

## Ask Aberdeen Episode 2 Transcript

**Georgie** [00:00:07] I'm Georgie.

**Michaela** [00:00:08] And I'm Michaela.

**Georgie** [00:00:08] And we're here to tell you about the University of Aberdeen.

**Michaela** [00:00:11] In each episode, we will discuss frequently asked questions about topics such as applications..

**Georgie** [00:00:15] Go abroad...

**Michaela** [00:00:17] Student life...

**Georgie** [00:00:18] Sports and Societies...

**Michaela** [00:00:19] Budgeting for Uni...

**Georgie** [00:00:20] And life in Aberdeen...

**Michaela** [00:00:22] We will be speaking to current Aberdeen students, those who really know what it's like to study and live here.

**Georgie** [00:00:27] And we'll be getting exclusive tips from members of our amazing staff.

**Michaela** [00:00:31] Join us for this episode of Ask Aberdeen.

**Georgie** [00:00:36] Hi, and welcome to this week's episode of Ask Aberdeen. Today, we'll be talking about choosing your degree. Many students know exactly what they want to study, but others have absolutely no idea and we're here today to give you some advice and help you make that decision. And I'm joined by two guests: Michaela, who is a graduate from Aberdeen and is a recruitment officer, and David, who is also an Aberdeen graduate and a member of our international team. So, Michaela, do you want to explain, firstly, how you chose your degree and what you studied at Aberdeen?

**Michaela** [00:01:02] So hi everyone, I chose and I studied politics and international relations, and I actually came to that degree knowing that's what I wanted to do, but still doubting myself very much - because that's obviously something that I have not studied at a high school level. I was never able to take international relations at a high school level, unsurprisingly, so I didn't really know what it was. So I was sort of constantly thinking about, you know, should I have done something else? And I ended up applying for politics and I stuck with politics the whole way through.

**Georgie** [00:01:39] Great. Yeah, I think some students, I know what they want to do and others just don't have a clue. I applied for a law degree because I knew that's exactly what I wanted to do because I had studied at A level. But some students haven't ever done that before. And David, I'm sure you've had that with students you speak to. Do you have students that have no idea what they want to study?

**David** [00:01:55] Oh, yes, all the time. I mean, it's a big decision to make, depending on what you sort of have the chance to experience, or what it means to yourself or you

interests, it is an important choice to make. It's a whole new a new chapter in your life. Yes, it's very common. When I was about that age, I would not have known exactly what I wanted to do. There were subjects I liked and some that I definitely didn't like. So, yeah, it is very common for people to not have a clear idea of what they want to do. Or have an idea of what they want to do, but not necessarily knowing how do I get there, you know. If it's a subject you might not have not taken in school. You might have little idea of how to become an astronaut as a classic example, what you need to do to get there, what is needed? There is no degree called become an astronaut. It's very common for people at that stage, not to know what they want to do or what they want to pick.

**Georgie** [00:02:52] Yeah, I think you said that thinking about, what are you good at? What do you enjoy? Is a really good starting point for a lot of students. We say to them, what are you taking a level or at higher or whatever it is you're studying and what do you like doing? You've got to choose something that you're going to really love because you're going to do this degree for the next four or five years. It's going to be something you're really passionate about. Michaela, how did you choose if you hadn't studied international relations, how did you decide to study it?

