

Information sheets: Choosing a course

Getting Started: Choosing the right university for you can be a very confusing process as there are thousands of courses available at hundreds of different institutions. The place to start is by asking yourself what you really want out of your university experience, out of the course you choose and the place at which you study. It really is never too early to start. Students should order prospectuses and have a look through them as early as possible (even in year 11). Here are some things to consider:

How do you choose your course?

Some schools and colleges offer you the chance to complete a questionnaire to find the courses best suited to you. These can provide a good guide as to what would be suitable, but are not necessary. Here are some things to think about.

- Are there specialist areas of your chosen subject that you are particularly interested in?
- Are you looking for a practical or theoretical course?
- Do you get work experience or a year abroad as part of your course?
- Realistically what grades will you get in your exams?
- Have you got any academic interests that you would like to carry on at university?
- Are there teaching and assessment methods that suit you better?

1. Type of Course

In general courses allow you to study 1 or 2 subjects; however modular courses are making it increasingly common for universities to offer combined honours degrees allowing you to follow a range of subjects.

2. Entry requirements

Are any specific subjects required? Will there be an interview or an audition? Be realistic about the types of grades you are going to achieve. Specific information will be given in the prospectus.

If in doubt – get in contact with the Admissions Tutor.

3. Teaching and Assessment Methods

How are the classes taught? How many students are there in a class? Is the course assessed by course work, exams or a mixture of the two?

4. Subject

- i. What do you like?
- ii. What subjects do you enjoy/ think you would enjoy?
- iii. Do you want flexible study?
- iv. Do you need professional training/accreditation?
 - i. Subjects you've not studied eg Engineering, Nutrition, Retail
 - ii. Unusual subjects eg Metallurgy, Surf Technology
 - iii. Combinations of subjects e.g. Law with Languages, Economics with Computing

Some courses have a year abroad or a professional placement (sandwich course) which extends courses to 4 years. It could be a chance to gain some valuable life or work experience.

5. Teaching and Research quality: How can you tell if the course is any good?

Students should refer to individual university websites as well as other national newspapers pages. For instance, [The Guardian](#) or [The Sunday Times](#) Higher Education Guides can be consulted for rankings - these provide a useful overview of Universities and their relative abilities both as an institution and for individual subjects. Please bear in mind that these are not absolute and are highly subjective. For instance, a student applying for a course in Agriculture will have many different requirements to someone who applies for a Fine Art degree. Students should consult the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and any teaching quality ratings which give an excellent insight into Universities academic abilities.

6. Career Choice

It is important to think about what your degree might lead to and whether you need a specific degree to follow a particular path.

Things to remember!

Courses with the same names at different universities are often quite different. If the areas in which an applicant is particularly interested are not offered by that University department, they shouldn't contemplate it. It is essential to do a course which will interest an applicant fully - otherwise they won't be as keen to get up for that nine o'clock lecture!

Good Luck!

Information Sheet: Choosing the Institution

Choosing where you want to go to university is also important as you have to make sure that you are going to be happy there for 3 or 4 years and that there is enough to do when you are not studying. Here are some things to consider:

- Does the university offer the course you want?
- Do you want a rural or an urban experience?
- Location - how far do you want to be from home?
- What sort of facilities are you looking for in the town and university?
- Do you want to be in a town, city or campus?
- Do you have any outside interests that you would like to continue with?

Types of institution

i. City or campus

One of the key choices will be whether you want to go to a campus university or a city-based institution and how far from home you want to be. These two options offer very different environments. Campus universities are self-contained, and provide a mix of academic, social and residential facilities, usually on one site. If you prefer a quieter pace of life with an excellent community feel, then perhaps a campus based university is best for you. Conversely, a city based institutions are usually integrated into the city and has the buzz and vibrancy that towns and cities have. This really is down to an individual's personal preference

ii. Near to home or far away? North/South? East or West?

There are pros and cons to both moving away, and living close to home during your student days. Many students say that between 1 – 2 hours is enough. Whichever option you choose, you have to make sure that it is right for you and that you will be happy with it for three or four years of your life!

iii. University size

There is a wide diversity in size. For instance, the University of Manchester is a large institution with tens of thousand students. A good example of a medium sized University is Reading. We have some seventeen thousand students. A small university would be Bath Spa, which has approximately five thousand students. Again, this is a question of personal preference.

Facilities - What are the facilities like?

- i. **Academic** - One important thing to look at is the quality of the academic facilities ranging from the library, to computer labs, lecture theatres and teaching rooms. It is worth checking opening times too – 24 hour access to computer labs may be important for those last minute essay typing sessions.
- ii. **Social** – Find out what the University has to offer in your spare time. Are there cafes, restaurants, bars and nightclubs at the University? What sports clubs and societies (radio, media, paper etc) does the Students' Union offer? Make a list of the clubs and activities that are important to you. Ask the University if they have them, and how good the facilities are for that activity. What is the nearest town like for nightlife, shopping, etc?

Admissions tutors may not know, so try the Students' Union...

- iii. **Accommodation** – there are lots of things to consider and find out. What is the accommodation like? How much is it and what does the price include? Am I guaranteed a place in halls for the first year? What accommodation is available on and off campus in future years?

Cost of education

In 2016, Universities can charge up to £9000 per year. Many Universities have generous bursaries and scholarships available to students which can range from academic achievement to excellence in sport or music or to support students on lower incomes.

Things to remember

- All universities have different feels, and not all of them will be right for you. The best thing to do is to go on an open day
- Research well now so you don't find you've made the wrong choice later

Make your decision on YOUR opinions and priorities, not anyone else's

Remember! Your teachers and careers advisers are experts and are there to help you

Good luck!!