

# Open doors...

## How to get the most out of an open day

As soon as you've decided what you want to study, you're faced with the question of 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 a more informed decision. Open days offer the perfect opportunity to find out all the extra things you have been wondering about. You are likely to be offered the chance to speak to existing students about their experiences at university and members of staff will be on hand to answer your questions about the course. Most importantly, you will be able to get a 'feel' for the uni that you're visiting, which will help you decide whether or not it is somewhere you can see yourself 'belonging' in a year's time.

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

- Find out when the open days are. Visit uni websites, check prospectuses for dates or visit [www.opendays.com](http://www.opendays.com). It's not the end of the world if you can't make official open days, you could visit on your own informally, but access to departments, students and staff will be more limited.
- Ensure the University you want to go to offers the course you want. Find out which site or campus it is taught at, as some universities have smaller campuses for particular courses out of town.
- Do your research! Read as much information as you can. Trying to form a picture of a university in a day is difficult but will be much easier if you know some things already. Get on the internet. Visit university websites and order prospectuses. Find out if the course appeals to you. What sort of things will you be studying?

What are the entry requirements? Then you can save your more in-depth questions for the academics on the open day.

- Check out the booking requirements. Some universities need you to book onto the open day in advance but for others you can just turn up.
- 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.
- How are you getting to the open day? If you are visiting a city university, it is probably best to travel by train to avoid problems parking. However you travel, make sure you leave plenty of time.

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

- Think about the journey from home. Is the university that you're visiting too close to where you live, or too far away?
- Think finances. The cost of living will vary depending on where you are studying. Some towns may be cheaper than others. Try to find out how much you will be paying for accommodation. Research what university bursaries, scholarships and Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) and child support grants are available, and whether you are eligible for financial help.
- Ask the academics what they are looking for in a personal statement. Are there any work experience requirements? Are there any additional tests you need to take?

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- Have a think about potential living arrangements. Would you like to be cooked for in a catered hall or would you prefer a self-catered flat? Are you happy to share a bathroom with other people or is an 'ensuite' 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 uni on a wet Monday morning? It's common for universities to give tours around some of their accommodation at open days and it's a really good idea to take a look.
- Is the uni city- or campus-based? Campus universities are confined to one area, where students live among students, whereas a city university co-exists with a much larger and more diverse community.
- Can you see yourself here? Do you love the peace and quiet of the countryside and would find the bright lights of London town too overwhelming? Or are you a fan of the fast paced, 24-hour city lifestyle, who could be left disappointed by a small town with just one nightclub?
- What sort of social activities are on offer? What's its music and theatre scene like and is there a venue that hosts your sort of gig or club night? What are the shops like?
- What types of university clubs and societies are on offer? Is one uni more appealing than another because it has a good student newspaper or chocolate appreciation society?
- If you're a sports fan, see if you can have a look at the sports facilities. Find out if there are any local sports teams that you could get involved in and whether there are any notable sports events hosted locally.
- Investigate other university facilities. You could find out about computers, libraries and laboratories, support available for D/deaf and disabled students, destinations of recent graduates and opportunities for part-time work.

### Top tips...

The best way to answer the above questions is to ask, ask and ask. Make the most of being in and around the university you're visiting. Speak to the students and lecturers – they'll be delighted to explain things to you and give you their point of view.

Decide if you want to visit the open day on your own. Is it possible for a parent or carer to go along with you, or do you worry that your Dad will cramp your style? Is there anyone at your school or college that is interested in checking out the same uni?

Don't worry about where your friends are going. You are guaranteed to make new friends at uni so don't sacrifice your decision to go where your girlfriend, boyfriend or friends are going.

If your visit to an open day involves an overnight stay, use it wisely. Go and check out the local sights, do some window shopping and maybe check out some of the renowned student haunts. It's all about whether you can picture yourself there in a year or so's time.