

Year 12

Making the Most of UCAS Conventions & University Open Days

Wednesday 17th April 2019

1. * Student Ambassador01 2: Hi, my name is Valentine and I am currently in my 3rd year studying renewable energy. The theme for today's forum is Making the Most of UCAS Conventions & University Open Days. For those of you who are new to the forums, you are welcome to ask me questions either directly related to the theme or about any other aspect of university life. Anything I can't answer I will refer on and someone from the Exeter Scholars team will get back to you with a response in the next few days. For those of you that have logged on before, welcome back!

Before we start I just want to give you a quick overview of how the session itself works in case you've not used one before.

2. * Student Ambassador01 2: When you post a message it will be sent to me to reply to and will show on your wall as awaiting reply. When I reply to your message it will then post to the public wall for you and everyone else to see. Until I have replied, no-one else will see your message. Bear with me, as when it gets busy it will take me a few moments to reply – but don't worry, you won't have been forgotten! I will start all messages with the name of the person I am replying to just to make the discussion easier to follow and if I'm posing a question to the whole group I'll start the message with 'Everyone'.

Also answering your questions today is Isabel and they will introduce themselves to you in a moment.

3. * Student Ambassador01 2: I hope that all makes sense. To get us started, has anyone thought about their UCAS application yet?

4. * Student Ambassador01: Hi, my name is Isabel and I am currently in my first year studying Physics with Astrophysics.

5. Alan Wasilewski: Hi, I'm mostly clueless about how the whole UCAS application process looks like. So my first question, what exactly is UCAS and how do I begin applying?

* Student Ambassador01 2: Hi Alan, UCAS stands for the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. It's basically a central system to apply to most universities in the UK (except a couple like Oxford and Cambridge who have a separate system).

The best thing to do is to get on the website and follow the instructions! You can pick up to 5 universities/courses to send applications to, and you'll need to input details like predicted grades and to write a personal statement. (Let me know if you have heard of these before?) You normally have until January to do this. After that each university will give you an answer, which will be either an unconditional offer (where they take you no matter what), conditional (where you have to fulfil certain conditions such as achieving certain grades) or decline you. After that you will need to pick your firm and insurance choices (1st and 2nd choice basically). It's a little bit of a long process overall which may seem confusing so let me know if you have any other questions!

6. Hannah Voysey: Hi, how many University Open days do you recommend going to?

* Student Ambassador01: Hi Hannah, I would not say there is a specific number but maybe focus on trying to see a range of different universities so that you get a feel for what you like. For example, if you are not sure whether you want a campus or a city university then maybe try and look at both. Don't worry if you cannot attend lots of open days as there is always good information online.

7. Benjamin McIntyre: How do I make the most of an Open Day? What information can I get that I can't already find online?

* Student Ambassador01 2: Hi Benjamin, the best part about Open Days is to see the atmosphere of the campus for yourself, which is a very personal thing. It's also very useful to meet some academics who would be teaching on the course and ask more questions, for example about staff to student ratios. In many places you get to meet student ambassadors like Isabel and to hear directly from us about the experience of the course. It's also nice to see not only the campus but also the environment around (if it's a city, or for example check out the beach if you're interested in somewhere like the Exeter Penryn campus where I study).

8. Beth Hughes: Is it best to look for the feel of a university at an open day or more about the course itself and the application process, like grades and admissions tests for medicine?

* Student Ambassador01: Hi Beth, I think that applying to a course like Medicine you need to focus on where you feel the course is right for you. However, as Valentine has said above, an Open Day offers you an exclusive chance to get a feel for the University that will not be conveyed to you online. I found that in visiting universities I was mainly focusing on the academics and application processes for my course but subconsciously I was making a judgement on the atmosphere and the general vibe of each place. It is a bit of a balancing act on an Open Day, it is obviously important to find out how each university does your degree, but also it is important to see what else the university does outside of academia as this is a place you are going to leave home to live in so you need to make sure you like it!

9. Benjamin McIntyre: What other applications for Uni are there other than UCAS, you mentioned that for Oxbridge it is different?

* Student Ambassador01 2: Hi Benjamin, I have just checked again and it seems to be through UCAS as well, however the deadline is in October rather than January, and you can only apply to one of the two. They regularly have additional assessments and interviews etc. UCAS should have all the steps laid out, as well as the Oxford and Cambridge websites.

10. Beth Hughes: How do you narrow down your choices for university if following open days you still like more than five?

* Student Ambassador01 2: Hi Beth, sadly that's one of the hardest parts of uni applications! I remember having trouble too. It depends on what you prioritise but things to think about include: course (look at module breakdown, field trips, assessment style: more coursework or exams?), university environment (city uni or campus uni), staff to student ratio, post-graduation employment rates, distance from home, etc. I'm

sorry I can't be more specific but it's all down to you. Open days are definitely a good place to get the atmosphere of a university rather than just how it looks on paper.

11. Beth Hughes: If you don't get the grades that you initially hoped for or if you have to go through clearing how do you cope and what is the best way forward?

* Student Ambassador01: Hi Beth, I think the best thing to do before results day regardless of how you felt your exams went is to make a clearing plan. Personally, I got a whiteboard and wrote down all the courses that had lower grade entries or did not have many applicants that I was interested in and wrote down the course code and the phone number to ring. This meant that if I did have to go through clearing, I was completely prepared and would not need to stress out. If you miss the grades for your main university, it might be worth calling them up on the day and asking them to let you on the course still or a different course (always worth a try!). If you do not get the grades you hoped for but still get into university then focus on the positives and celebrate! Usually, your school or college will have assigned people to help you out on results day with clearing if you have missed your grades so do not think you will be alone in any of it.

