

Find your niche on a 4-year course

The 'Scottish 4-year degree' can seem confusing and a waste of a year, but History and Politics (MA Hons) student Jack argues that it's the ideal way to explore and, finally, focus on what really interests you.

There is no doubt about it, starting university can be a bit daunting – a new lifestyle, new accommodation, new friends, new classes and, for many, a new city.



Not the kind of niche Jack means

Upon starting their courses, something which can often weigh heavy on first years' minds is this notion of "finding your niche". At university, you are often presented with many different course options from the get-go, and there is often a kind of pressure to know exactly what you want to do straight away. In reality, however, it shouldn't feel that way at all. Of course, some people will know that they want to do early medieval Scottish history or modern Islamic studies or whatever their heart is set on. But actually, there is no real

need to have any clue about how you want to 'specialise' so early on in your university career.

One of the real advantages about studying a four-year degree is that there is plenty of time to try out and experiment with different time periods, different regional histories and even different teaching styles and assessment types. In first and second year (especially while your grades don't count towards your final honours degree classification!), take the opportunity to try a course which you always thought about trying out but never quite wanted to risk it.

Moreover, not having studied a certain subject in pre-honours does not necessarily exclude you from picking it up at honours (as long as you meet the necessary pre-requisites, of course). That being said, I think I speak for a lot of my peers when I say that third year (moving into honours) is a solid step up. You definitely feel the gears changing. This is only to be expected, of course, and I found myself well-equipped academically by the teaching staff to deal with this change. The point is, however, that it is a good feeling to be taking courses with which you are completely comfortable. In third year and beyond, it is reassuring to be doing subjects with which you are familiar, and you know you enjoy. So using your pre-honours years as a kind of science laboratory of courses to produce your favourite combination of classes is the way to go.

Overall, then, 'finding your niche' doesn't have to be scary. There is plenty of time and opportunity to try things out and even when you get to fourth year, you don't really have to focus on one specific 'niche' one hundred percent of your time. In pre-honours, enjoy the breadth of options and try to combat this expectation that everyone should know their niche within a minute of setting foot through the university doors.