**Michaela** [00:03:15] So when I was in high school, I really enjoyed sort of history, geography, you know, those sort of areas and I liked following the current affairs. So I thought when I was looking at degrees, I was thinking this is a combination of everything that I like in high school. And this was taking it to a new level, at University level. But I still had those doubts in my head because I kept thinking, you know, geography is what I enjoyed the most when I'm in school. So should I just apply to geography? And I kept thinking about, am I missing out on something? So that's where those first two years at uni really actually helped me because, alongside my politics modules that I had to take, I was able to take external modules from geography to make sure that this is actually something I wanted to do. And I was able to then determine that geography is actually a little bit too scientific for me. I really liked politics in the end because it was the fun of geography without necessarily the science of geography. So that was good. But there are also other things that I was thinking about. You know, for example, I've never done business before at high school. So I was sort of worried that maybe I was missing out on something amazing by not having ever done management or economics. You know, that's something that everyone else seems to be doing. Everyone seems to be going into finance and making really huge amounts of money. So I was thinking, should I be going into that, to look into it? So I actually took one semester, took a course on management, a single one, and I really discovered that it is not for me. And that's perfectly fine. You know, I just took that one course and I passed it. I passed it fine. But I did not really enjoy it as much as I thought I would. And then I, you know, with my politics courses, I loved them. And I really, really found out that's what I want to do. And I wanted to do that for my entire degree. So it was really just nice to be able to, like, explore things and find out what you're good at. English is not my first language, so I always also thought that languages might be something I would be good at. I took Spanish for two semesters. Turns out that I'm not good at Spanish, so I dropped it after two semesters. But I do still have that level of competency in Spanish. But I was able to just take, you know, two semesters of it to classes, which got me really far. But then I decided that actually Spanish is not something for me because it requires way too much work. And I just decided that, you know what? I'm going to focus on just taking politics. And I just dabbled around, you know, trying different things, explored a little bit of everything. And then I just sort of settled in with politics and international relations and just continued with that.

**David** [00:06:05] This is one of the benefits of the four year structure, I would say in general, is if you're not quite sure what exactly want to do but you know the area, or even if not, it gives you the flexibility to try out new things and then realise this is absolutely not what I enjoy. Or realise. Oh, my God, this is so good. I had no idea I enjoyed this so much. Like my cousin, for instance, he applied for psychology and ended up taking sociology and anthropology classes and certainly very quickly realised that anthropology is not being Indiana Jones running through the jungle, discovering new tribes or hidden treasures. But it can be very academic if it's a university degree. There's a lot of theories around how early humans organise and all of that, and he did not enjoy that at all, then decided to drop anthropology as quickly as possible and stuck with psychology and sociology, which he did end up enjoy. So it gives you that flexibility of trying something you've not experienced before. Which you can also do if you have the opportunity of doing workshops or summer classes or one week taster sessions somewhere on a university course, you know, it's always worthwhile exploring what you might enjoy, getting a bit of a feel for it even before you apply for your courses as part of your preparation for university. If you have those opportunities at the moment with all that's going on, they might not be as common or you just get a taster for what what it is you think you might be interested in. The benefit of the four year structure is that you then have to make that decision before applying or, feel stuck on the course, if you realise this is that for me, you can make changes if when necessary.

**Michaela** [00:07:48] So actually, I also had a friend in my first year - when he started, he was studying psychology, if I remember right. He was from Germany and he thought that sounded really good. And then in his first year, he was taking a random science course and he took an applied maths course, and he really loved it. And he actually ended up switching over to a maths degree in his second year. And because of the structure that we have at Aberdeen with the four years, he didn't have to do like an extra year. He just switched over in the second year. And because he had done already those compulsory courses from maths in his first year, he was just able to do the whole degree in the rest of those four years. So that's also a nice thing that even if you do know, if you apply and you find out that that's not the thing that you really like, there's still the scope for you to finish your degree in four years, even if you completely switch. Like your cousin did or like my friend did, even to just a totally different degree. Or you can just add on, but you could do say psychology with sociology. You can just add on a joint degree if you want to, or you can just switch over completely. And that's what I really like. I like that I wasn't tied into something as soon as I applied. So that was nice.

**Georgie** [00:09:10] I think that's something I found as well. When I moved from England up to Scotland, I realised how flexible the degree system is and how different it is. So for anyone who's listening, who doesn't know exactly how it works: In England, generally, you would apply for your degree and you would basically stay on that course and the modules in that course, you may have some choices of those modules, but generally those are from the same degree. Whereas in Scotland and Aberdeen, you can choose modules in pretty much any other subject area as long as it works with timetabling. And you can really try different things. As Michaela said, she's tried a bit of Spanish and you could try a bit geography. And as long as you have suitable kind of prerequisites to try these modules out, you can do the university. So if anyone's wondering exactly how that works, we do have a presentation on our website under undergraduate and 'information guides and advice'. So if you want to see exactly how that works and a bit more detail, you can watch that as well. Something else is also when people are thinking about kind of what do they apply to is they know they've got flexibility when they get to university, but they've got to make a choice to start with. Some people who say, like, for example, you mentioned

David, I want to be an astronaut. So that's something we often say to people is if you've got a career in mind, kind of do your research, find out what you need for that career. So sometimes people say, know examples, but I want to do something and we say, okay, great, go to somewhere that does that job and ask them what they require. Do you have any kind of comments for that, David?

