

Manchester Live: Choosing what and where to study (July 2020)

0:00

OK, hello everyone, I'm gonna get the webinar started now. So hello and welcome to this live webinar Choosing What and Where To Study. My name is Maddie, I'm a recent graduate of the University of Manchester. I did a degree in history and French. I graduated about a year ago now, and ever since then, I've worked there as a student recruitment intern. The biggest part of my role normally involves delivering a full range of talks to students all about higher education, the application process, the student experience. And this talk is going to focus mainly on some of the main decisions prospective students are going to have to make in the lead up to applying to University.

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And before I start, I just want to check that we aren't having any technical issues at all. So, to the right of your screen, you'll see a toolbar. And there'll be an option there, a little button that looks like a hand. If you can hear me properly, if you're not having any issues with the sound at all, could you please click the hand icon, now, just so that I can see?

1:00

Oh, that's great. Most, pretty much all of you raised your hand, that's brilliant. And if you do have any technical issues at all throughout the webinar today, do let us know via the chat, via the questions function. I've got my colleagues Huw and Nicole with me today, and they're on hand throughout the whole presentation to take your questions as we go along. So, don't wait till the end to ask your questions.

1:22

Send them over as they come to you and my colleagues will be able to answer those for you, when you send them over. OK, so I'll get things started now.

1:36

OK, so I'll just give a brief overview of the topics that we're going to cover today. First, I'm going to run through some of the main reasons why people decide to go to university. What the benefits are, what you can hope to get out of that experience.

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Then, I'll talk about deciding exactly what you'd like to study, and at which university or higher education institution, and I'll give you some advice as you approach that decision making process. And then just to tie everything up at the end, I'll give you some ideas of actions that you can start to take immediately to help you approach these decisions over the coming weeks and months.

2:15

OK, so first of all, I'm going to discuss some of the main reasons why people choose to study at University. And obviously, there are hundreds of reasons, and each person will usually have their own unique motivations, but we tend to find that most people share a handful of ideas or motivators about what they hope to gain from studying at a higher level.

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So here at Manchester, we tend to narrow down this question to three main reasons. So first of all, many people go to university to enhance their career prospects, since very often, a degree will open the door to a huge number of job opportunities and careers.

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Secondly, lots of people go to university to pursue a subject that they really love, and so that they can study it in a much greater detail than they may have ever been able to do so before.

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Finally, many people are drawn to university, because they want to experience student life. So this is things like gaining independence, maybe moving out of their home, meeting people from all over the world, joining societies and everything else that you might come to experience as a university student. Sometimes, people are influenced by a mix of all three of these reasons. And often many more, like I said, but these tend to be the biggest motivators. And they are all really valid reasons to pursue a university course.

3:32

This slide shows a few more academic and social benefits you can hope to gain from university study. For example, research has shown that those who have a degree integrate better into their communities, and they have a greater capacity to move up the social ladder. They're also more likely to vote, volunteer, and engage in public debates – so they are more active members of their community. Graduates are also less likely to experience long-term unemployment, and they're also more likely to eat healthily and stay active. So a few studies have found these benefits in going to university.

4:06

And you can see here, how studies have also shown that graduates have greater earning potential. So that is, those with a degree tend to earn a higher salary over the course of their lifetime than those without. This isn't something that we like to dwell on, as earnings and salaries can be very subjective, and those who do not attend university might well end up with really good earnings as well. And money shouldn't ever be the sole motivation for studying a degree. But, generally speaking, graduates do tend to earn more than non-graduates, and you can see in these graphs that over a working lifetime, graduate salaries on average are about £10,000 higher than salaries for non-graduates. And post graduates, so those who get a master's degree or a PhD, tend to earn even more on top of that.

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So, while this shouldn't be your top priority, earning potential is definitely something you should keep in mind.

5:02

Ultimately, you can approach this decision by breaking it down to three main questions. So, first of all, why do you want to go to university? Not your friends or family, but you, this is your decision.

5:15

Secondly, what course would you like to study, and, again, this is down to you, and only you. Finally, where would you like to go to study and perhaps live? Maybe you want to stay close to home. Or maybe you have a dream destination in mind. Again, ultimately, it has to be your own independent decision.

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And we're going to explore some of these questions in more detail in the following slides.

