

The Queen Mary newsletter  
for teachers and careers advisers

on



# Letter from the Editor

**This edition of OnQ includes the following articles which you are welcome to photocopy for your students; it is also available to download as a pdf at [www.qmul.ac.uk/undergraduate/schools/educationliaison/services/index.html#pubs](http://www.qmul.ac.uk/undergraduate/schools/educationliaison/services/index.html#pubs)**

- Making your final choices: what you should consider
- Work experience – how, what and when?
- Studying in London – the benefits of being a student in the capital
- The Subject Profile is English

I hope you will find them useful.

Roisin Hurst

Acting Head of Education Liaison



## College news

### Dr Thomas Asbridge's landmark series airs on BBC2

Dr Thomas Asbridge from the College's School of History has recently presented *The Crusades*, a three part series tracing the history of the 200 year war between Christians and Muslims for control of the Holy Land. Dr Asbridge is a reader in Medieval History at the College and is director of Queen Mary's new MA in Islam and the West. He filmed his series on location across the Middle East, North Africa and Europe, visiting numerous archives – from Jerusalem's Aqsa Mosque to an isolated island monastery in Venice – to reveal rarely seen manuscripts and artefacts. Catch up on BBCi Player at [www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/)

### Mathematical Magic goes Live!

Queen Mary academics, Professor Peter McOwan and Matt Parker, have been busy developing a series of magic tricks using mathematics. Both are amateur magicians

and they use their skills to encourage more students to study science and mathematics at university.

A new series of films with their tricks has been launched but you'll have to work out how to do the tricks yourself!

You can download the mathematical magic guide and view the films online here: [www.mathematicalmagic.com](http://www.mathematicalmagic.com)

### QM Entrepreneurs visit Downing Street for high-level technology talks

The founders of a Queen Mary, University of London spin-out company joined the country's leading technology experts at 10 Downing Street recently to discuss start-ups, sentiment detection and super computers. Dr Stuart Battersby and Dr Matthew Purver of the Interaction, Media and Communication Group at Queen Mary's School of Electronic Engineering and Computer Science, founded commercial venture Chatterbox Analytics in 2010 to build tools for analysing social media.

Chatterbox provides tools for automatically analysing patterns of conversation and was one of the first companies to trial Intel's supercomputer. This enabled them to experiment varying parameters and use millions of tweets to train the computer system to recognise the slang and niche language used on Twitter.

### Advising Students on Humanities and Social Sciences Degrees

The next Biannual Teachers' Event will take place on Friday 2nd March and will focus on the career benefits of humanities and social science degrees. Academics from Queen Mary's Schools of Law, English and Drama, Politics and International Relations and History will be participating. There will also be a graduate employment update from Queen Mary's Careers Service. For more information about the event and to book your place, please go to: [www.qmul.ac.uk/infosession](http://www.qmul.ac.uk/infosession)

# Why work experience counts

An outstanding academic record might not be enough to secure an offer from your favourite university; relevant experience may also be needed. Which courses? What sort of experience and how much? Read on....

You've got excellent predicted grades, a superb reference from your school and you're captain of your school's hockey team. You've ticked all the boxes to get into your dream course, right? Well you'd think so, but for some very competitive courses, work experience may also be essential.

## Which courses?

According to a report by the Education and Employers Workforce, requirements regarding work experience can vary considerably between universities and courses, so it's always worth checking directly with the universities themselves. However, the general rule is that for courses involving working with people in a medical, health, care or educational setting, admissions tutors will expect some reference to work experience in your UCAS personal statement. This includes courses like teaching, medicine, dentistry, nursing, physiotherapy and other paramedical courses. Securing work experience could mean the difference between you being interviewed or rejected. Fainting at the first sight of blood might be a sign that medicine is not for you; work experience will give you an opportunity to discover if becoming a doctor is realistic.

For other popular courses such as law and journalism, work experience will help your application stand out. Although Law admissions tutors are mainly after applicants with a strong academic record and interest in the subject, work experience will allow an applicant to show that they have a wider understanding of law, rather than just the more well-known fields.

## What counts as relevant experience?

Again, this will vary, depending on the course you are interested in. For medicine it can be difficult to get placements in hospitals or in GPs' practices due to high demand. However, there are other options you can consider such as hospices, care homes, occupational therapists, befriending services and homeless charities. Be prepared to think laterally. Volunteering at an old peoples' home over several months could prove a lot more useful than shadowing a GP for a couple of days. It will demonstrate your commitment, and you will be dealing with real people. You will also have the opportunity to develop empathy as well as your listening and communication skills.

