



Tips from **students** and questions to ask

Whether you can get to open days or if you will be doing much of your research online and through emails, here are some tips from students who have been through it all.

It's really worth visiting

- 'Go to open days and ask plenty of questions about university life, the course, and support services. Go with a list of questions and chat to students – you can get honest, first-hand experience of studying there. It may seem a hassle if some of the universities are far from home, but it is worth the train fare and there is nothing better to get a real 'feel' for the place and the people.'
- 'Interview your tutors – speak to them at the open days. I began inquiring about one course but when I spoke to the course tutors, they advised me I was a good fit for a different degree, and as soon as the lecturer started telling me about some of the modules, it really appealed to me.'

Things to look out for at an open day

- Does there seem to be a good rapport between the staff and students?
- For car owners, is there much (if any) student parking and what is the cost?
- Are the buildings well designed and welcoming with good signage (including 'you are here' location maps) to help visitors (and freshers) find their way around the campus?
- Check out the students' union and departmental notice boards – are there lots of interesting things going on?

- For those with special dietary requirements (e.g. vegetarian, gluten-free), is there much choice in the cafes and food outlets?
- Try to read a copy of the latest edition of the student newspaper – what are the important issues on campus?

Apply for pre-uni schemes or tasters to help you make up your mind

- 'During sixth form, I was part of a programme which pairs you with an e-mentor who is studying a similar subject to the one you want to do. It's all about targeting children who are the first in their family to attend higher education. After that experience, and attending the open day and law taster day, I knew it was the right place for me. Talk to people who are doing your potential degree to see whether the course is right for you – a lot of people come to university and are taken aback by the workload and the extent of independent learning.'



Trust your instincts


- ‘You know if a course is right for you when you can talk for ten minutes on the question: ‘So what do you like about that degree?’ And my advice when looking at what university is best for you is to think of the three Cs: city life, course modules, and career prospects.’
- ‘I fell in love with my chosen uni instantly, so the best tip I can give is to trust your feelings. If you find faults and things you are not comfortable with, like I did when I visited other unis (I thought the halls I saw were not all that nice, I didn’t feel they were for me), then it is not worth going there. If you like the sound of the course and you like the university after visiting it, that’s where you should go.’
- ‘When in doubt, make a spreadsheet. Make a table with all the universities you have in mind and compare each across a range of different requirements that are important to you, from computer facilities to tuition fees. The university you choose should be the right one for you, not the right one for others. Find out what careers your chosen subject can lead to and think hard about whether you can see yourself doing those options in the future.’

Pick online brains

- ‘These days, it’s possible to find out lots of information on websites – for example, www.unistats.co.uk is the place to go to compare UK higher education course data. This includes satisfaction scores in the National Student Survey, jobs and salaries after study, and other key information.’
- ‘Take the time to research your university online. Look through forums to find out what current students think about their course and ask them questions.’

Don’t believe all the myths

- ‘I came from a state school. When it came to applying for Oxbridge, I was hesitant because I had a weird idea that there was a type of person who went to Oxford and that I wasn’t it. Now I feel really daft about believing those



stereotypes. The university’s prospectus only asks for people who are keen to learn, there’s no footnote tucked sneakily away also stipulating a knighthood and a country house. Don’t worry about grades too much, either – I got some very dodgy A level grades, including a D in English. But when I went for my interview at Oxford, the professors told me they didn’t always take them too seriously as a way of measuring aptitude.’

Pay attention to course details

- ‘Pick something you love – and won’t mind getting up for! You’ll find that you work harder if you’re passionate about your degree. Joint courses are also great because you get the best out of both subjects.’
- ‘Make sure your course choices cover modules that are suitable for you – browse through the course outline so you know what to expect. I wish I’d realised that a module title is one thing, but the ‘unit guide’ for each section is really where the information lies.’
- ‘Find out more about the lecturers – it’s worth researching the lecturers and unit modules to find out their research interests. See if they’ve got Twitter profiles that can be followed for insight into the course content. And for an arts or design-based course, attend the end-of-year graduation show. You’ll be able to see students’ work, talk to them, and get a real understanding of what the pros and cons are of the course and university.’

- ‘See if the course or uni offers you any internship or placement opportunities. I was particularly drawn to a course with a one-year internship programme, which meant I spent a year working. As a result, I know I want to work in education policy when I graduate.’

Questions to ask about the course

- How many offers did the course make last year?
- Are there scholarships or bursaries on offer?
- How many taught hours does the course have?
- For courses that use specialist facilities – such as recording and editing suites or scientific laboratories – will the facilities be shared between undergraduate and postgraduate students?
- Does the course carry professional accreditation (for example, in psychology, is it recognised by the British Psychological Society)?
- How will the degree be assessed (coursework, exams, practicals, presentations, and group work) and how are marks towards your final degree split between the years (i.e. first, second, third year) and between course assignments and exams?
- Are the core and optional modules still the same as published in the prospectus?

Think about friends and support

- ‘It’s worth thinking about where your friends are going. I’m NOT saying follow your friends, but be aware of where people are. I went to a uni knowing I had a good friend going to one that was only a couple of hours’ train ride away.’
- ‘Everyone wants to have an amazing time at university, but when the going gets tough, it’s important to have a strong support network around you. I’ve found when you are on a course such as nursing, which is emotionally, mentally, and physically draining, you need people around you who you can turn to.’

Location

- ‘Consider staying close to home to save money – don’t rule out staying local. Commuting to campus from home has saved me so much money on rent and I have had the support of my family throughout.’
- ‘If you prefer to go away, check out the journey – how accessible is it when you have to travel home for three years? It sounds obvious, but a nightmare train journey will get less appealing as the course goes on, not to mention the cost.’
- ‘Consider what kind of environment you want before you apply – I wanted a campus university because it means I’m at the heart of everything, I can get to my classes in a couple of minutes, and I absolutely love that.’
- ‘It’s important to venture outside the campus: look at the costs of buses, off-campus accommodation, and access to shops. See if the environment suits your personality. If you’re an outgoing person, look to see if the area has a great nightlife. Or if you are like me, you may like a museum or the countryside. It’s a good idea to think about rent – look at the area’s property prices on websites before applying.’

Questions to ask about the university or college

- Do they take many students at Clearing and through Adjustment?
- For Halls of Residence, how many weeks of the year are covered by the contract?
- How well staffed is the university careers service?
- Can the university help find internships or work placements?
- Is the library open seven days a week?
- How far away from the halls of residence is the nearest supermarket?
- Is the campus well served by buses (for example, from the town / city centre or the railway station)?