

Open Days and Prospectuses

Students at Charterhouse should fill in the Absence Form for University Open Days / Interviews available from the Careers Library at least a week in advance of the day you wish to miss school. Ask ABB or Mrs Portefaix to sign it before asking your beaks and housemasters to sign it. One copy is for your housemaster the other should be returned to the Careers Library. Parents will also have to fill in the University Absence Form which is available on the web site.

Prospectuses

A university or college prospectus gives information about a particular course and institution, covering facilities, tuition fees, scholarships, courses, accommodation, support services and more. Prospectuses can be ordered or downloaded from individual university or college websites, or the Aimhigher website. At some universities and colleges you can also get an 'alternative prospectus', written by students, that gives an insider's view of the course, facilities and student life. You can order prospectuses online by using www.prospectusuk.com or by going to the University website.

Open days

Open days usually take place in spring or autumn or when you may have had offers of a place from several universities, but you've not yet accepted a place. While you may build up an impression from reading the university or college's literature, there's no substitute for seeing a place in real life. Many students say it was visiting the place on an open day that helped sway them towards their first choice. An open day gives you the chance to explore the site, see the accommodation and talk to staff.

To book a place, you may be able to register online on the university website. If you can't make the dates for the open days, you may be able to sign up for a guided tour instead, or you can visit informally under your own steam.

Before attending a university open day, you should ensure that the open day at your chosen institution cover the subject that you want to study? Some have specific open days for each subject others have a general open day that covers all subjects in all schools. This information can be found on the www.opendays.com website. Select the institution from the search page, and go to the 'open day dates and details' section.

When at the open day, think about the following:

LOCATION Find out what sort of location each university/college on your list is in. There are four major categories that you can put them in to:

1. Civic Universities - sited within a city centre usually with halls outside of the city in the suburbs
2. City-campus Universities - usually within a major city, but sited on parkland campus(es) outside of the city centre
3. Campus Universities - all sited on one campus - usually in a rural setting
4. Collegiate - life and learning based in colleges, usually in a rural setting (except for Cambridge, Durham, London and Oxford)

Do you like the area and what it has to offer?

Is the institution too far from or too near to home? Do you like the area? Can you cope with being there for at least three years (!)?

SOCIAL LIFE You will be in the place for at least three years and the friends you make will be with you for life, so, apart from bars and night-clubs (which are usually in great abundance anyway) find out the student-mix (male:female ratio) and what clubs/societies are available.

- **STUDENT UNIONS** operate bars, clubs, shops and societies. Find out what is available and where it is based - is social life based in the town/city or within halls of residence or on the main campus?
- **MUSIC** in the form of orchestras, choirs, bands and individual tuition is usually available. Find out how frequently it is run and how much it costs.
- **SPORT** provision is important. Find out what sports are available, how many teams there are and what the facilities are like. The BUSA (British Universities' Sports Association) ranks all institutions. Find out how good the university team really is!

Does the university/college have clubs and societies that suit your interests? Does the university have sports facilities, and can you see them? Does the social life appeal to you?

Don't worry about where your friends are going. You are guaranteed to make new friends when you get to university so don't sacrifice your happiness to go where your friends, boyfriends or girlfriends are going. It's your life, so make it your decision. Just make sure that you've thought of everything before you make the choice!

LEARNING RESOURCES are very important as you will need them for research and further reading. How good are the libraries? What is the ratio of number of students to computers? Is internet provided? and is it free? How many contact hours do you have in your subject each year?

ACCOMMODATION is generally the most expensive part of going into higher education. See if you are guaranteed a place in university/college owned accommodation in your first year. Decide whether you want to be catered for or cook for yourself and then see what the quality of accommodation is. This is best done first hand so try to visit a hall of residence when you visit on an open day. If you do visit a hall of residence, find out if it is for first years, and if it's nice, ask them if all halls are like it (they may have just shown you a really expensive hall reserved for post-graduates - not much help!). You will probably have to find your own accommodation in the second year, so ask how easy it is to find, and generally how expensive it is. Remember that you will have to buy food, electricity, water, gas, heating, telephone....

TRANSPORT How far is it from halls to the main campus - will you need a car (and if so, where can you park it) or will a bicycle do? If you need to use public transport, find how much it costs. Remember, a few journeys every day over the period of a year can really add up!

SUPPORT AND LEARNING Find out what sort of grades students get at the university/college, especially in the subject that you want to study. See what the destinations of the graduates in your subject are too. Also, find out what sort of non-curricular support the university/college offers (such as health + welfare - counselling etc.). When at the university/college you will be assigned a personal tutor to look after things as this, so find out how many students there are per tutor and how regular tutorials are.

You are definitely going to have fun and enjoy yourself, wherever you go. But remember, the better a place suits you the more fun and more enjoyment you're going to have. Decide your priorities before you begin and then look for those institutions which meet them. Make sure you choose a university for the right reasons for yourself, as you are the one who will spend the time there. They all seem to have good points, so an open day is the best way to get a gut feeling about how you would like it.