For teaching, try and get experience of different age groups and types of school.

Observe a few different teachers to get an idea of the different skills they are using on a daily basis. Ask them about the amount of preparation they need to do before lessons. Do you have the potential to develop these skills?

For journalism, again experience is the key. Get involved in your school or college's magazine, try and contribute articles to your local newspaper, or better still, get some experience with them. Remember to keep a portfolio of any articles you have written and had published so that you can show these to any prospective interviewers.

Regardless of the subject you are interested in, don't forget to check out local universities as most will offer taster courses and summer schools in a variety of subjects. Look for local groups and societies for interesting talks, go on tours of universities and talk to current students. Why not set up your own club or society in your school or college?

## How to get work experience

Year 12 is the ideal time to start thinking about this. Don't leave it too late: hospitals (and other businesses) will have long waiting lists; make sure you contact them as early as possible. Be flexible about the times you can work – and remember to balance this against the demands of your studies.



Unless you are incredibly lucky, ping-pong off one email to one employer is not going to bag you the work experience you want. You need to cast your net wide and make sure you follow up emails with a phone call. Find out the name of the relevant person so that you can contact them directly.

Start with people you know who work in that area – can they recommend specific companies to work for? Ask your school or college careers service, and your teachers. Maybe they know of previous students who have found placements and can therefore recommend people to contact.

## Make the most of it

Having work experience doesn't automatically make you a desirable applicant; how you use it in your personal statement will be the key. If you don't say what you gained from it, then it won't add much to your application. What did you learn? What surprised you? Did you have any interesting conversations with professionals, customers, or patients? The aim is to show that you understand what a profession is about, what life is like for people who work in that field, that you know what skills are required and how to develop them. And remember to keep a diary, write down your observations plus any memorable experiences. When it comes to interviews, it's useful to be able to recall what you did so that you can talk in depth about it.



“fainting at the first sight of blood might be a sign that medicine is not for you”

# Get the London Experience

Being a student in one of the world's greatest cities is a fantastic opportunity. Find out how to make the most of what London has to offer

With only months to go to the 2012 Olympics, London has more of a buzz around it than ever. Being a student in London will offer numerous benefits, some of which you may not have thought of....

## Study opportunities

Let's start with the most obvious advantage—the numerous study opportunities. London is home to over 40 universities and higher education institutions, teaching over 350,000 students. So you are bound to find a university that's right for you! In addition to the huge University of London, (which incorporates separate institutions such as Queen Mary, King's College London, Goldsmiths, UCL etc.), there are also lots of other universities such as London Southbank, Middlesex, Westminster, Brunel etc., all situated in different parts of the city. However obscure your subject interest, you will find a London university that offers it.

Being in London will also provide enhanced study benefits, particularly if you need to access additional specialist research. If you are a student at the University of London, you can use Senate House Library which has over 300 million volumes. Students can also use The British Library which is the largest library in the world. Other London-based research facilities include the Public Records Office, the National Archives, House of Lords and the Old Bailey, not to mention all the museums, art galleries and exhibitions held in the capital. So you really have no excuse for not finding the relevant information you need for your essays.

## So much to do!

One of the best things about being a student in London is that you will never be bored. With over 150 theatres, 8,000 acres of park land, 37,000 listed buildings and 4 world heritage sites as well as thousands of bars, restaurants and shops, there is something to suit everyone. There are theatres, concert venues, cinemas, restaurants, comedy clubs, pubs and sports venues (Wembley, Wimbledon, and the Olympic Stadium to name a few).

Visiting one of London's landmarks such as the Houses of Parliament or St Paul's Cathedral is often the first thing students want to do. But don't forget to explore the more quirky student hangouts, such as Shoreditch and Brick Lane which are very close to the Queen Mary campus.



If shopping is everything to you, then you will be spoiled for choice; London houses two of the largest urban shopping complexes in Europe; Westfield Stratford City and Westfield Shepherds Bush. There are also countless markets to explore such as Camden, Portobello, Brick Lane, Borough and Notting Hill. If you like braving the elements, then why not try ice skating at the Natural History Museum, swimming in Hampstead Heath lido or rowing on the Serpentine.

## Work experience

Another great thing about being a student in London is that the employment opportunities are so varied; everything from media and PR to politics and finance. You will be in a great position to access internships as many of the companies offering these are based in London.

If you are looking for a part-time job, London is heaving with shops, cafes, art galleries, restaurants, bars and offices, many of which regularly recruit students for part-time work. There are also several temping agencies which sign up students on a regular basis to work at corporate events all over London. So there is no excuse for not developing those all important transferable skills which employers love.