**David** [00:10:34] Especially all of the things that are not covered by traditional school subjects, it can be more daunting to consider, how do I get to that stage? What qualifications do I need? So it is absolutely a good idea to talk to someone who is doing the job. Most jobs normally have some sort of governing body or advice body. Then you can maybe get in touch and say, I want to become a registered engineer or chartered accountant, how do I do that? What do I need to do? Especially with with law, what steps do I have to do to practise in England and Scotland or to practise overseas, will the degree be recognised through this sort of thing? So it's absolutely a good idea to ask people who really do the job. We do recommend that anyone interested in medicine, for instance has a chat with the GP just to figure out is it the right thing for you, what does this job entail? And building backwards from that to what should I study at university. And depending on the job, there will, of course, be additional requirements potentially a degree, and then do additional qualifications afterwards or just have an idea of what is involved in it. And you might find out that for some jobs, it does not matter what your first degree is, people may come from a wide range of backgrounds. Others, of course, have very specific details on this degree. And then there's additional tests. And then you qualify as, I guess, from the experience of law has that approach to things. Often talking to the guidance counsellors or career counselors in school, or if there is career event in a school or nearby where different companies in different sectors come in, talk to representatives about what might be available afterwards and how to get to that starting point as well. I would really say, make sure it is something you enjoy doing or that you are interested in purely because you will be doing it at university for a number of years and then potentially for the rest of your life. So hopefully it will be something you get some enjoyment out of. It can be an instance of doing it backwards, like with the astronaut example, what you do often you have to in the past have done military service that has, I think, now changed. But the astronauts have a hard core science degrees sort of mechanical engineering, maths, biology backgrounds. And then there are some sort of additional steps, you have to do the actual training. So things like that, figuring out what do I want to do and how do I get to see this as a sort of backward step. Now, I once spoke to someone on the campus tour back in my day as a student ambassador who was interested in structural engineering. So we ask people, why do you want to do structural engineering? And then the reply was that they really enjoyed blowing things up and doing demolitions, but had been told that in order to do that, they first have to learn how to build things before they can blow them up. So it's sort of working backwards. If you're looking for demolitions, you first have to understand, well, how is the buildings built in the first place? What the point of stability is, so that the advice they have given was it is a great career demolitions experts are required you first to learn how do you build it in the first place before you safely blow it up. That was a particular good piece of advice to to get.

**Michaela** [00:13:57] There's actually a website that I have previously used, even when I was doing my studies at university. It's called Prospects.ac.uk, I believe. And they list pretty much every job and every sector and they tell you about like what the job actually entails and how much you might expect to get paid. And then they often list degrees that might lead you to that job. So I was very much interested in publishing or media and I wasn't quite sure how it was going to get there. You know, should I actually do journalism? Like, if I want to be a journalist, do I need to study journalism or can I start to just any

degree and then sort of get there through that degree? So I did a lot of research into that website. And it's really helpful and also does have things like a level career quiz that will suggest things to you.

**David** [00:14:49] I think journalism is a good example we often get asked when at recruiting fairs, do you offer journalism? There are careers where there's probably multiple paths to get there, the same end result, a career in journalism. So I don't think it's one of those, you do not necessarily need to have a degree in journalism. So I think that my advice is look at what kind of journalism you want to go into: sports journalism, economics, journalism, political affairs, and then look at some people who who work in that field and look at what have they done? Like Robert Preston, I believe, has a degree in economics and degree in journalism, I could be wrong on this. I think people who have done the degree in the field, they want to write about it and have joined the student newspaper and shadow in local newspapers, some of them do radio to get some experience. And then have moved into maybe internships at newspapers to get to more journalistic experience. So it's not necessarily one where you have to do the degree and then there's only one way. A lot of careers will have multiple paths into the career. There's always a couple of careers that you have to get the degree, like the medicine degree - that's life and death situations, but others maybe not as serious. There might be multiple paths and one that works particularly well for one student might not look as well for another student, but there might be different options. You don't have to do the law degree right away, you can do politics or geography or international relations or languages or anything, and then do the accelerated conversion degree and still end up becoming a lawyer. So they often, depending on the career, what you want to do, there might be multiple paths. You can choose from the same destination.