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But for now, I just want to emphasize how important it is to research these factors. Research courses, research universities and locations. Research what kind of benefits you might expect to receive from undertaking university study. Research often, keep an open mind and review options really thoroughly as well. It'll be really beneficial in ensuring that you make the right decision for yourself. But it also just looks really good since universities can tell who's done that research, and that will impress them because it shows you are fully aware of what you're

applying for, that it's an independent decision, and it also shows passion, not just for the subject, but also for your own education.

6:17

OK, so now I'm going to move on, and I'm going to talk about what you should be taking into account when deciding on a university course.

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Now, there are lots of different factors which can affect your decision, First of all, whether or not you want a particular career. For some jobs such as medicine, dentistry, or architecture, you'll need a specific degree to ensure you are qualified.

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However, for everyone else, your degree really should be something that you enjoy, and you're more likely to succeed and be more driven in a subject that you're genuinely passionate about. This could be a subject you have already studied at school or college. Or it could be related to something that you do outside of school, outside of your studies, such as drama, writing or anything like that. Or it could be something completely new that you have a passion for such as criminology, anthropology, business, economics, which you might not have had the chance to do at school before.

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Whatever subject you're interested in, it's crucial that you look at the entry requirements for your course.

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Some courses require certain A Levels. Some even require certain GCSEs. And it's important to remember that you only have five choices on your UCAS form. So, you need to avoid wasting any of your choices with a course that you aren't qualified for.

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Now, as I mentioned in the previous slide, some careers require certain degree courses. However, that doesn't mean that your course choice will always impact your future plans. In fact, studies have found that 66% of graduate jobs ask for a degree in any discipline, any subject at all, since they're mainly interested in the transferable skills you gained at university. So these are things like research, public speaking, communication, teamwork, time management. Something that you could potentially get from any degree background.

8:06

And it's also worth mentioning that sometimes, even if your undergraduate degree doesn't necessarily lead to a single specific job, you're usually able to return to university to study for a postgraduate degree, which will help to retrain or to requalify, and then you can enter a particular profession. For example, many graduates go and study a law conversion course, or PGCE teaching qualification. And so, you'll always have loads of career options available, no matter what you do choose to study.

8:38

So when you do comes to choose a course, what exactly do you need to consider? We've got a few things highlighted on this slide here. I'll just run through them. So first of all, course structure. So that's literally how you are taught. It could be through lectures and seminars. It could be workshops, lab sessions, even work placements. Then you've got things like assessment methods. So do you sit exams? Do you complete coursework? Is there a mix of both? And then, how much contact time do you have? So, that's how many hours each week you spend actually learning in a classroom environment as opposed to independent study or free time. These factors vary massively according to which course you pick. Humanities

subjects, for example, on average, have lower contact hours than STEM subjects. And, therefore, involve a larger amount of independent study, which may suit some people, but not others.

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You basically need to make sure that the course structure really plays to your strengths. So things like assessment, if you're terrible at exams, maybe avoid a university course which is 100% exam based, that kind of thing.

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There are other factors, too, like whether you're able to study abroad. Here at Manchester, you're able to spend a period working or studying abroad on most of our degree programs, whether it be for a year or semester.

9:48

However, not all courses allow it. So it's worth researching your options if this is a priority for you. If you definitely want a period abroad, it's best to go for a language course because that guarantees a compulsory year abroad, or you could go for a degree course, which has something like 'with international study' in the title of the course. It could be 'business with international study', and then you know you're gonna get a guaranteed period of time in another country.

10:15

It's also worth checking out the kind of modules you can do, this is really important. By modules, we basically mean classes. And at Manchester, for example, you do about six modules each academic year, just on average. For some courses, all of your modules, all of your classes, they're mandatory.

10:33

But in over degree courses, you have lots of optional modules, which means you have a lot more flexibility. The modules on offer also differ massively between universities and even year on year. So a chemistry degree at one university will be completely different to a chemistry degree at another, purely because they offer completely different modules or different topics and classes each year. And I'll give you a little bit of an illustration of this in a couple of slides. But again, it's best that you just have a good research. Find a degree course which offers modules that you find interesting and useful, and again, that you think plays to your strengths that you think you could succeed well in.

