# Student Support Service briefing:

# Choosing a university during COVID-19

Choosing which university to attend can be a really big decision - with lots of factors to consider. With COVID-19 putting a halt on events such as information days and creating additional uncertainty; accessing information to make the right decision has been made more difficult.

As the decision deadline creeps closer the pressure is increasing. We have put together this handy guidance, including a list of questions, to help you find what you need during COVID-19.

## Look at the university website and social media

Every university has its own website with information about their courses, social activities and accommodation options.

There will also be information on the support available to you as a student with a disability as well as the accessibility of facilities such as the library. The website and information on it will be invaluable for giving you a feel for the university and whether it delivers everything you want without a physical visit.

### Top Tip:

Take note of contact details for Disability Support and Student Engagement teams - these will be key people you should communicate with throughout your course. We recommend you start now by introducing yourself and asking for a video or phone call to discuss your needs and the support available to you.

This is especially important with the disruption caused by COVID-19 – don’t be afraid to ask lots of questions, they will help you prepare and feel more comfortable about starting your course.

Universities are also likely to have Social Media profiles which they use to communicate with students. It will be important to keep checking both the social media sites and websites regularly for updates and notices, especially at this time.

## Open day alternatives

Open days are an extremely valuable part of the process, giving you a feel for life on campus and which university suits you best.

Due to COVID-19, all upcoming events such as these will be cancelled. However, universities realise how important these opportunities are and have provided alternatives.

### Virtual tours

Virtual tours and Online Open days can give you a chance to gauge the layout and scale of universities as well as potentially ask questions to the member of staff of student running the tour. UCAS have a full list of the universities that have virtual tours on offer (Link provided at the end of this document).

### Other suggestions

Whilst a virtual tour is a good way to get a perspective of the university, it may not be accessible or cover all of the things you need to know before deciding. We suggest;

* Contacting the university for a more tailored overview. Arrange a specific time to talk to ask questions about the site and course over the phone.
* Searching social media for student groups linked to the university to find out their opinions and views.
* Search YouTube and other platforms for videos, these can give a snapshot of life on campus and whether it is the right fit for you.
* Reaching out to current students or asking if the university could suggest someone (perhaps on your course, or who also has a visual impairment) to talk you through their experience. This can help to build awareness of the anticipated challenges and enable you to get advice from someone with first-hand experience.
* UniBuddy works with UCAS to offer a chat service to contact current students or ‘buddies’ attending a broad range of universities and courses. This may be a useful tool for getting to know the university and course material better from a student’s perspective (Link provided at the end of this document).

Additionally, we can signpost you to services and websites you may find useful that are more specific to students with visual impairments.

## Think about your needs

Speaking to support staff in advance allows you the chance to ask questions about the types of support you'll be able to access around campus and your best options for accommodation.

Prior to your call, plan out what you want to cover. Think about how you want to describe your eye condition and sight level – outlining what you can and can’t see will help people understand what you need and why.

**“The most important thing is that you can communicate your disability…being visually impaired can mean very different things… universities are not specialised on your specific disability; you have to explain to them what you can and cannot do.” Sofia**

Think about how they can help you with general studying, course material accessibility or adaptions, and well-being support. Speaking with these teams will give you a strong sense of the approach taken by the university and the style of support you can expect there throughout the course. Just be mindful that staff may be really busy and slower to respond due to the disruption caused by COVID-19 – be patient but start the conversation nice and early.

# **Contact us**

Get in touch by emailing [studentsupport@pocklington-trust.org.uk](mailto:studentsupport@pocklington-trust.org.uk) or calling 020 375 78040.

## External links

List of universities that offer a virtual tour: <https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/what-and-where-study/open-days-and-events/virtual-tours>

UniBuddy UCAS service: <https://www.ucas.com/chat-to-students>

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