**Georgie** [00:16:43] Yeah, absolutely, and on the flip side, we often have students who say, OK, I really want to study history, what do I do with a history degree? So they don't know what career they want to do, but they do know what subject they want to study. So all perspectives is quite helpful. That is where I often advise people to have a look online because it shows you what some of the recent graduates have done with that degree. You mentioned law and you don't even need a law degree in England now either. If you want to be a lawyer, you can actually do a degree in any subject. And they've just changed the way you qualify. So you can then do a one year type scheme and you get you do training so you don't even need a training contract anymore. You can get work experience. And basically there's a lot of things opening up to allow you to go into different careers without having necessarily done it at degree level. But if people are thinking that there's a degree that they want to study, but they don't know, maybe, maybe mom and dad are saying, well, that's great, but what are you going to do with it? Have a look on the prospectus and see what other people have done with it. We also have a marketing campaign which tells you what some of our alumni have done and what they've gone on to do. And it's really interesting. I mean, I'm a big fan of Call the Midwife. Laura Main, who's an actress on Call the Midwife was an Aberdeen graduate. And I think she studied history, she didn't do acting or anything like that. But you've got lots of options. And just being a graduate gives you options as well. Having those skills employers value the fact that you've been to university. Do you want to add to that?

**Michaela** [00:18:06] So my parents were in that camp of what the heck are you going to do with a politics degree? Do you really want to be a politician? was genuinely the most asked question of my degree. Oh, you want to be a politician? I was like, no, I don't want to be a politician. I'm just interested in the general topic. So that's something that you might encounter. For example, we've got archaeology and people might be thinking, are

you going to become Indiana Jones as well? Where are you where are you going to be digging up these mummies and stuff? But that's not necessarily the only thing you can do. You know, like it's not like if you study English, you have to become an English teacher. Just having a degree in general is such a good thing. And jobs will mostly require you to have a degree, but will not necessarily say that you have to have studied history to apply for this tourism board marketing manager role or something like that. It doesn't necessarily matter what you study. It more matters what you do while you're at university, you know, because like David mentioned with if you want to go into journalism, there's all these part time, volunteer things that you can do like student newspaper or student radio. So you don't have to have that degree title to get into the job that you want. And it's OK if you're like 17 and 18 applying to uni - like, how are you supposed to know what you want to do for the rest of your life? So it's a good thing that it doesn't tie you down because honestly, I would not be a good politician. So I'm just glad that it's not it doesn't work like that. It doesn't work like, you know, you pick your degree at 17 or 18 and that's you done for the rest of your life because it's just so free, you know, like you come to university to explore yourself and learn skills and then you figure out what you want to do later.

**Georgie** [00:19:55] I actually have the opposite experience. Having applied for Law was like, that's great? You're going to be a lawyer, that's it. That's set in stone. That's what you're going to do. And when I was applying, I was like, yeah, I'm going to be a lawyer, going to earn loads of money. It's gonna be great. I'm going to love it. And as I went through university, I loved my degree, but I knew then I didn't want to be a lawyer. I'm not really sure what I want to do long term, what my career is going to lead to. But my manager said when she hired me, having a law degree looks good. Having a degree let me get a set of skills, all the extra things you do, the experience going to university is an incredible experience. I loved it. So, yeah, there is pressure to kind of change your degree and try things, but there's like loads of options you afterwards.