11:08

You should also check whether you're able to take a module and a language, or if you could do it as a minor subject, or as a dual honours subject, like I did. So that's where you do a different degree course, alongside another one. You split your time 50% - 50% between the two degree courses. But some people might just study one language module per year, something like that. No matter what, it's really good for employability, and to add a little bit of variety to your course.

11:34

So if that's something that's important to you, if that's something you'd really like the opportunity to do, make sure that you research language opportunities at the different universities that you're researching. For some people, it will also be important to ensure the course you're applying for has professional accreditation. So by this, we mean when a course is officially recognized by a government or professional body. So, for example, with architecture, you've got the Royal Institute of British Architecture. A lot of psychology courses are professionally accredited as well.

12:06

It means that a course is officially recognized by a government or professional body, and that will allow graduates to practice within that professional body.

12:14

It means you're fully qualified when you finish your degree.

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So, this is perhaps important for people who would like to study psychology, architecture, maybe things like engineering, in the future, and can be crucial to your future employability as well. For some courses, you might be required to sit an entrance exam. Medicine and dentistry, for example. They usually have to sit some sort of exam, while for other courses it differs from uni to uni.

12:39

Some courses like art, architecture, or creative writing might require a portfolio, while courses like music and drama might even have an entrance performance exam of some kind. Again, make sure that you research ahead of your application just so that you are fully prepared for anything like that. Because it can be quite daunting.

12:57

You should also consider whether you need to have completed some kind of work experience before you apply for a course. This, again, is really common with medicine, dentistry and health care courses. It's also worth finding out whether you might be able to work as part of your degree. If you have a year in industry built in to your course, like many engineering students do. Or, can you pursue an internship maybe, during the summer or in your third year? These can be really crucial to your future employability. Or you might just be really keen to get as much experience as you can as a student. So, if that's important to you, again, do your research, and make sure that you ultimately pick a course that provides those career opportunities.

13:37

And you should consider employability. What is the employability rate for graduates of the University you're considering applying to?

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But also, what kind of jobs do graduates of your course tend to end up in, and does that match your goals? Because it's all well and good looking at the employability stats for the university at large.

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But it's really, really crucial to have a look at the sort of career routes and jobs that a lot of the graduates of your specific course end up in in the future.

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And that can show you if that course is going to open up the doors that you really want opening.

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Finally, you should consider academic reputation. Again, not necessarily of the university at large, but of the course that you're applying for, the course itself. Many people put a lot of emphasis on University rankings, naturally, I think it's inevitable. But it's definitely more worthwhile to see where the course ranks in comparison to the same course at other institutions. You could be at a really high ranking university but the course isn't really suited to you, or you don't get all the opportunities that you'd like. Meanwhile, the same course at a

lower ranking university could be world-class and really perfect for you. And that's ultimately what matters most. So do make sure you take academic rankings into account of the course itself.

14:53

OK, so just to emphasize, even though many courses at different universities will have the same name, they won't necessarily be similar courses, as they may well offer very different modules, placements or study abroad opportunities, like I said.

15:08

So just as an illustration, these are just some of the modules on offer for a first year student on a history course at the University of Manchester. And I saw this in my first year. So this is quite familiar to me. As you can see, there is only one mandatory module at the top of the list: history in practice, and the rest are optional. Entirely optional. Each module is worth 20 credits. And if you have roughly 120 credits to fulfil each year, that means that students can pick any five modules from this list. And it's a really long list as well, this is just a small selection of modules on offer. They're able to pick what they like, they have loads of flexibility, and they're able to tailor the course to their interests and strengths.

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That means, for example, if you love modern history, you can take lots of modern history modules, and you can avoid classical history or medieval history, like I tended to do. You can really tailor it to you.

16:00

At a different university, though, the history course might not offer so much flexibility, and there will most likely be entirely different modules available.

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So, as ever, it's really important to do your research, to ensure the course you ultimately pick offers your ideal modules, offers you the flexibility that you'd like, and assessment and learning styles as well. So if you go onto the course profile pages on the website, and if you go into the course details, you'll see the list of modules, just like this on the screen. And you can see the all the modules are actually a hyperlink, so you can click on those. And it'll give you a full rundown of what the syllabus involves, but also how it's taught and assessed. So definitely have a look at how each module is assessed and taught, and check that that plays to your strengths. And also check whether these courses and these modules offer the features that you'd like, such as work placements, additional language opportunities, anything like that. So there's lots of research, but it really is worthwhile.

