

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

- **How do you get around between these places you need to go?**
- **Is it a rough part of town or one that you can't get to after 8pm without a taxi?**
- **How does the local population feel about students? Would they rather hug 'em or hang 'em? In other words, how are 'town/gown' relations?**

The answers to these and a press-gang of other questions depend on many factors. The following chapters take a scalpel to the lot of them, dissecting the corpse of confusion and extracting the marrow.

In particular, on a day-to-day level, a lot of your hassles or happiness as a student may depend on the way the university is laid out on a local level. So the next chapter **118** will look at some of the typical set-ups of universities – campuses, civic universities, multi-sites, colleges – and paint a picture of what choosing between them is likely to mean when it comes to the crunch.

LIVING AT HOME

After all that, perhaps the cheapest and easiest alternative is to stay put. Ideally, without paying your parents anything for your room, food, heating and so on. Even if your parents do want or need you to chip in with the rent, what parents are going to offer a worse deal than the open market? (Apart from anything else, it's bad business.)

Little things, like, perhaps, having home-cooked meals or being able to use the washing machine rather than visiting the university launderette, are not only cosier and more convenient, but they also save you time and money. However, students living with their parents aren't entitled to the same student grants and loans **178**.

Having said that, unless their parents are more understanding than a multilingual shrink, students who choose to stay at home may miss out on a big chunk of the student experience. Many students won't mind. Many will even be positively grateful. But if that's not your idea of student life, then staying home will be a false economy.

Apart from anything else, you may be limiting your choice of universities if they have to be within daily tripping distance of home. That's no problem if your local uni just happens to be ideal in every way, but if not, you should open up wider possibilities by considering moving out.

Many students who live at home do so not because they're still waiting to cut the umbilical cord, but because they've got other things tying them to one place – family, kids, work, houses with mortgages and so on. As a rule (with so many exceptions that it must by now be proved), mature students tend to study locally for precisely these kinds of reasons. But then for mature students it's rarely a case of staying with their parents anyway.



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LOCATION: A FINAL WORD

All this stuff about location, especially questions such as 'What's it like?' aren't just a matter of where. These things are closely linked to the whole question of atmosphere. Which is why that's the subject of the next chapter...

A FEW QUESTIONS

- **How far from home do you want to go?**
- **Would you like to (or would you consider) staying at home while you're a student?**
- **Are there any parts of the UK you'd especially like to go?**
- **Are there any parts of the UK you'd especially like to avoid?**
- **What parts of the country might you rule in or out because of the cost of living?**
- **For universities left on your shortlist, what's the local vicinity like?**
- **What are the local facilities and attractions?**
- **Would you rather live in a city or in the countryside?**
- **Would you like to live in a small town or a big city?**

MORE INFO

BOOKS

The Push Guide to Which University 2007/08, Alice Tarleton, Anthony Leyton & Ruth Bushi, ed. Johnny Rich (Hodder Arnold, 2006)
ISBN 0340 929588, £15.99.
E-mail: editor@push.co.uk

WEBSITES

www.push.co.uk
Push Online

For members, there's an interactive map which can be used to choose universities by blocking out or including regions.

www.scit.wlv.ac.uk/ukinfo

Handy map showing the location of UK universities and colleges.



CHAPTER EIGHT

ATMOSPHERE

118

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

There are lots of questions it's important to ask before applying to a university and many students ask most of them. **But top of the league of questions that remain unasked, despite being more important than a cricketer remembering to wear his box, is 'What's it like?'**

The problem is that it's a tough question to get straight answers to. Hardly anyone will encourage you to ask it. A university's atmosphere isn't an easily definable thing. You can't measure it. And to make matters worse, it's relative to other universities.

But even so, it's crucial. **A university with the wrong atmosphere for you is like damp socks – they may cushion you, but there's no comfort.**

That's why Push – ever ready to rise to a challenge – has done the impossible. This chapter is a guide to a university's atmosphere: the range of possibilities, the factors that affect it and what it may mean to you.

First off, the range...

WHAT SORT OF PLACE IS IT?

Every university has its own character, whether it intends to or not.

For example, Cambridge University is about the most intense educational experience you can have with your clothes on – when students aren't busy working, they're usually busy on the sports field, rowing on the river, producing plays or magazines, debating or politicking, praying in chapel or playing in bands, and so on. If all else fails, they can even seem busy just propping up the bar.

Of course, there are exceptions. Cambridge has students who wouldn't lift a finger unless someone put a car-jack under it. But there's a general tendency.

Conversely, Lampeter is so laid-back it's almost horizontal. If hippies had set up a university, this would be it. They don't necessarily do any less work than Cambridge types (well, maybe). It's just the general pace at which they do it. Like tortoises and hares, perhaps.

Other universities come in all different styles. Think of an adjective and there's probably a university you could apply it to:

119