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UNIVERSITY OF
ABERDEEN



Help from above:

**Advice from former
students on what to
expect from **Level 4****

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A new academic year is an exciting time, full of new challenges and opportunities. Each year of university is a little bit different – some things get easier, and some things get harder. We know that advancing into a new year group is something people tend to worry about, so we spoke to students at the University of Aberdeen (353 of them!) and asked them what advice they wished they'd received before moving into a new academic year. We hope that this is useful to you and wish you all the best for the new academic year.

Level

4

What to look forward to



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I currently have less overall timetabled classes, which in turn has allowed greater flexibility and availability to work on my honours project. I have devoted more time so far towards my work (currently only project work) than I had devoted towards continuous assessments etc during the start of third year. The greater time availability has helped me keep on top of what is required while also allowing a good amount of time for relaxing.

– BSc (Hons) Zoology student

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The main thing that level 4 students report enjoying is the final year honours project and increased flexibility. Whilst this also comes with challenges, most found the experience liberating and they felt like they were a real part of their School and becoming experts in their field.

Many students also reported that they enjoyed feeling more confident when talking to lecturers due to increased knowledge about their subject and a changing, more mature relationship with staff.

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Where 3rd year felt like university/school quite a lot; 4th year feels more like a job - I get up in the morning and go to the IMS where I will be based each day at a desk or in the lab amongst other academics of all levels.

– BSc (Hons) Biological Sciences

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Reflect on Success

It's important to take the time to recognise just how much you've learned since level 1 and that some of the things you've improved at aren't just academic. You need to make sure your CV reflects just how much you've learned - self-reflection can be a very useful exercise for making sure you do justice to everything you've done so far and for identifying any gaps you might want to fill in your final year.

Self-reflection can be a very useful exercise for setting goals and building confidence. Try using ACHIEVE on MyAberdeen to self-assess, reflect, and improve.



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I feel more confident, by knowing more people, having more close friends and being even more involved in university life. Make the most of it because it's the last year.

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**– MA (Hons) Politics and
International Relations student**

Academic challenges

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Try to keep up with work as much as possible from the beginning. Try to find a balance between dissertation/independent study project and other courses - don't get carried away with dissertations and forget the rest!

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– BSc (Hons) Mathematics student

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In level 4 there is much more independent study which I at times find difficult. Not because I'm not good at studying on my own and getting stuff done, but because I sometimes struggle with finding out what to study. Should I research, should I read more novels/short stories, should I write more?

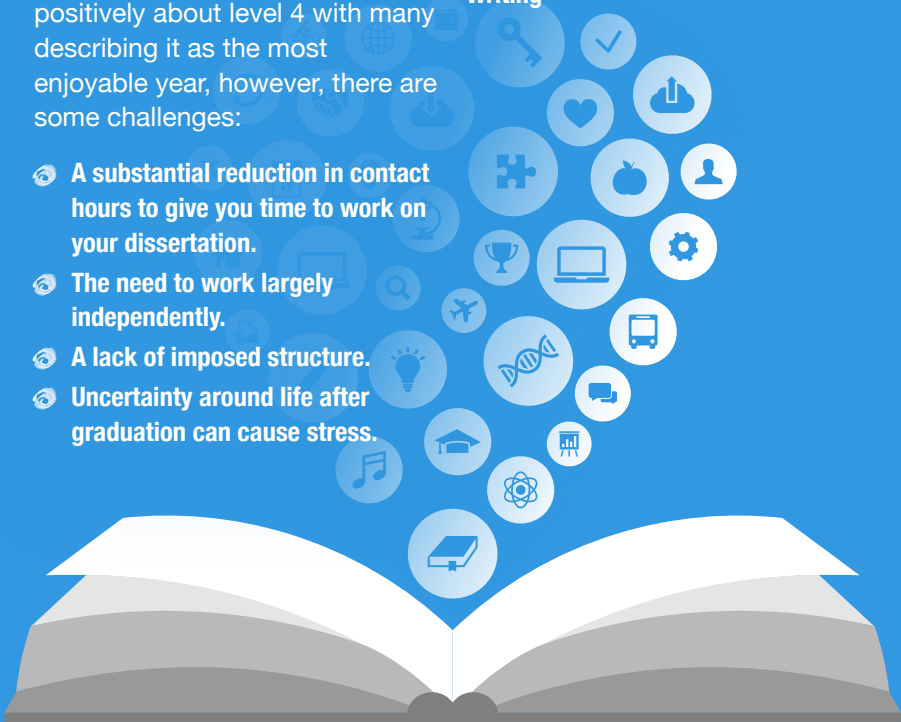
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What to be aware of

Generally, students talked positively about level 4 with many describing it as the most enjoyable year, however, there are some challenges:

- 👁️ **A substantial reduction in contact hours to give you time to work on your dissertation.**
- 👁️ **The need to work largely independently.**
- 👁️ **A lack of imposed structure.**
- 👁️ **Uncertainty around life after graduation can cause stress.**

– MA (Hons) English with Creative Writing



Academic challenges

How to prepare

In preparing for these new challenges, make sure that you take advantage of all the support the University makes available to you.

