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Please address any further questions to info@astronomy.ac.uk.

Answers

1. What is astronomy.ac.uk?

astronomy.ac.uk currently consists of three equal partners: the Astrophysics Research Institute (Liverpool John Moores University), Jodrell Bank Observatory (University of Manchester) and the Department of Physics, Astronomy and Maths (University of Central Lancashire)

The consortium has been established in recognition of

- the increasing public interest in astronomy,
- opportunities provided by constantly improving web access and computer-based learning,
- the demand for progression routes beyond partial first year equivalent,
- the enormity of the task to provide such routes for any one university,
- the increasing demand for life-long learning opportunities.

We intend to introduce further modules and extend the collaboration to include modules provided by other university.

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The Cert H.E.:

2. What is the framework for the Cert H.E.?

The Cert H.E. is made up of modules. A module is a coherent unit of subject material complete with its own aims, objectives and assessments. Modules are level and credit rated (see the individual module information pages at astronomy.ac.uk for the number of credits assigned to each module). Within a given Cert H.E. you can combine modules from different Universities; check with the University providing the Cert H.E. to see what modules are accepted.

Each module or course has a number of *study credits* and a *level of study* associated with it. The astronomy.ac.uk adopts nationally defined meanings of these terms. See the individual modules descriptions for the level and number of credits associated with each module. A Cert H.E. requires a minimum of 120 credits at Level 1 or above.

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3. When do the courses start and finish?

Each module has different start dates. Some modules have one start date and others have several throughout the year. Please refer to the web site for each module for more detail. Students may decide to register for the Cert H.E. qualification after completing a minimum number of credits (at least 40 credits at UCLan, 48 credits at Liverpool JMU). They can convert credits gained on previous, relevant individual modules to contribute towards the Cert H.E. (upto 80 credits at UCLan, upto 96 credits at Liverpool JMU).

The Cert H.E. is currently available through the University of Central Lancashire and Liverpool John Moores University. It is expected to be available in the following academic year from the University of Manchester. Details of the Cert H.E. vary between institutes, check directly with the one providing your Cert H.E.

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4. What do I need to do to complete the Cert H.E.?

The Certificate of Higher Education (Cert H.E.) requires a minimum of 120 credits which can be acquired from a combination of modules all at level 1 or higher. In addition a minimum number of credits must be gained *after* the student has registered for the Cert H.E. at the university where they are registered (40 in the case of UCLan, 24 in the case of Liverpool JMU - two modules in each case). In other words you cannot bring all the credit for a Cert H.E. from previous courses (no more than 80 credits to UCLan or 96 credits to Liverpool JMU).

The course is intended to be as flexible as possible, however, to complete the Cert H.E. students must have certain core modules: the Certificate in Astronomy (AA1051 from the University of Central Lancashire) or the CPD in Astronomy (ENGAS1016 and ENGAS1017 from Liverpool John Moores University). You should also have completed a minimum number of credits prior to enrolling on the Cert H.E. (40 at UCLan, 48 at Liverpool JMU). This is summarized below:

- A Cert H.E. requires at least 120 credits of study at Level 1.
- At least two modules must be studied at the University awarding the Cert H.E. *after you are enrolled on the Cert H.E.* (40 credits at UCLan, 24 credits at Liverpool JMU).
- A minimum number of credits should be gained from relevant modules before enrolling on the Cert H.E. (40 credits at UCLan, 48 credits at Liverpool JMU).
- At least one of the modules brought to the Cert H.E. should be the Certificate in Astronomy from UCLan or the CPD in Astronomy from Liverpool JMU.

In every case check with the awarding University if you are unsure. Our administrative processes should help to ensure that you are given every opportunity to enrol on a Cert H.E. without wasting credits already gained.

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5. What are the benefits taking a course with modules from different universities?

You will be taught by research-active astronomers from three different universities each with different specialities. This means you will have access to a much wider range of modules and researchers than would be possible if were doing modules at any single universities. The geographical proximity and their experience in and enthusiasm for the development of distance learning materials means that the modules are the most interesting, up-to-date and academically rigorous available. Several of the staff have worked at all three institutes and are able to ensure cohesiveness across the consortium.

All three universities have agreed to co-operate in the development of distance learning programmes in astronomy. This co-operation is based on the following principles:

Exchange of Information

- to be freely given on modules currently offered and those under development at each university.

Complementarity

- to ensure that modules produced by the partner universities are, as far as possible, complementary and not fundamentally duplicating one another, and to ensure that these modules are denominated in units of credit which all ow them to fit within the award framework of the other partner universities.

