

Making the most out of an open day

Most universities offer an “open day” for prospective students, including lectures and talks, as well as existing staff and students on hand to answer questions. Websites, literature and videos can all give an excellent sense of the university, but nothing beats a personal visit.

Think beyond academics

Don't focus solely on the academic elements of the university. Check out halls of residence, social centres and sports facilities. If the university is town-based, spend time in the local area and give some thought to how it would feel living there for the next few years.

Trust your child's instincts

No matter how appealing a course might be, if your child hates the feel of the university the minute they step in the door, it's highly unlikely that they will get either the qualifications or experience they deserve. Pay heed if they take an instant dislike to a place.

Prepare questions in advance

Do not be afraid to ask questions. Open days provide the perfect opportunity to receive direct answers to questions that may be difficult to find online. Both you and your child should think of some questions in advance.

Walk and observe

Walk around the campus and university town or city. Try to encourage your child to get a good feel for the environment. Can they imagine themselves living there? Do the students look happy? Is it a friendly place?

Speak with students

Whilst open days provide an opportunity to receive information on the degree course and the university itself, nothing beats hearing from someone with first-hand experience of what it is like to study there - ask questions about teaching quality, societies, accommodation and the local area.

The art of seduction

Universities take the opportunity of open days to showcase their most impressive facilities. Be mindful, what you are being shown likely represents the very best they have to offer. Don't let your child be totally seduced by this, they must make their decision based on plenty of other research too.

Planning for an open day

To get the best value out of university open days, it's advisable to prepare in advance. Open days often include a variety of lectures, walking tours and presentations, so your child should check what's on offer and plan accordingly. In addition, they should make a list of questions that they want to ask each university so they can compare and contrast differences to help with their decision making. Some ideas of what you might want to ask are included below.

Question ideas for an open day

- Will an applicant still be considered if they did not meet their predicted grades?
- Will an applicant still be considered if they did not meet the GCSE entry requirements stated on the university's website?
- What is the university looking for in a student's application / personal statement - is there anything they can do to increase their chances of being offered a place?
- How many hours of timetabled teaching does the university provide and what is the ratio between lecture and seminar teaching?
- What additional support does the university provide if a student finds certain parts of the course particularly challenging?
- Does the university provide any additional support for students with a particular learning difficulty (e.g. dyslexia)?
- What does the university offer with regards to career support and guidance?
- What type of careers / jobs do students go on to have after graduating?
- Can a student take on part-time employment whilst studying?
- Does the university provide opportunities to study abroad / work in industry (or can you tell me more about these opportunities)?