## Travel in style

London is very easy to get around, with numerous transport options. The tube (or underground) will take you all over London and you will be entitled to a student discount. You can also catch the bus, overground train, the Docklands Light Railway, tram or even get a water taxi up the Thames! If you crave the countryside, (although London is one of the greenest capitals in Europe with hundreds of squares, parks and canal walks), it is easy to escape for a day. And remember there is a 30% discount railcard available for students for train travel in the UK.

## London on the cheap

Understandably, students often worry about the cost of living in London. Like any city it can be as cheap or expensive as you want it to be. As a student you will be entitled to discounts to cinemas, theatres, club nights with your trusty NUS extra card. Get to know your Students' Union as this will be your passport to cheap nights out. However there are plenty of free things to do in London. Many museums and galleries have free entry, and events like the Notting Hill Carnival and New Year's Day parade are fantastic free days out! There are free concerts, festivals and performances every day; 'Time Out' magazine lists the best events to attend. There is also the 'London For Free' website which has ideas of fun things to do in the city. If you are looking for something different, why not be part of the audience for a BBC show, or dust off those roller blades and go round one of London's parks.



“If you like braving the elements, then why not try ice skating at the Natural History Museum”

# Decision time: selecting two offers

## Making the right choices now can save you a lot of angst on results day

You may already be clutching a few university offers, and if not hopefully you will be soon. Some universities do take longer to make decisions than others, so don't panic if you're still waiting to hear. Once you've heard back from all of your universities, it's almost decision-making time. If your research was less-than-thorough when you submitted your UCAS application, then now is the time to give some serious thought to which university is going to be your home for the next three or more years. This is probably the biggest decision you've ever had to make, so choosing a university simply because it's where your best friend is going is not recommended!

### The basics - what happens now?

You have until early May to decide which two offers you'd like to accept: you can accept two – one firm and one insurance (which is usually a lower offer in case you don't get the grades required for your first choice). Remember that when you accept two offers, you're entering into a contract with both universities: if you get the grades for your first choice, you are obliged to go there; and if you don't you have to go to your second choice. Remember that UCAS will give you a deadline for your response, don't ignore this as you will lose all your offers if you don't reply in time.

### Will I make the grade?

The first thing to take into account when making your decisions is the grades that you're being asked to achieve. You may have applied to one or more universities asking for slightly higher grades than you're likely to get – perhaps you have an offer of ABB at A2, and

you're more likely to achieve BBC, for example. It might be tempting to accept this offer and rely on doing better than expected (or the university being generous on results day); however this can be a dangerous strategy. If, on results day, you don't meet the conditions of your offer, then you may not be accepted, which means that you'll have to take up your insurance place (if you have met their requirements). If you have your heart set on your firm choice then this will be disappointing. Taking up your insurance place can also mean that you may not be guaranteed accommodation, for example. So talk to your teachers and make sure your firm acceptance is a realistic option for you.

### Check the course

Once you have decided which universities are realistic options, take the time to have a detailed look at the course, department and other facilities. You will get invited to post-offer open days – these are aimed at students like you who have already applied, so the information will be more focused than it was at any open days you attended earlier in the cycle. This is the time to ask really detailed questions. Does the course match your interests (courses with the same name can differ greatly at different institutions)? Is it structured in a way that suits you? Find out about compulsory and optional modules, and talk to current students - what do they have to say about the course and department? You might also like to consider other opportunities available – will you get the opportunity to study abroad? Is it a sandwich course? And what about opportunities away from your course: perhaps you play a sport to a high level – will you be able to continue this?

### The right university

Whilst finding the right course is essential, you shouldn't neglect the university itself. Ensuring that you feel at home is one of the most important things; after all, if you're not happy then you're unlikely to want to study. Spend some time looking around the campus – can you imagine yourself there? Is there plenty to keep you occupied? Is it well-connected and easy to get to the nearest town or city (if that's what you want of course!)?

### Where will I live?

If you are moving away from home, then accommodation will also be a deciding factor. Is it guaranteed for first years; and if not how likely are you to get accommodation? Is it on campus or within easy reach of the lecture theatres? How many will you be sharing with, and what are the facilities like? And crucially, how much is it? Living in palatial surroundings is all very well but you do need to be able to afford a social life. Do be careful as you may be shown around the most expensive accommodation at the open day – you will probably fall in love with it... until you find out how much it is! So do find out what sort of accommodation is within your budget.

### Consult a map!

Believe it or not, you will want to come home occasionally (and mum's taxi may not be available every time you fancy a weekend at home) so think about how long it's going to take you to travel. Is heading home for a weekend going to be realistic? Is it well-connected by train? And equally important – if you're planning on commuting, how long is this going to take you door to door?