- 🕒 **Make sure you read your course guides and any available assessment guidance**
- 🕒 **If you're struggling, ask your Personal Tutor or dissertation supervisor for help!**
- 🕒 **Visit the InfoHub (<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/infohub/support>), the one-stop shop to help you access University information.**
- 🕒 **Visit the Student Learning Service (SLS) <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/sls> which offers**
 - > Academic skills workshops
 - > 1-to-1 sessions with Academic Skills Advisors
 - > Online resources to help improve your academic writing <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/academicwriting>
 - > Exam stress services <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/infohub/support/exam-stress->
- 🕒 **Take advantage of the support the Careers Service offers including CV and application feedback (<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/careers/>)**
- 🕒 **Help with time management can be found in the Toolkit Productivity section (<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/productivity>).**
- 🕒 **Try using WorkFlowy to help you break big ideas and tasks into manageable pieces (<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/productivity/workflowy>)**

The honours project



How to do well

- ▶ Everyone's honours project is different – don't compare your progress to other students, even if they're in the same School as you
- ▶ Create a timeline for your thesis project so that you can keep yourself on track in the absence of deadlines and contact hours
- ▶ Maintain good communication with your Project Supervisor. Don't be afraid to ask for help and guidance

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...don't compare your volume of studying with your peers. Especially concerning the thesis project. Everyone differs in how far they are in the process of setting up the experiment and testing people.

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– BSc (Hons) Psychology student

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In terms of the project your supervisor is there to help you, and the staff are always understanding of personal situations. You will definitely put more pressure on yourself than you need to, but it's important to take a step back from things and put things in perspective.

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– BSc (Hons) Marine Biology student

Work-life balance



The increased pressure in level 4 and the proximity to graduation means that it's vital to ensure you have a healthy work-life balance and to look after yourself; something that will serve you well when you move into employment where your personal life should be separate from work.

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Don't quit any extra-curricular activities! You may feel like you have a lot less time due to the increased workload, but I find taking part in sport a few times a week helps relieve me from so much stress! It probably makes me work harder because I've had a proper break. You shouldn't expect yourself to work constantly.

– MA (Hons) Psychology student

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Be careful not to overburden yourself...studies are important, but it's important to maintain a sense of enjoyment of your time at university - if you're not happy, your studies will suffer anyway. At this stage, time management becomes important, but I would say that it's important to include time in your schedule for self-maintenance, be that taking an hour to sit with a coffee and read your book a few times throughout the week, or just setting out time to see a friend.

– MEng Mechanical Engineering

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In addition to the time management and study skills resources noted above, if you are struggling please remember that the University offers a number of other support services:

- 🌀 The Counselling Service offers counselling sessions as well as a range of self-help resources <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/services/counselling/>
- 🌀 The Big White Wall is an online mental health and wellbeing service offering self-help programmes, creative outlets and a community that cares <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/productivity/big-white-wall/>
- 🌀 Headspace is an app that will teach you meditation and mindfulness in just a few minutes a day <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/toolkit/productivity/headspace/>



Paid work



What to be aware of

- 👁️ If you need to work for financial reasons, make sure you don't take on more than you can deal with. Between 8 and 16 hours of work a week is manageable, but if you work upwards of 20 hours a week your studies and your physical and mental health will likely start to suffer.

How to prepare

- 👁️ More advice on finding graduate jobs, internships, and part-time work is available at:
 - > the Careers Services <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/careers/>
 - > Aberdeen University Students' Association <https://www.ausa.org.uk/ausaadvice/employability/workstudy/>

Final thought...

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Even just a couple hours everyday reading papers, or starting an assignment makes a huge difference. Put aside the time for uni work as early as you can and if you feel you have too much to do and you're overwhelmed, just start somewhere. Having the opinion that doing a little is better than nothing on the days I don't feel motivated definitely stops me from falling too far behind.

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MA (Hons) student