**David** [00:20:33] I think it's absolutely right for those degrees where people might ask, what are you going to do with that? We will all say it isn't just about the specific content of the knowledge of your studies. Like I would say my current role, I don't necessarily draw on my history degree every single day. I have a very keen interest in it and read books on that. But what the other skills you learn how to give a presentation, how to do research, critical analysis, critical thinking, writing, very handy in a whole range of careers. Also what employers maybe sometimes more looking for than a specific degree. Then the elements of this is, as you said, a lot of different laws about how to become a lawyer. But there would also be lots of other doors open. So I know, for instance, that a lot of mechanical engineers, because engineering in general was quite math-heavy, so it is good people who enjoy that sort of thing. Mechanical engineers are often able to get jobs in the City, in London, because they have that deep maths knowledge, they can do economic analysis and accounting and finance related tasks quite easily, despite having a degree in engineering. You can look for jobs in finance in the city afterwards because of specifically that the course content, but also the additional skills they have picked up and obviously being involved in societies and meeting new people. If you get involved in radio or volunteering or charity work that also gives you all sorts of skills. That's coming in very handy later on. There might not be specific about 'did you take this course in second year?', but rather it is the whole package you get from having done the degree and having been at university.

**Michaela** [00:22:32] And the thing is as well, if you want to go into like a really narrow field, for example, within biology, you're really interested in specifically conservation biology, you might be looking at the degrees that Scottish universities or Aberdeen do not

offer. And you might be thinking there's nothing that is very specifically what I want to do. But usually what happens is that your undergrad is a bit more generic and a bit more wide ranging. And then you would do a postgrad that would allow you to really focus in on the career that you want to go into. So don't despair if you have a very specific career in mind. I was very much interested in like war and terrorism and I was looking for an undergrad in terrorism. And it turns out that there is not really that many universities that actually do four years worth of terrorism studies. So then that's when I realised you sort of do your undergrad in the more general topic, and then you would focus on something that specific either in your third and fourth year, which is when I actually got to take some more related courses. But you can also then do a postgrad that will really focus on whatever it is that you really want to do in detail.

**Georgie** [00:23:41] Yes, I was thinking about this as I was choosing the degree that is right for you, but also I was talking to family and friends. They often know you really well and they can recommend areas you've maybe never thought of that you might be interested in. You can then look into these and I think David mentioned getting work experience as well. If you can go and go and shadow someone who's doing their job that you might be interested in or speak to a Medic or speak to someone, get a real honest opinion from them about what it's like to do that, because ultimately you've got to find out if that's what you're going to love. You're going to study, as you said, for four years or five years or more. It's going to be something you're really passionate about. But we also have our students on UniBuddy, as Michaela said, to do and explain how that works. You've got to ask.

**Michaela** [00:24:23] Yes, we actually have quite a lot, I think it's like over a hundred students that are on UniBuddy on our website, which you can find if you just go into the online prospectus and you go to any of the pages on specifically, say, engineering, there will be a little pop up where you can speak to someone from that degree area who volunteer their time to speak to prospective students. So if you have any questions and you want to ask a genuine student who is not paid to say nice things about Aberdeen just because they get paid to say nice things, they genuinely like Aberdeen, you can go on and ask them anything about even like things that you might not be necessarily able to find online, like how much do things in Aberdeen cost, but that's not going to be something that you can research on the UCAS.com website because it's so very specific and you will be able to connect with someone. If you're from coming from abroad, you might be able to find someone from abroad as well who can answer your questions. So that's UniBuddy. And it's really good for connecting with students one to one. But also, don't forget that we do have our whole recruitment team. So, David, for example, you oversee a specific region, right? How does it work with you guys in International?

**David** [00:25:39] So we divided the world, not on any sort of politics degrees, just by region, so that we can build lots of knowledge in specific regions of which are the sort of broad geographical regions we have. We have a specific international officer like myself who is there to advise students on anything to do with studying Aberdeen in Scotland or studying in general and concerns international students might have - at the moment we've got a lot of questions about travelling visas and so on. So yeah, that would always be someone there to reach out to answer any questions. And another source of advice can be the people teaching the degrees. So if someone has very specific requirements because of the career they have picked and then they know that their degree will be, I think most universities offer a degree in physics or a degree in business management, but then the content vary quite a bit. And hopefully the website will, like our website will give examples of these are the courses we have to take these. The courses you can take up to the

additional courses you can see from the wider field, but if there is something that specifically needs to be covered, you know, we can also to put someone in touch with a course coordinator or an academic and then discuss if the course is the right choice for someone. How many hours will there be in astronomy, in a physics degree for someone who wants to go on and do a postgraduate in astronomy afterwards? Will there be only one course on it? Will it be two courses per year? They can pick some of the very detailed questions about what someone might want to know. There are 130 odd universities for business management, but is this the right business management degree for me. They can get that granular information as needed. What is specifically offered and then you can make a comparison between the university based on the specific content.