# English at Queen Mary

With an excellent reputation for both teaching and research, and a supportive and friendly atmosphere, English at Queen Mary has much to offer students

The English department at Queen Mary is one of the fastest-growing in the UK, with over 40 members of academic staff, and around 600 undergraduate students. Our size and range allow students an unparalleled amount of freedom to pursue their interests across the range of English studies – our innovative undergraduate courses span the early modern period to the ultra-contemporary, and introduce students to literature from across the world. Every member of staff teaches at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, so that all of our students benefit from creative, research-led teaching by people who are passionately engaged with their subject.

The quality of research in the department is internationally recognised. English research at Queen Mary was ranked 2nd in the UK in the last Government assessment (RAE 2008), ahead of Oxford, Cambridge, and UCL, with more than 70 percent of our academics working at a world-leading or internationally excellent level. We also do well in national university rankings: English at Queen Mary was ranked 9th in the UK by both *The Times* and *The Guardian* University Guides 2012.



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Our commitment to good teaching, meanwhile, is reflected in the most recent National Student Survey (NSS 2011), in which 91 percent of our students were satisfied overall with the quality of the course.

As a department, we are particularly concerned with the relationship between English studies and the wider world. This is an emphasis in much of our teaching – whether we are considering the relationship between literature, history, and political ideas in the module *Palestine/Israel, Israel/Palestine*, or thinking about the role of text in the construction of the eighteenth-century city in *Representing London*. In keeping with this emphasis, several members of staff are well-known for their work in the public arena. Professor Lisa Jardine CBE has served on many literary prize panels, including the Man Booker; others can be heard on the radio or TV, for example Professor Peggy Reynolds's *Adventures in Poetry* on Radio 4, or Professor Jerry Brotton's BBC documentary series *Maps: Power, Plunder and Possession*. Radio 3's 2011 list of ten "new generation thinkers" – up-and-coming public intellectuals "with a passion for communicating the excitement of modern scholarship" – included two members of our department, Shahidha Bari and Rachel Hewitt.

Our students benefit from an intellectual culture which is outward-looking and engaged with the world. Equally, our students themselves are energetic, creative, curious, and willing to challenge received opinion. Many students are active writers, bloggers, or performers; in just the past year, Queen Mary English students have also organised public lectures, founded a literary magazine, and set up a new Philosophy Society.

The department's diversity and energy are mirrored in the structure of our degree programmes, which place emphasis on student choice. The majority of students study single-honours English Literature; but we also have well-established joint programmes with History, Drama, French, German, Hispanic Studies, Russian, Linguistics, and Film Studies. All undergraduates study a set of innovative foundational courses in year 1, after which they are allowed free choice throughout their second and final years, from a range of over 60 course options. Some focus on a particular literary period or genre; some on a single author. Some allow students to explore the intersections between English and philosophy, history, politics, psychology, or art history; others focus on the literature of

London, or literature from Africa, South Asia, the Caribbean, or the United States. In addition, students are able to spend part or all of their second year at one of our partner universities in the US and Australia.

In general, teaching is delivered through lectures and small group seminars, but we try to vary things so that students learn by encountering different situations and points of view. Some courses feature guest lecturers (such as professional writers or publishers); others involve workshops or field trips. Many draw on the unrivalled cultural resources of London with visits to theatres, museums, or galleries. As students progress, they spend more time in smaller classes where they are expected to take more responsibility for their learning. In their final year, students produce a long, independently-researched dissertation on a topic of their choice.

Our department is distinguished by its friendly atmosphere: as befits our position in London's only campus-based university. Every student is allocated a personal adviser from among the academic staff, who can advise on both academic and personal matters. Year 1 students are also supported by a peer mentoring scheme led by second and final year students. We have a dedicated Student Support worker within the department, and we can also help students access the range of support services available within the College.

Students of English develop a range of skills which are in demand across a wide variety of career areas. Our graduates are able to: think flexibly, critically, and analytically; work independently – researching and synthesizing complex ideas; write clearly; communicate their ideas convincingly; work effectively in a team. For this reason, Queen Mary English graduates are successful in a wide range of careers, particularly those calling for excellent communication and analytical skills: journalism and the media, PR and marketing, advertising. Some also go into finance, and management training, law, and teaching are also popular destinations. Every year, many students also go on to postgraduate degrees.

For more information on our degree programmes, entry requirements and what it is like to study at Queen Mary, University of London, please visit [www.english.qmul.ac.uk](http://www.english.qmul.ac.uk)