12. Matthew Spurrier: What are the main factors that would constitute for a University with a good atmosphere, that you could tell within an open day?

* Student Ambassador01 2: Hi Matthew, there can be many things! Try to have a chat with the student ambassadors when you can, although we tend to keep positive we are allowed to be honest with you and tell you what the student life is like. Past that it's a lot down to your personal choice - do you prefer a city or campus uni (the Penryn campus is fairly small for example so we've got a great community feel)? Does the student union offer clubs that interest you, and are you well-represented if you've got problems? You can also ask about relationships with locals. Essentially ask yourself what would make you comfortable, and is it there?

13. Regan Bray: What should a prospective student look for when looking at potential universities (what makes a good university)?

* Student Ambassador01 2: Hi Regan, there are many factors and it depends what you yourself consider most important. For example: course content (module breakdown, field trips, practical work), staff to student ratio is often overlooked but can make a big difference as you get a more personal experience, but also the student's union (do they represent you well if you have problems, and do they offer many clubs you're interested in?). Employment rates after graduation are also interesting to look at.

14. Beth Hughes: Did either of you get into your first choice university and if not are you glad that you didn't?

* Student Ambassador01: Hi Beth, I put Exeter as my first choice and was lucky enough to get the grades to secure my place. I have a few friends that did not get the grades for their chosen course. One of them called up the University and is now studying a slightly different course which she loves and she still gets to go to the University she wanted. Another did not make his grades and went through clearing but is equally happy with the University he now goes to. I would say do not get too hung up on not getting into the

university you want- be realistic with the offer you decide to firm and insure and then have faith in yourself. As I said earlier, planning for clearing on results day is a really good way to keep calm in case it doesn't go exactly how you want it to but once that has been sorted focus on getting into your firm choice!

* Student Ambassador01 2: To add to that, I also was lucky enough to get into Exeter as my first choice, but as Isabel said you can be happily surprised. My friend got into Exeter through Clearing, which wasn't his plan, but he said that he's now really grateful as it motivated him to work harder once at uni.

* Student Ambassador01 2: But even if you work very hard and don't get in, don't worry. There's plenty of good places to study and hopefully your other choices are places that interested you too

15. Matthew Spurrier: Is there a website for most student unions, with the offered clubs listed, or another way to find out beforehand?

* Student Ambassador01 2: Hi Matthew, yes, most university websites should have information about student life and existing clubs and societies. Often if you gather enough interest you can also start your own! I remember browsing through lists before I applied and trying to see which seemed interesting.

16. Beth Hughes: What is the best way to approach writing your personal statement for UCAS?

* Student Ambassador01 2: There's plenty of useful resources online. The best thing to do is to allow yourself plenty of time to look through those and build your personal statement. You want to show that you're passionate about the subject and are keen to learn more, and that you've got what it takes. Definitely get other people to proofread it for you, and if you've got friends or relatives who've gone through uni ask them for tips!

17. * Student Ambassador01 2: Everyone, we've got several more minutes before this Q&A session is, so feel free to ask us any more questions on UCAS/Open days before then. We're also happy to talk about student life and other questions.

18. Beth Hughes: when will you know if you've got your offers?

* Student Ambassador01: Hi Beth, with regards to the 5 universities you pick, you can log into UCAS and see whether they have made you a conditional offer or rejected you. I think my first offer came in about October last year but this all depends on how quickly you send off your personal statement or how the University process applications. On results day, you can log into UCAS Track and see if your university have made a decision. If no decision has been made when you log on, you will have a better idea when you collect your grades from school/college (i.e. if you have the grades or higher grades than what your firm offered you then you have a place at that university). Sometimes it takes a while for the university to update track as they have a lot of applications to update so just hold tight! Personally, I checked track first and saw Exeter had confirmed my place before I even knew what grades I had achieved.

19. Matthew Spurrier: While I know this is slightly off topic, is it difficult to adapt to lectures and independent study instead of lessons like at a level?

* Student Ambassador01 2: It's actually alright. I've noticed that in 1st year of uni there are a lot more lectures, like you would have lessons at school, and as you get to 3rd year it gets more and more independent. So don't worry, you're not suddenly thrown in the deep end. Many universities make the 1st year not count towards your final degree grade, which tends to be a time for adjustment. It also depends on the class sizes. For example, my course has about 30-40 students a year, whereas some others may have up to 200. It makes it more personal to ask questions etc.

20. Matthew Spurrier: Moreover, where are graduates from the physics course at the University of Exeter likely to find work? (e.g. research funded by the university / local companies / industry)

* Student Ambassador01: HI Matthew, it really depends what type of work you are looking to go into. The University of Exeter has a great physics department with a lot of world class research going on. What I'm trying to get at is that if you leave Exeter with a good degree in physics you could apply to a range of jobs and would look like a great candidate!

21. Matthew Spurrier: Does class size actually have a major effect when so much of the information you need to know for the exam comes from independent study, which is somewhat daunting to me in itself (e.g. how would one know whether what they're reading is actually relevant without spending literally all of their time reading?)

* Student Ambassador01 2: I can't guarantee for every course, but the way it works for me is this: lecturers give their lectures and the presentation slides are available online. There's also reading lists for recommended further reading, but this only adds to your knowledge, it's not exam material. So the way it works for me is that I attend lectures during term, and only self-study during revision time or to complete coursework. That's definitely a good question to ask at Open Days though.

22. * Student Ambassador01: Thanks very much for taking part in today's online forum; I hope you've found it useful! Details of the next session can be found at www.exeter.ac.uk/exeterscholars/currentparticipants/liveonlinegaforums/. If you have questions in the meantime, please contact the Exeter Scholars team, who will be happy to help: www.exeter.ac.uk/exeterscholars/contact/currentparticipants/.