

22 January 2019

Dear Year 12 Parents

As we begin the next UCAS season with the Higher Education & Careers Fair on the horizon in March, I would like to highlight to you the things your son can and should be doing to strengthen an application for university.

We often remind the boys that what they 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 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 your son should be asking his teachers for suggestions for books – that includes scientists 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 and there is much that can be found online.

The **BBC News app** is essential 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 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 today, for example, there are articles about:

- Spotlight on Sickle Cell Disease – for prospective students of Medicine
- The battle on the frontline of climate change in Mali – for prospective students of Environmental Science / Geography
- Why your new heart could be made in space one day – for prospective students of Product Design / Technology
- Designing the cities of the future – for prospective students of Architecture / Engineering / Business
- What exactly is Davos? – for prospective students of Business / Economics / Politics
- and many more.

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

Relevant experience isn't just to be found in reading. Has your son attended any **public lectures** in his 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 has he 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/events> there are lectures in early February on John Ruskin, Trees, Beetles and an exhibition

on the Bacterial World. At Gresham College in London <https://www.gresham.ac.uk/attend/> there are free lectures almost every evening – in just two weeks in February these include Music Made of Listening, Maths in the City: Future Cities, Computer Vision: Machines that See, Infections of the Lung and Heart, Christianity and the Natural World, Volcanoes and Society and more. For students of law – has he sat in on cases at Wycombe Magistrates court, Aylesbury Crown Court, even the Old Bailey? There are often lectures organised with outside speakers in departments at school or by the Careers Department. Has your son attended any of those and what were his thoughts thereafter?

**Work experience/shadowing** in a relevant area is always useful and, in some cases, essential (eg: health/education/vocational careers). In every case it is important to 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 boys will find interesting documentaries on all the main channels. For example, as I write this, on BBC 4 today there are documentaries about Jane Austen, Art of America, Pubs, Ponds and Power: The Story of the Village, The Incredible Human Journey (of mankind's ancestors), Living with Nomads, America's West Coast, The Plantagenets. 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/) (<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.

I hope your son will continue to take good advantage of everything that is around him. All it needs is a willingness to bestir himself for his future!

Kind regards,  
Hilary Munday  
Assistant Head