Making the most of a university visit

Find tips and hints to help you prepare for a visit to a university before making your final choice. This includes advice on what to consider, and what to expect on an open day.

Many universities offer places on the basis of the information on your application form, so it's important that you visit your chosen universities before you accept an offer of a place. You will be a student there for three or four years and it will be a bit late to realise during Freshers' Week that you hate the place!

All universities hold open days for prospective students. These give you the opportunity to find out more about the course and to meet staff and students. You can see the campus, the town or city and check out any facilities that are particularly important to your choice of course.

Open days take place throughout the year but the bulk are held in spring and autumn. General open days are large-scale events offering the chance to see the whole of the campus and often include talks and presentations on all degree subject areas. Many open days include campus tours given by student ambassadors. Departmental open days are smaller events giving a detailed look at a specific subject area.

The open day is your chance to put questions to staff and students so think about the issues that are important to you. Go prepared with a fact-finding list.

The course

Research the course structure and content before you visit so you can ask specific questions. Find out how many places are available and the career prospects for graduates. Ask about application procedures; are all applicants interviewed? What do the admissions tutors look for on the application form? Find out about deferred entry and how the department would regard your gap year plans. What are your first impressions of the teaching staff? Do they appear enthusiastic, organised and ready to answer questions? If finance is an issue for you, ask about possible bursaries and sponsorship linked to the degree course.

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The location

Is the university in a city centre with halls of residence in the suburbs, on a parkland campus outside a city or town, on a rural campus or based in individual colleges in a city or town setting? What is it like to live there? Investigate the cost of living; London and big cities will be expensive places to live.

The facilities

How good are the libraries and study spaces, the computer suites, the student bookshops, departmental laboratories, workshops and studios? Check out the sports facilities as well as the student support services such as health, welfare and careers services.

The accommodation

Are you guaranteed accommodation in your first year? Do you prefer to be catered for or to cook for yourself? Visit a typical student room to see the standard of the accommodation offered. Check how far from main campus you will be and the cost and availability of transport. Find out whether you can take your car and where you can park.

The social life

Is it based in the town or city, on the main campus or in the halls of residence? Find out about clubs and societies that link in with your interests, the bars and the nightlife. Is there an active Student Union? If sport or music is important to you, check out what's available and how much it might cost. Most students have part time jobs to help with their living costs so find out about the availability of local part time work and whether the university operates a jobs agency.

You can find dates of open days on university websites and in the prospectus. The quickest way to access university and college websites is through UCAS. Look at opendays.com to see a calendar of open days.

What if you are unable to visit at the open day? Campuses are open all year round and it is usually possible to arrange a personal visit by contacting the university. You can also make an unofficial visit by driving or walking around the campus. You won't be able to see the full range of facilities but it will give you an impression of the place. You may also be able to arrange a visit through a current student; perhaps an older

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brother or sister has a friend studying at the university or you may have a relative living in a nearby town or city.

Make sure you choose your university for the right reasons. Open days allow you to compare and contrast to find the one that suits you best.

Node information
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Related Links

- UCAS
- opendays.com

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