

## **Summer schools and taster days**

Most universities run what are often called 'summer schools' and 'taster days'. Their object is to show school and college students what they do, offer a picture of undergraduate life, and (most importantly) communicate what taking a first degree in a particular subject involves. Some university events are of a general, introductory nature and for pupils in Years 7 – 11; however those discussed in this article are, by contrast, aimed at students in Years 12 or 13 who are committed to applying for higher education, and whose plans may already be quite advanced.

### **Summer schools**

Summer schools can extend to a week but most last two or three days, usually taking place in late June or July to interfere as little as possible with the studies of those attending. Being residential, they include at least one overnight stay, usually in a university hall of residence. This offers the chance to see the campus, as well as undertake the arranged departmental programme. Encounters with current undergraduates, and postgraduates involved in research, are intended to raise interest and enthusiasm while keeping a realistic perspective.

### **What's on offer?**

The nature of the academic subject strongly influences how the summer school is run. For instance a subject such as maths, which can be abstract, may have lectures as the main vehicle of delivery whereas biological sciences may encourage participants to design and run their own experiments and present their findings.

Some universities focus on science and technology but at others a much longer 'menu' is available. One institution advertises summer schools in American studies, biosciences, chemistry, criminology, drama, economics, engineering, English, environmental studies, fashion, business, geography, history, nursing, philosophy, and psychology.

Whatever the subject though, using state-of-the-art facilities and gaining knowledge and confidence via the praise and constructive comments of university staff will make for a memorable experience.

Summer school participants receive valuable information and advice on progression routes following graduation and are shown how to maximise the impact of their stay on their UCAS application form. But while it can give your son or daughter additional experiences to add to

their personal statement, don't worry if your son or daughter doesn't attend one - universities recognise that not everyone who wants to attend a summer school is able to.

### **Who is eligible and what are the costs?**

On average, summer schools cost about £50 a day, excluding travel. All meals are provided, and on at least one evening there is usually a social event.

Some programmes are offered free of charge thanks to sponsorship from local or national companies with preference given to those who are financially or otherwise disadvantaged. Many institutions award a few bursaries and/or reimburse travel costs in an effort to ensure as few applicants as possible are denied a place solely for such reasons. It's a good idea to check out the university websites to see what might be available – for example one institution offers a bursary of no less than £1,000 a year to any student completing its summer school and then embarking on an undergraduate course there.

Places are typically allocated on a first-come, first-served basis, and universities often look for applicants who are studying at least one A-level within a cluster; for some summer schools, two or more relevant subjects are expected.

Eligibility for a summer school is sometimes restricted to students whose schools are currently in partnership with that university, or who live within a given geographical area, like a county or region.

### **Taster days**

Non-residential 'taster' events usually only last a day but suit large numbers of would-be applicants and their resulting popularity means most are ticketed. Typically, they start at about 10.00 in the morning, finishing at about 4.00 that afternoon. The 'package' usually includes lectures by subject specialists, practical workshops, and a campus tour. Depending on dates, it may be possible to attend one or more 'taster' days before commencing a summer school.

Initially, your son or daughter should enquire whether their school or college is arranging visits to particular universities - the head of sixth form or careers leader will know. They are then free to apply for any others they wish.

These summer events mean there's time to explore the institutions, courses, and career possibilities well ahead - preparation that is essential to getting the most out of them.