16:57

OK, so I'm going to move on a bit now, and I'm going to talk about what you should consider when choosing where you'd like to study. And we'll look at some factors that you may want to bear in mind when choosing a university.

17:09

So again, ultimately, it's your decision. Try your best not to feel pressured by family or friends. Do your research, and maybe make a list of your own priorities to make the whole process easier.

17:21

For me, for example, factors such as location, distance from my hometown, and cost of living were all really crucial. For others, though, it might be the academic ranking of the course, or wanting to be able to stay at home. It really does differ from person to person.

17:41

Right, so, bearing in mind that there are around 370 higher education institutions in the UK, it's important that you take a wide range of things into account when making your decision. So, first of all, does the university actually do your course? This might sound a bit silly, but not all universities do all courses. So make sure you check that. Next, location. Do you want to be in a city, do you want to be in a town, do you want to be by the sea, or somewhere more rural? And would you prefer a campus style university or somewhere spread out across the town or city?

18:13

Do you want to go really far from home? Do you want to stay close to home? And is the cost of living manageable? It goes without saying that London has a much higher cost of living than elsewhere in the country, but your loan from student finance will usually be a little higher if you're studying there.

18:28

Then you need to consider things like student life. So what kind of events to the students' union put on? Do they have societies that you're interested in? Can you practice sports that you love? Can you meet like-minded people easily? Does it cater to your interests and hobbies, basically. The best way to find this out is to talk to current students. And you can chat to students on a load of university websites. You can visit forums, like the student room, and I'm gonna give you a link at the end of the presentation, as well, where you can go on our website and chat to our students. I'll show you that at the end.

18:58

Next, things like transport. So, this is important. Are there good transport networks where you are moving to? That can be really crucial. And can you get student discount or student passes on the various forms of transport?

19:11

And then, have a think about what the career service is like at each university. It might not seem like a priority right now, especially if you're not sure what career you'd like to go into in the future. But it can be really important. For example, do they make it easy to find part-time work, work placements, or volunteering opportunities alongside your studies? They're there for you from the first day at university. So, they're not just there for your future career. They're also there to support you alongside your studies. Do they offer careers advice? Do they check your CV and job applications? Can you access the service even after you graduate?

19:44

Like I say, it might not seem like a priority now, but it's definitely worth bearing in mind.

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Next, have a scan for scholarships and bursaries you might be eligible for. These could be income assessed, or there could be awarded according to academic merit. And this can definitely make a University much more tempting.

20:01

And be sure to look at the pastoral care available at each university. Again, this might not seem like a priority right now, but it might become absolutely crucial to your higher education experience. Moving away from home, studying at degree level - it can be really exciting, but it can be stressful at times as well. So having a solid support network - everything from personal tutors to a counselling service, or even a timetable of well-being

activities throughout the academic year - that can be really important, and it can really enrich your experience.

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Finally, it is worth looking at academic reputation. Again, not of the University, but of the course itself. And, again, like I said before, the most crucial part of this whole decision making process is recognizing what is important to you personally. This is your university experience and your life. So you need to make sure that you're prioritizing the factors that are essential to you and to choose wisely ultimately. Research as ever is really, really key.

21:02

OK, so I'm just going to tie things up now by talking about your next steps. So after this presentation today, what can you be going on and doing to sort of, kick-start the research and application process?

21:17

So, first of all, you need to find out as much information as you can. And these are some really good resources that you can start looking at right away. So, you might already have heard of the UCAS website. It's the same website that students use to actually apply to universities in the UK. It's where you receive offers and confirm your place at those universities.

21:37

However, the UCAS website is also a really good place to search for courses and universities in the UK. So, even if you don't have a clear idea of everything that you want to do, you can just search for a location, and it will show you all the universities in that area and their courses. Or if you have an idea of a course, but not a university, you can search the course and it will give you a list of every university in the country which offers it, with links to redirect you to the University website.

