

South Wilts Grammar School

Sixth Form



**Getting the best
from University
Open Days**

GETTING THE BEST OUT OF UNIVERSITY OPEN DAYS

Visiting Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) gives you a chance to see what they are like, find out more information and make your own mind up. You are, after all, going to spend between 3 and 6 years at your chosen place, depending on what you are going to study. There are different kinds of open days – whole institution, departmental, college. Try to visit as many as you can, but remember we recommend a maximum of 3 in term 6 of Year 12 and 5 anytime in Year 13 during school time. Many universities have Open Days on Saturdays and some during summer holidays. Open days are listed on the UCAS board in the 6th form block, individual institution websites or www.opendays.com. You will need to book via the university website to ensure you have a place, particularly if you want to attend a specific subject lecture. Some booking sites are open now. You may also wish to spend some time in the local area to get a feel for the non-university side of life.

To get the best out of your visit, make a check list, take notes and summarise it all when you get home. Do this in whatever way you like, as long as you can compare all the information and make it make sense. If a parent is willing to attend with you, this sometimes gives you a different view of things as they tend to look at different aspects, ask different questions or even hear different things!

Remember, you're going to be at University for several years, so observe, reflect and ask as many questions as you can. Don't worry about how silly the questions may sound, it's not an interview and the staff will have heard it before. The check list of things to think about is by no means exhaustive but something to get you started. If you think of something else, please let us know so that we can add it to the information for next year. The list is long and you may find you get out of the car / bus and decide you don't like the area, feel of the university, town or something else. However, don't just turn around; check things out and remember many students pick universities they visited on a sunny day rather than a cloudy day or because they like the choice of food in the canteen. You're likely to follow your instincts, but make sure those instincts are backed up with information.

If you have any questions or need some help deciding which 5 institutions to put on your UCAS form, please talk to your tutor and/or email Mrs Mackay. Don't forget, all your teachers once went; ask their opinions, ask parents but do remember, it was often very different in our day. The most important thing is to be happy with all the institutions you put on your form so that you are pleased when you get offers rather than be disappointed about not getting an offer from a particular institution.

COURSE:

Content

Print off the course outline before you go and check you know what it contains, it is what you think it is and are you interested in it. If there are bits that don't sound that interesting – is it a % that you can live with?

Structure and Flexibility

- What is the qualification and length of time for qualification?
- Is it modular or linear?
- Is there an option to specialise in specific areas further into the course?
- Is there a core year (often found with Engineering) that allows you to learn more and then diversify?
- Is there a year in industry (if appropriate) or other work experience?
- Is there a chance to study abroad?

Entry Requirements

- Do they have any specific or preferred subjects at AS or A2?
- What do the admissions tutors like to see?
- What is their % applicant to offer?
- Are you being realistic? Remember your predicted UCAS grades are likely to closely reflect your AS grades in August?

Teaching Style

- How is it split between, lectures, tutorials, reading time –

- Do you like the idea of big lectures (sometimes 300 people), small tutorials (Oxford and Cambridge 1 or 2 people),
- Are you good at discovering information yourself / do you prefer more directed study?

Typical working week - lab work, lectures, expected hours, contact hours?

Assessment

- How often do they happen?
- What type of assessment, yearly / termly exams, practicals, field trips, course work?
- Do they count to the final degree grade?
- How quickly can you expect to get feedback?

Lecturers – who are they, what are their specialities, students' opinion?

Department

- What is it like?
- What are the facilities like?
- What are their relationships with industry, businesses, employers?
- How many students in the department?
- Do they have good research facilities (usually a good sign of external funding)
- Where is it compared to other parts of the University?
- Will you have a long walk to get there?

Tutorial Support

- Will you be allocated a personal tutor?
- How often will you see him / her?

Career Opportunities

- What careers do graduates follow?
- What assistance is given to careers advice?
- What are the key transferable skills?
- Is the course recognised by a professional body (if that is pertinent to your chosen field)?

UNIVERSITY

Type & Size of University

- Campus (e.g. Nottingham)
- City based (e.g. Cardiff)
- Mixture (e.g. Southampton)
- Collegiate (e.g. Oxford)

Students

Ratios, diversity, maturity, international

Location & Atmosphere

- Is it far enough away from home, or too far?
- Do you feel comfortable – can you see yourself here?
- Does it feel friendly and safe?
- What's the nearby town or city like and how far away is it?
- What facilities are available on the campus (if appropriate)?
- What is the condition and style of the buildings?

Transport

- What are the transport links like and how close are they?
- Cost of transport home or to friends and how long will it take to get there?
- Will there be lots of travel between campuses/accommodation and departments?
- Is there parking available or secure bike racks?

Accommodation

- Is it available for the whole of the course or specific years?
- Catered, self-catered or a mix (usually catered week days, self weekends)?
- Single or double rooms, en-suite or shared facilities?
- What condition are the buildings in – are they well maintained?
- Costs?

- Facilities – washing machine, microwave, freezer etc?
- Small flats or large corridors – which one would you prefer?
- Security?
- Help with finding accommodation for 2nd and 3rd years?

Facilities & Support

- Library, labs, computers, lecture theatres, seminar rooms
- Bars and Clubs
- Sports facilities
- Launderette, Shops
- Welfare Officers, Health Services
- Financial Advisers, Careers Advisers, Employment Centres
- Student Union

Social

- Clubs and societies
- Practice Rooms
- Nightlife
- Theatre, Arts, Music, Cinema

FINANCIAL

- Tuition Fees and other fees
- Sponsorship
- Bursaries
- Course Equipment
- Field Trips
- Specific Insurance for the course
- Cost of Living
- Part Time Jobs
- Scholarships
- Travel to and from halls to lectures
- Travel to and from home
- Accommodation costs in your 2nd and 3rd years

GRADUATE PROSPECTS

You will have to think about post-course employment at some stage during your degree. With more and more people obtaining degrees, you need to know what your transferable skills are and have an eye on what you are going to do at the end of your course whilst doing your course. So you may need help working out what having a degree would mean to a potential employer and how, what you are doing will make you a good employee. This is where the Careers Service comes in.

- How proactive is the student careers service?
- Type of work graduates end up doing?
- % of graduates employed?
- Drop-out rates?
- Relationships with potential employers – fairs, work experience, internships?
- Further study options?
- How do the students feel about the careers service?

CONCLUSION

Put all this together with your pre visit research to help you make your decisions. Remember you need to feel happy with getting an offer for any one of your choices. Do ask for more help from your tutor and the sixth form team if you want help making those final choices.