



## **Thomas Telford Alumni Students - An insight into University Life!**

**Name:** Megan

**A Levels / BTEC Courses studied at TTS:** Geography, Chemistry and Psychology

**What course and where are you currently studying?**

Physical Geography at University of Birmingham

**1. What is the best part of student life?**

In all honestly, I don't really enjoy student life and wish I had applied for degree apprenticeships instead. That said, living with new people from a range of backgrounds can be interesting, and university gives you the opportunity to try new things, such as different societies. I do enjoy the independence of university life, although it can sometimes feel isolating if you don't have the right flatmates.

**2. Are you happy with the course you have chosen, and what is the best part about it?**

I enjoy my course and the opportunity to research areas that interest me. Lots of my essays are flexible around my personal interests which give me opportunity to read around the areas I want to rather than what I've been told I have to. The field courses in Geography are also a great way to meet new people, for instance we went to Rotterdam last November.

**3. How much contact time do you have with course staff and lecturers?**

Very little, normally only around ten hours a week and I only have lectures, no seminars. Due to strikes this year I've also had around 6 weeks of teaching cancelled (out of roughly 20 weeks in total).

**4. How have you coped with self-managed learning? How have you found the change from classroom work to more independent learning, such as attending lectures, managing your own workload, taking notes from lectures and writing assignments?**

I haven't really struggled with that aspect of university since I've always been relatively independent and able to find information out on my own. I think the biggest shock for me was the lack of guidance. For example on our fieldtrip in Rotterdam our tutor never really explained what we were supposed to do, it's expected that you've done the reading beforehand and know how to use the equipment/plan a research project. Nothing at university is handed to you on a plate like at school.

Using Google Scholar and accessing papers through the university network can also be difficult at first but you quickly get used to it. I think as long as you're able to work hard and find out information independently you'll be fine.

**5. How much work do you have to do outside lectures? And are your lecturers there to give support. How well do you know your tutor?**

In first year you don't have that much work to do outside of your contact hours.

There's always reading lists you can work your way through but I find it's best to figure out what topics you might like to do for an exam and then specialising in them rather than reading everything. Compared to sixth form at TTS, university is relatively relaxed (at least on my course). Assignments get set weeks, sometimes months, in advance so if you balance your time well it's not stressful at all.

You can contact lecturers via email, and apparently meet them in person during their office hours, but with the number of strikes this academic year it's been difficult to ask any questions regarding coursework or contact them at all. My tutor is lovely, and we have weekly discussions on set reading. That said, he was involved in the strikes and lots of our meetings were cancelled, alongside formative assignments.

**6. Do you have time to get a part-time job, either on campus or nearby?**

I have plenty of free time but don't work in Birmingham since I kept my casual job as a lifeguard in Telford.

**7. Would you recommend joining as many extra curriculum activities as possible to get the most out of the student experience? What societies do you belong to?**

If I could restart first year I'd definitely join societies since if you don't have the best of flatmates it can be surprisingly difficult to make friends. I'm a member of KINVIG (the Geography society) as well as BEAT (a charity society) but I'm not that involved in either.

**8. What has been the hardest thing about embracing university life?**

I've really struggled to push myself out of my comfort zone. I found myself missing home and my friends throughout all of first year and consequently travelling home frequently. You have to be willing to try new things and embrace change at university but unfortunately that's never been one of my strong points.

**9. What is living in Halls like? How safe do you feel?**

Halls in Birmingham are incredibly overpriced for what they are! My room is comfortable but very dated and tired. I share a flat with 3 other students, 2 of which are international and much older than me so we never really had anything in common. The complex is gated so feels safe but you often hear a lot of bad things about the area (Selly Oak).

**10. How often do you travel home? Has it been easy to get home when you have needed too?**

In semester one I didn't travel home that often but I found I was quite lonely in semester two so started going home pretty much every weekend, or spending my time at Aston university where I had friends from TTS instead.

**11. How do you manage money, and have you been able to budget well, or has money been tight?**

I haven't had any issues with money, but that's because my maintenance loan fully covers my rent and I still work part time. My parents also give me some money which I try to save since I feel bad!

**12. What if you don't get on with people, and you don't want to join a drinking culture? What other clubs and societies are there?**

Honestly there's hundreds of societies at UoB. There's even sober socials for those that don't drink. Many societies are focussed on their socials though and drinking is a very heavy part of the university life.

**13. Are there people you can talk to, who can help with stress and anxiety?**

I get constant emails about the university's wellbeing services but I've never personally looked into it. We also have student mentors and hall reps but I'm not entirely sure what they do. As far as I'm aware there are many different people you can contact.

**14. Is there anything else you wish you had known when researching or selecting Universities? Or any advice you want to pass on to current students?**

Don't be tempted to pick your firm choice based on lowered/unconditional offers. It's effectively bribery. I didn't get the grades for my firm choice and still got in! I think it's the same story for a lot of people. Also don't dismiss degree apprenticeships! I wish I had applied for at least some of them since I've found university life isn't really for me and I think I would prefer working.

**Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire. We appreciate your help!  
Best wishes for the future from all of us at Thomas Telford School.**