

Dr Stringer's visit of The University of Birmingham

The place
A whistle-stop tour on foot of the campus (all 70+ acres of it) – including the tallest freestanding clock tower in the world and the largest University Sport Centre in the country.
A large amount of building work – noisy and disruptive now but some great new facilities are springing up behind all that cladding. The University is proud to claim massive investment in student facilities including a £65m Library.

The people
I met the Vice-Chancellor Sir David Eastwood, the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education), Professor Kathy Armour, and the Director of External Relations, Cathy Gilbert.
I also met undergraduates Anna (Final Year, English) and Benjy (Second Year, Psychology).

What the VC and his team said
The University is proud of its heritage as a pioneer for women's education.
It is NOT a major recruiter of independent students – the High School bucks the trend here.
It is keen to maintain and extend its international profile.
It often accepts a one grade drop for candidates with a grade A or above in EPQ.

What the students like
Anna was drawn to the course and the teachers. She said that the people teaching her really care about their subjects and they actually enjoy teaching undergraduates. (<i>This is not something that you can take for granted. Some academics prioritise their research and don't relish the teaching</i>).
She also liked the element of coursework because she does not thrive in an exam environment.
Benjy chose Birmingham, above all, for the campus – the size and the amount of green space plus the sports facilities. He has taken up basketball since joining the university and likes the combination of competition and playing for fun.

What the students found challenging
Both have low contact timetables (Anna has 6 hours per week in her Final Year, Benjy 11 hours per week in the Second Year but only 9 in the First Year). This means they have to be self-motivated to study independently.

What advice did the VC give to students contemplating studying at Birmingham?
Beware the trap of 'learning to the test'.
You have to be able to 'read very big books'.
Independent study is expected from the first day.
He recommended debating as a great extra-curricular activity at school to prepare for uni.

What advice did Anna and Benjy give?
Make full use of the Applicant Days.
Be prepared to have to manage your own time.

Dr s's verdict
A great choice if you are looking for a campus university but want a healthy slice of city life.
A solid Russell Group university with ambitious plans for its future.

BUT

Not for you if you are looking for a cosy collegial environment – it is a big, bustling uni on the edge of a big, busy city.
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Looking ahead
Watch out for a new Chemistry Building – coming soon.
Keep an eye on their expanding programme of Degree Apprenticeships – this is a uni that is planning to invest in this area.
There is also a GDST Alumnae Group there and is popular with High School Alumnae.



NORTHAMPTON
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