

The Inspire Programme celebrates its first birthday

St John's is delighted to be celebrating the first birthday of its innovative Inspire Programme. This dynamic outreach initiative is focused on non-selective state schools in our link regions of the London boroughs of Ealing and Harrow, and consists of a carefully structured programme for students from Years 9 to 13. Over these five years, pupils with promise are encouraged to raise their aspirations, to stretch themselves academically, to develop their interests and to grow in confidence, so that they can make well-founded applications to top universities such as Oxford.

Our first year has been incredibly busy, exciting and rewarding. We have met hundreds of pupils, in their schools and in Oxford, and shared with them, and with

their teachers, the joys of developing their knowledge, discovering what Oxford has to offer and aiming high for their future.

The programme began by concentrating on pupils in Years 11 and 12, the key years for making these vital decisions about their future. About 65 Year 11 pupils attended a series of Academic Taster Days in Oxford, dynamic, hands-on days full of tours, activities and talks on either STEM or Humanities subjects. On one such day, following a talk on 'Why museums collect and how we can learn from objects', pupils visited the Ashmolean Museum where they enjoyed an object-handling session. The chance to get up-close, to touch the past, to hold it in their hands, was a real revelation.

Two things I've learned today: how to ask questions and what to ask when studying sources, and don't assume anything when looking at a source.

Year 11 pupil, Arts and Humanities Visit Day

Inspire students attend an engineering taster session.



Year 12 has been at the heart of Inspire this year, with about 80 pupils from eight schools enrolled for a course of five Twilight sessions in their schools, led by our outreach staff and a team of committed academic experts. These have given talks on topics as diverse as:



'The future of food'



'The biometrics of insect flight'



'Conquest and Christianisation: Saxony and the Carolingian World, 772-888'



'Ruins and Romanticism in English literature'



'The wonders of the brain'



'Calculating cancer: What can maths and computer science tell us about medicine?'

These lively sessions concluded with guidance on study skills, and how to conduct and present research. It has been clear from the pupils' reactions that they have really enjoyed them, and have been excited to learn and think about topics they do not encounter at school.

I really enjoyed the lectures and seminars that I attended as it gave me more of an insight of how learning at Oxford would be like.

Year 12 pupil,
Twilight sessions



Students attend a session on geography (Future of Food).

The culmination of the programme for Year 12 was our Residential Summer School in August, when about 50 pupils came to live in St John's for four days, to see for themselves what life at Oxford is really like. It was a brilliant few days, as the pupils attended lectures, seminars and application workshops, toured the colleges and the city and listened as each one of them gave a presentation on a piece of original research they had done over previous weeks. To unwind, they also took to the river in punts and watched open-air theatre. A graduation ceremony at the end of the week, with parents present, was a delightful way to round off a truly inspiring and happy event.



Year 12 students go punting on the Cherwell. ▲

▼ The Residential Summer School concluded with a graduation ceremony.



**Thank you very much for creating this programme!
I enjoyed it very much!**

*Year 12 pupil,
Twilight sessions*

Students attend a workshop on how to conduct independent research and how to present their research as a poster.



Following the 2017-18 Year 12 programme, we were delighted that nine pupils have since submitted applications to the University of Oxford (including to St John's) to study subjects including PPE, history and mathematics. A number of these applicants live in areas of socio-economic disadvantage or attend schools which perform below the national average at A-level (or equivalent). These numbers also include pupils who qualify for free school meals, as well as young people who will be the first in their families to attend university. We are very much looking forward to building on this success in 2018-19 and encouraging even more applicants from lower income, minority ethnic and other underrepresented backgrounds.

Teachers

A vital part of providing opportunities for bright students to engage with Oxford has been to build relationships with their teachers, and to do all we can to help them to give their most able pupils the expert advice and guidance they need when applying to a top university. The Inspire Programme has included two sessions for teachers on making UCAS personal statements and references as effective as possible. The sessions,

delivered by Causeway Education, are based on research by leading academics from multiple Russell Group universities, and give teachers practical strategies to use in the classroom and with their colleagues, so that successive cohorts of students can benefit from their improved practice. The feedback from the teachers who attended was fantastic, and we have lots of plans to expand our work with them.

Participants, Teachers' Inspire Programme

Info on references and the structure of the personal statement – I'd never received any advice from my school on this!

It changed my perspective on personal statements and references. It was great to include the research this was based on, so teachers know how you know it works.

Really well delivered – very comprehensive and informative.

I found this super clear and useful.



Session on modern languages (Utopias in French Literature)

Looking forward

We have lots of plans to build on this rewarding first year of Inspire. Our Twilight sessions for Year 12 will include parallel sessions for teachers, too, on STEM and Humanities topics, with updates on cutting edge research in their subjects and more information on how best to support their academically gifted pupils in their future choices.

This sustained contact with teachers and their pupils will be supported by our new digital platform, Inspire Magazine, a dynamic online resource where prospective students and teachers can find subject articles, questions for further research, puzzles, competitions, videos and a host of super-curricular material. They can also directly contact our Access and Outreach team with any questions. Oxford academics are writing the fantastic content for this lively platform, which is being refreshed and

expanded all the time. Our first issue is on video games.

We are also looking forward to engaging with more pupils at a younger age, in Years 9 and 10. This year's series of aspiration-raising visits to Oxford went down so well with Year 10 pupils that we plan to do lots more of those, and to develop our support for them in schools, too.

Finally, we are reaching out to more schools. We are actively targeting more schools in Ealing and Harrow that have traditionally sent few pupils to Oxford, and we are starting to expand Inspire to our other link regions, Brighton & Hove, East Sussex and West Sussex. This will start with subject-specific study days in Oxford for Year 12, prior to the full launch of Inspire in those regions in future.

At St John's we are committed to admitting students who are passionate about their subject and prepared to work for it, regardless of their background, and supporting them to succeed here. We welcome diversity in our student body, and are proud that our students do indeed come from a richly diverse mix of backgrounds. Our

first year of Inspire has been, well, inspiring, and we are so looking forward to developing our relationships with more pupils, supporting them as they grow in confidence, and helping them to see that Oxford can be for them.