**Michaela** [00:27:34] Yeah, those are actually on UniBuddy as well, I didn't mention that, but we do have students as well as some of the academics who signed up to be on UniBuddy. So that's another source. You can just go straight to them via UniBuddy or you can contact anyone in the international or the U.K. team or the enquiry room. The enquiry team might also be able to help. And we can get you in touch with someone.

**Georgie** [00:27:56] Yes, that's very true. We get often lots of enquiries about entry requirements and degrees as well, something that can impact what you choose to study. And as David said about every university offering business. That's what I found applying to law. Lots of universities offer a law degree. How do I know which one I want to go to suit me? I looked into things like geography, where is the university and things like that. But also I looked at the grade entry requirements. Some of them I can get into, some of them I thought maybe were too easy. There was different things like that. So it's worth looking at that for our students looking to study any of the courses. We do have certain science requirements for certain degrees. So we often have students email us and say, this is what I'm studying. Please help me here. What can I apply to? And that's absolutely why we're here, to help. So if you've got questions like that and you're not sure you don't want to apply through UCAS and find that you aren't eligible, please do that.

**David** [00:28:47] And I think that's where a lot of a lot of research comes in, once you settled on business management or electrical engineering or medicine, you need the more granular research. Well, these are the subjects I have taken. These are the grades I have. Where can I apply to? I mean, it's not just the grade requirement of the academic degrees, but do I have the right subjects? Engineering is a good one where some universities see physics as the more important subject, some universities think maths is more important. So often if someone has done really well in maths and physics, we will take them, but maybe not the other way round. Some medical schools very much prefer biology, some medical schools are more likely to ask for chemistry. So someone asks for a specific subject and someone else might ask for different subject, architecture is often the case between more of a focus on the engineering side of things and the sort of the actual building, the structural integrity and others are maybe more focused on the more creative side of architecture, sort of making the buildings appealing. They might have different entry requirements. They might ask for slightly more scientific background. Others might ask for a portfolio of drawings. So that's sort of part of the more granular research into that. Get good idea of what I want to study where, where, where can I have the right background for it. And so then then you are right down to individual university choices. Hopefully Aberdeen will be one of them.

**Georgie** [00:30:23] I think that's given listeners a lot of information about how to choose a degree. There's lots of advice there. I'm not sure we've given you a clear answer, but basically you should research. You should think about what you enjoy, speak to family,



speak to lecturers, come to an open day. Often people come to that with no idea what they want to study. So when you can come back onto campuses, which you'll be seeing, do all those things and just find what feels right for you. And overall, you can get lots of flexibility in your degrees. You can try different things.

**Michaela** [00:30:53] I just think it's really important to do what's right for you. Not many people know this, but I did a year of textile engineering, which was the furthest away from what I actually wanted to do. But I did it because I thought, this is a good career opportunity for me. Like, this is something I should do. No, no, absolutely not. It was just absolutely horrendous. And yeah, I decided very early on that this was not the right thing for me. So I after the one year of doing textile engineering, I actually just was like, you know what, what's the furthest away? And I applied for politics and I loved all four years of politics. So really, if you're just doing something just because you want a good career at the end, that's fine. But make sure that you actually can stomach four years of it, you know?

**Georgie** [00:31:43] Thank you very much, David and Michaela, of joining us on this episode of Ask Aberdeen. And we've got lots of episodes coming up. So subscribe to the podcasts and you've got to keep in touch with us. Thank you, guys.

**Voiceover** [00:32:00] Thank you for joining us for this episode of the Ask Aberdeen podcast, if you would like to suggest the topic we should cover, please email us at [ukteam@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:ukteam@abdn.ac.uk). We would love to hear from you to be alerted about new episodes. Subscribe wherever you get your podcasts.