

# Open days

## How to get the most out of visiting universities

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As well as deciding what you want to study, you're also faced with finding which university you want to go to. Choosing the right place to spend at least the next three years of your life is not easy but visiting different universities can help you reach your decision. Open days offer the chance to find out all the extra things you have been wondering about and maybe a few that you hadn't thought of before. Most importantly, you will be able to get a feel for the university and whether or not you can see yourself enjoying being there.

### What to do before you go...

Before you end up visiting every university in the country, make sure those you're interested in offer the course you want. If you're not sure what course you want yet, find out which ones offer the kind of subjects you're interested in and see which courses catch your eye.

Think about the location of the universities you want to look at. If you know you want to be near home, you probably don't want to visit universities at the other end of the country, or maybe you want to study as far away from home as possible! Would you find living in a big city too overwhelming, or would you be disappointed by a university in the countryside with just one nightclub in town? Is the university within a city or is it based on its own campus? If you're not sure which you'd prefer, try to visit both types. Check where your course is taught, as some universities have smaller campuses for particular courses out of town.

Find out when the open days are. Visit universities' websites, check prospectuses for dates or visit

**opendays.com**. You'll probably find some universities hold open days on the same date, but remember it's not the end of the world if you can't make official open days – contact the universities to see if there are any alternative ways you could visit.

When you've decided which open days you want to go to, check if you need to book a place in advance or if you can just go along. If you do need to book, always do that first before arranging your travel, or you might find there are no spaces left and you're stuck with a train ticket you don't need! Get a copy of the open day's programme to help you plan the day. It may be available online or could be sent to you once you've registered.

Do your research Look at universities' websites and prospectuses and read as much information as you can in advance. What sort of things will you be studying? What are the entry requirements? Then you can save your more in-depth questions for the open day. Trying to form a picture of a university in a day is difficult but will be much easier if you know some things already.

How are you getting there? Does the open day programme offer suggestions for transport or where to park? However you travel, make sure you leave plenty of time. Get all your information together the night before so you're ready to go.

### What to do on the day...

- Think about the journey you've had from home. Is the university you're visiting too close to where you live, or too far away?

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- Ask the academics and admissions staff what they look for in a personal statement. Are there any work experience requirements or additional tests you need to take? The prospectus may tell you this, but if there's anything you're not sure about, ask!
- It's common for universities to give tours around some of their accommodation at open days so look at what they offer. Do you have a choice of catered hall or a self-catered flat? Are you happy to share a bathroom with other people or is 'en-suite' top of your priority list? How do you feel about sharing a room? Or is distance your biggest concern and you'd do anything to avoid a 45-minute uphill walk to lectures?
- Think finances. The cost of living will vary depending on where you are studying – some towns may be cheaper than others. Find out the cost of accommodation. Ask the student finance team about any university bursaries, scholarships and Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) and child support grants that are available, and whether you are eligible for financial help.
- Investigate other university facilities, such as computers, libraries and laboratories, support available for D/deaf and disabled students, and the careers advice available. What have recent graduates gone on to do?
- What types of student clubs and societies are on offer? Is one university more appealing than another because it has a good student newspaper or chocolate appreciation society?
- If you're a sports fan, find out about the sports facilities and if there are any local teams that you could get involved in.
- Think about your social life outside of university too. Does the area have a music and theatre scene that offers your sort of gig or club night? What are the shops like and how near is the cinema?
- Can you imagine yourself here?

### Top tips...

Make the most of being in and around the university you're visiting by speaking to the students and staff and asking questions – they'll be happy to explain things to you and give you their point of view.

Decide if you want to visit the open day with family or on your own. Is there anyone at your school or college that is interested in checking out the same university?

If your visit to an open day involves an overnight stay, use it wisely. Visit the local sights and shops and see how you feel about the place itself. It's all about whether you can picture yourself there in a year or so.

Don't worry about where your friends are going. Just because you're at different universities doesn't mean you'll never see them again. You'll meet loads of new friends at university so don't base your decision on where your girlfriend, boyfriend or friends are considering – choose the course and the university that's right for you.