22:03

It's really handy, and since UCAS is actually a charity, it's also completely impartial. Unlike University websites, for example, who are actually quite keen on encouraging you to apply to them specifically. They aren't necessarily biased, but UCAS is a really good way of sort of having an unbiased platform where you can compare courses across different universities. And you have other really handy websites as well such as Unistats, you've got whatuni.com, and the student room. You might use the student room already. It's used by students at basically all levels of education, and it's a really good chance to chat to people on forums about their own experiences.

22:41

You could reach out to current students at your dream university and ask them for advice and tips. Or you could ask for people's honest opinions about what's good or not so good about the university.

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And you also have the university's own websites, which are an invaluable way to find out about course structure and modules, entry requirements, study abroad opportunities, as well as wider factors like accommodation, the location of the university, societies and events.

23:12

Next, you have visits, open days and higher education fairs. Naturally, since all our schools and universities are closed as part of the lockdown, that isn't actually possible at this moment in time. We can't really predict what's going to happen in the autumn on next summer. But you should definitely have a browse across university websites because the vast majority of

them have been working really hard over the last few weeks to provide you with some really good virtual content. I'm going to link you to some at the end of this presentation as well for Manchester. But definitely have a look at different websites. Because we have lots of virtual alternatives, and lots of ways of connecting to our students and staff online, as a nice replacement.

23:52

And, finally, university literature. So, prospectuses, pocket guides, leaflets. They're all usually available via university websites as well, and that can be a really good way of finding detailed information on a particular course or a certain aspect of university life. So definitely try and find some of those as well.

24:14

So just some things to note, your next steps. So to narrow it down to four steps that you can be cracking on with right now, just make sure that you research your options thoroughly, just research as much as you can. It's definitely worth it in the end.

24:27

Then make sure you speak to teachers as well because every single teacher has studied for a degree in the past. I think a lot of people forget about that. They'll all have their own experiences and advice that they'd be more than happy to share with you, and they will remember personally how stressful this decision can be. So do reach out to them.

24:44

And finally, as I said earlier, while you may not be able to physically visit universities currently, many universities are planning on really exciting virtual alternatives, where you'll still be able to get a glimpse of the campus and chat to current Students and subject tutors and advisors. So definitely seek those events out.

25:04

Now just as a tiny little bit of self-promo for Manchester now. If you do happen to be interested in Manchester University, obviously we are not open his normal for you to visit. But we are extending our webinar schedule throughout the summer now. We've got them scheduled all the way until autumn. So you will most likely have found the link for this webinar on a section of our website. You can see it there, manchester.ac.uk/manchesterlive, and have a look on there. Again, not only do we have uploads of all of our previous webinars for you to be having a look in your own time, but we also have a full list of upcoming webinars. We have roughly one a week over the next few weeks, focusing on everything from accommodation, student life, the UCAS application process, personal statements, Student Finance, everything. So have a look on the website, and sign up for future webinars, and have a look at our past content as well.

25:57

And finally, we also have just rolled out something called Unibuddy with the University of Manchester. So this is a really good way for you to go to our website and chat to current students about their university experience or their experience on their course. It's really, really good because you can go onto the website and you can filter the results. You can filter the students according to their degree course. If you really want to speak to someone who does maths or medicine, you can tailor it to maths students or medicine students. And then you can find someone who's doing your specific course and ask them very specific questions. And you can also tailor it according to the country that they've come from. So if you're from a foreign country, and you'd like to know what it's like to adjust to studying at a higher education institution in the UK. You can chat to international students who come to Manchester, and ask them anything you like.

26:51

It's a really nice way, a really nice informal way to chat to our current students. I'd really highly recommend it. Because it's a really nice way to connect with the University at such a weird time. And also, on Unibuddy, we have a full list of blogs, which are being constantly updated. They're written by current students as well, all about student life, all about adjusting to higher education, all about their experiences studying abroad, or studying their course, or meeting friends, things like that. So, that's a really good way to get a glimpse into university life as well.

27:32

So, I definitely recommend going on that section of a website, too. But that, I think, is everything for me. I'm gonna leave this screen up just so you have the chance to grab a photo or copy down the link. Thank you so much for listening, and thank you for sending in all of your questions. I'm going to keep the webinar live for a few more minutes, just to make sure that everybody's questions have been answered. But other than that, please take care of yourselves, and keep an eye out for all the upcoming webinars we have over the next few weeks on our website. Thank you all again, and have a really nice day.