Provision of Higher Qualification Routes

- each university will provide a route to a Cert H.E., with routes to higher qualifications open to development.

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Qualifications:

6. What qualifications do I need to do the courses?

The modules are designed to allow non-specialists access to study astronomy at first year university level. Consequently, the minimum level for admission is GCSE Mathematics and Science at grade C (or their equivalent). Successful applicants for the programme will normally have completed their secondary education. If you only have the minimum level of academic qualifications then you should be able to demonstrate a passion for the subject via a compelling personal statement on application (perhaps you are a member of a local astronomical society, you own a telescope or can provide supporting information and references).

Individual modules may have some further requirements, such as having completed one of the introductory modules first. See individual module information for detail. *The core modules do not need any previous university-level education.*

In addition, all of the courses are taught in English, and you must be fluent in English

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7. What is a Cert H.E. and will it qualify me to become an Astronomer?

A Cert H.E. is a qualification equivalent to the first year of an undergraduate degree course. This will not qualify you to become an astronomer. Professional astronomy is a highly competitive field, even for PhD graduates. The Cert H.E. will give you a strong grounding in astronomy. Most people take the course as a hobby though it is also intended as professional development for individuals such as school teachers, science educators and planetarium/science museum workers.

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8. Do I need to attend lectures or classes on site?

There is no formal attendance requirement for the Cert H.E. However, there may be attendance requirements for individual modules. These modules are available world-wide and in general contact will be via telephone, e-mail and discussion forums.

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9. Can I use the Cert H.E. towards another qualification?

The consortium adopts and uses the nationally accepted definitions of credit and level. Once awarded a Cert H.E., graduates will have completed at least 120 credits at Level 1. This is the equivalent to the first year of an undergraduate degree and so these credits may be used towards gaining a degree qualification.

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10. Can I gain an award (certificate) without completing 120 credits of study?

To gain a Cert H.E. you must complete 120 credits of study at Level 1 or higher. However most individual modules also have a qualification from the provider university associated with them, such as a University Certificate or a Certificate of Professional Development. Check with individual module details. Even when you have gained an award for an individual module, you can still register for a Cert H.E. and transfer your credits to that higher award, within limits. The same may also apply to complete degree programmes, but you should check with the university providing the degree.

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Assessment:

11. How are the courses assessed?

Each module is assessed individually and each university will be responsible for assessing the modules that it provides. Assessment usually takes the form of course work or examinations. The format and assessment requirements will differ from module to module. Each university will hold its own assessment board for the modules that it provides and for the Cert H.E. students registered with that university. Each university will make decisions about whether a student has passed or failed a particular module. You should present awards or evidence of credits gained from other universities to the university with which you register for the Cert H.E.

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12. How do I submit assignments?

You can submit the assignments in a number of ways. Most commonly, students post, fax or email them directly to their course tutor. The assignments can either be word processed or hand written, but must include diagrams and all of the appropriate working for calculations. When you email an assignment, please let your tutor know what format it will be in. Particular modules will have more specific requirements which will be explained in the relevant materials. Where specific requirements differ from those given here, the module-specific requirements are to be taken as the correct ones.

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13. What do I do if I need help with the assignments?

Contact your tutor directly. Usually the easiest is via email or telephone. If they are not available then ask to speak with another tutor on the course or the course administrator. You should receive detailed information when you enrol on a module.

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Payment:

14. What is the cost of the course and which university do I pay?

The exact cost of the Cert H.E. will depend on which modules are taken though at costs for 2002 a total of 120 credits will amount to between about £800 and £1000 for UK resident students (note that fees are based on where you reside, not your nationality). A better estimate of the costs can be obtained by considering the modules you wish to study and adding them up, taking into account your personal circumstances.

A student registered for a module at university A will pay the module fee as set by that university. At the same time they may be registered for a Cert H.E. at university B. No fee will be payable to university B unless the student is registered for a module there as well. However each University will have limits on the number of external modules which can be applied to a Cert H.E., and of course will require those modules to be relevant to Astronomy. The basic rule is: You pay for the modules, not the certificates.

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15. Can I pay in instalments?

The Cert H.E. is made up of modules which are priced and paid for individually. This means that students can spread payments for the Cert H.E. over the duration of the course. In addition, it is sometimes possible to pay for individual modules by instalments. The individual Universities will be able to tell you their own arrangements.

To question list

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