



A guide to open days for teachers and advisors

Once students manage to navigate the minefield of course choice and universities on offer, Open Days are by far one of the best tools in equipping students to make well-informed decisions about what and where to study.

As a teacher or advisor you may wish to organise a group visit to a particular university Open Day, or more commonly grant students permission to attend one or two days during the school term. Some Open Days do take place at weekends or evenings, which can be a more practical option if having to travel, but some visits will require students to miss a day of lessons.

Universities will normally have dedicated pages on their website relating to information about Open Days and students should be encouraged to research these as part of the application process when considering their options.

Opendays.com is a useful central resource that students, parents, teachers and advisors alike will find as a great reference tool for planning visits. The Open Day calendar database can quickly help plan dates, avoiding any clashes. At a glance, it will give potential Open Day visitors options for visits, particularly if travel needs to be planned in advance.

You might find students turning to you for advice relating to issues in attending Open Days, ranging from financial barriers – spending train fares crossing the country might just not be an option for them – to competing demands with school work, or even geographical challenges. Whilst there is no doubt in the value of visiting the university, they may be unsure that going into higher education is the right choice for them. Encourage your students to contact the university directly to see what the alternative options are. Virtual Open Days, webinars, sample lecture podcasts and social media channels engaging with current students are just a few examples of other opportunities available for prospective students that will allow them to get a feel for the university.

Check out and encourage your students to use St Mary's Student Guide in preparation for any Open Days they might be attending. Campus tours are a recommended way of viewing the University on the day as it includes all the key aspects of student life.

St Mary's Student Guide: Open Days

Having concentrated efforts in researching university options across the UK, students should then consider visiting some possible choices that will give further insight into the academic culture and student life beyond university websites and prospectuses.

Firstly, use individual university websites to check out visiting opportunities or use opendays.com as a one-stop central database for any institutions that may be an option. Draw up a list of the ones to visit and book a space – remember to include anyone who might be joining!

1. Check the schedule for the day before you visit. Manage your time, to allow for any talks and tours as well as arrival and departure times – especially useful if you're arriving at the University by public transport.
2. Speak to the Student Ambassadors working at the Open Day. All universities will have current students helping – make the most of them! Current students provide an insight into everything from the size of lectures and seminars, to the Students' Union, to the clubs and societies, not to mention what it is like to live in or travel to the local area.
3. See as much of the campus as possible, even if it is a multi-site university. There will be talks and tours taking place and you can consider the realities of studying and living there.

Open Days are usually very busy and it is easy to forget what you want to ask with all the excitement. Make a list of all the questions that may be important to the decision-making process. Use this handy guide of suggested questions in order to leave with all the relevant information required.

Course is key – this should be the top priority!

- What does the course cover?
- How many hours a week is timetabled teaching?
- How much flexibility is there?
- What assessment methods are used?
- What's the split between lectures, tutorials and self-directed study?
- What size are tutorial groups?
- What deadlines are there?
- What are the specialist subject-based facilities?
- Are placements/study abroad on offer?

Applying for the course

This is an opportunity to find out what is not on the website and hear directly from the decision makers what it is they are looking for in applicants.

- Clarify the entry requirements – and what happens if students don't quite get the grades?

- Which qualifications and combinations of qualifications do you accept/prefer?
- Is it worth applying for more than one course?
- How do they select which candidates to make offers to?
- What do they look for in your application and personal statement?
- Can they recommend any reading or activities to inform your personal statement?
- Do they hold interviews or is selection based on your UCAS application?
- How do they feel about gap years and deferred entry applications?

Employability and careers support

Whilst there are numerous benefits to be gained from participating in Higher Education, it is a big personal and financial commitment – it is wise to consider future prospects.

- How does the course support employability?
- Do they offer or arrange placements?
- What have recent graduates gone on to do?
- What careers guidance facilities are there?
- Do they run job fairs?

Questions for current students

They once had similar questions and concerns; do not worry about asking too many questions, they will be happy to talk to you.

- What do you enjoy most about studying here?
- What are you studying and how have you found it?
- What is/are the teaching, facilities and support like?
- Are some halls of residence better or worse than others?
- What is the town/city like?

Accommodation and student life

Life beyond the lecture theatre.

- Is a place in halls guaranteed? What accommodation is available off campus?
- What does it cost?
- How big are the rooms?
- How secure is it?
- Do most students stay on campus at weekends?
- What happens in years two and three?
- How far will you have to travel to get into uni? Is there parking?
- How do the costs actually break down?
- How much money is a realistic weekly student budget?
- What bursaries, scholarships or fee waivers are there and how do you apply?
- How easy is it to find part-time work?
- What clubs/societies does the Students' Union offer?
- What does the local town/city offer for students?

Enjoy, and remember it is okay to visit again if you need to. We hope to see you at a St Mary's Open Day in the future. Good Luck!