

27 January 2020

Dear Year 12 Students (and Parents for information)

As we begin the next UCAS season with the Higher Education Exhibition on the horizon in February, I would like to highlight the things you can and should be doing to strengthen an application for university or a higher or degree level apprenticeship.

We often remind you that what you do in class is on its own never enough to secure a place. Any degree course Admissions Officer is going to be looking for solid evidence of real passion for and commitment to the subject chosen and of a mind that will truly benefit from the demands of higher study. For Oxbridge, Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Science and many other courses and universities which still call students for interview, the Admissions Officer/Panel will expect an ability to articulate that interest and commitment, and to make connections from A levels studied, relevant activities and even from co/extra-curricular activities.

We regularly push the need for **reading beyond the specification**, so you should be asking your teachers for suggestions for books – that includes scientists just as much as those on the arts/humanities side. Why not read a biography of Fermat (Maths), Turing (Computing) or Linnaeus (Biology) or a study of a particular theory in Philosophy or Physics? Articles from **specialist journals** such as *The Economist* are essential reading and there is much that can be found online.

The **BBC News app** is an excellent starting point with its separate sections for technology, health, business, politics, science and the environment, the arts as well as world and UK news. These give a snapshot which should then lead you to further research. University interviews will frequently turn to issues that have been in the news in the preceding few weeks or months for students in any discipline. On the app as I write there are, for example, articles about:

- Can wearing masks stop the spread of viruses? – for prospective students of Medicine
- Could pigeon feathers change aircraft wing design? – for prospective students of Aerospace Engineering
- Can F1 really go carbon neutral by 2030? – for prospective students of Business/Environmental Science/Automotive Engineering
- Can we predict volcanic eruptions? – for prospective students of Geology/Geography/Mineralogy
- and many more.

However, simply reading is not enough; you must **think about what you have read**, think about what has inspired you within what you have read and be able to talk about the impact that it has made on you – perhaps leading you to research a particular aspect in more depth.

Relevant experience isn't just to be found in reading. Have you attended any **public lectures** in your chosen subject? Many of the national bodies hold **exhibitions** and public lecture programmes (London/Oxford) and some university departments offer the same thing. As a future scientist/engineer have you recently been to the Science Museum in London or Oxford – if not, why not?! There are a wealth of museums offering talks right on our doorstep for almost any discipline. For example, at the Museum of Natural History in Oxford <https://oumnh.ox.ac.uk> there are talks in February on Beetles, Patterns in Nature, The First Animals and weekly tours to learn about the architecture of the building. Most events and exhibitions are free. At Gresham College in

London <https://www.gresham.ac.uk> there are free lectures almost every evening – in just one week in February these include Einstein, 100 years of Council Housing, Europe's Wars of Religion and Unfinished Music. Lectures have helped students with career choices, challenged thinking and been useful for EPQs. For students of law – have you sat in on cases at Wycombe Magistrates Court, Aylesbury Crown Court, even the Old Bailey? Have you attended the lectures organised at school with outside speakers such as the recent talks on journalism and clinical psychology?

**Work experience/shadowing** in a relevant area is always useful and, in some cases, essential (for example for health/education/vocational careers). In every case it is important that you reflect on the experience, possibly jotting down a few thoughts which could be used in a personal statement.

**BBC 4** is particularly good for programmes which look at some aspect of history / science / culture / language and you will find interesting documentaries on all the main channels. For example, on BBC 4 this week there are documentaries about Natural World, The Windermere Children, Brutalist Architecture, The Gene Revolution, Britain and the Sea and many more. These are ideal for recording/being watched on iPlayer if time does not allow them to be watched on the night and for further thought and research to follow.

And finally, Oxford University has an excellent digital outreach portal aimed at engaging students aged 11 to 18 years with debates and ideas that go beyond what is covered in the classroom. As the 'Home of Big Questions', the portal, called Explore (<https://explore.org/>) tackles complex ideas across a wide range of subjects and draws on the latest research carried out at Oxford. The project aims to raise aspirations, promote broader thinking and stimulate intellectual curiosity.

These are just a few suggestions – you are in the lucky position of having easy access to London and Oxford with all the free lectures, museums, exhibitions, theatre, art galleries etc available. I hope you will push yourself to take advantage of everything that is on offer around you. All it needs is a willingness to bestir yourself for **your** future!

Good luck!

Miss Munday  
Assistant Head