

OXBRIDGE COLLABORATION WITH S7 COLLEGES



On Tuesday 4th October, Esher College hosted a National Network for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO) funded event for Year 13 students and teachers from the S7 Consortium of Sixth Form Colleges (Bexhill College, BHASVIC, The College of Richard Collyer, Coulsdon College, Esher College, Godalming College, Reigate College, Strode's College, Varndean College and Woking College). The event was delivered by Churchill College, Cambridge, and St Hilda's College, Oxford and was the third of a new three-event per year programme for the S7 Consortium that has been co-delivered by Churchill and St Hilda's across 2016.

One hundred students from Esher, Godalming, Reigate and Woking Colleges, plus six staff members, attended the event which focused on:

- fine-tuning applications and preparing for academic interviews, for students applying to Cambridge, Oxford, and like universities;
- a full discussion of a filmed interview with a Cambridge offer-holder, broken down into sections;
- a practice interview activity based on a controversial moral position on Brexit which was delivered as a prompt, with follow-up discussion on the merits (or not) of the argument.

Hannah Rolley (Recruitment and Schools Programme Officer - St Hilda's College, Oxford) said: "As part of the NNCO, we have been working with the S7 Colleges to support prospective Oxbridge applicants to understand the application process. Back in the summer we delivered a valuable personal statement workshop at Reigate College, and our October session at Esher College invited those students, who were then turning their thoughts to the interview, to come along to find out what they can expect and how they can prepare. We were able to show a video of an interview, provide material for a live academic discussion, similar to that which may form part of the interview, and there was also an important opportunity to ask individual questions. The students were fully engaged and gained vital information and guidance about the interview process from the evening."

Cambridge, Oxford, and similar universities look for straightforward qualities in their applicants: potential undergraduates who have chosen the right subject, who have strong exam records and demonstrate evidence of significant super-curricular reading and appropriate revision. Croydon, Surrey and Sussex are home to many such students, who will go on to achieve remarkable things, at A-Level and beyond.



"It's been fantastic to work with Hannah and colleagues from the S7 Colleges on this important project," said Jonathan Padley (Widening Participation Officer - Churchill College, Cambridge). "This is part of a wider endeavour at Cambridge and Oxford to work with potential Oxbridge (and like university) applicants in a sustained and meaningful way each year, by community. We're grateful to the NNCO for funding our collaboration and particularly appreciate the time that colleagues across S7 have invested to make sure that their students have access to our provision. Most of all, though, we'd like to thank the students who've taken the time to attend our sessions throughout the year – we hope they've enjoyed and benefited from them, and wish the students every success in their university applications, wherever they have chosen to apply."

The Oxbridge Coordinator at Esher College, Shaista Moghul, thanked Hannah and Jonathan for their time and their support. “The students were treated to a myth-busting workshop on preparing for academic interviews at University,” said Shaista. “Jonathan and Hannah were able to inform and reassure students about the interview process at each university and the students certainly appreciated this. They learned why the universities chose to interview students, what to expect in an interview format, and how best to prepare for interview. Most of all, they were reassured that the interview is not designed to intimidate, but is rather a small group teaching session. The two hour workshop included a video with live commentary from Jonathan as well as a very lively, interactive group activity, where students critiqued a prompt stimulus on Brexit. They also had the chance to question Jonathan and Hannah individually. Our students are definitely a lot better informed, and have a stronger sense of what to expect from an academic interview.”

Comments from student feedback were very positive, underlining the supportive message of the workshop. “I found it reassuring to find out that most people do well at interview and that interviewers don’t ask trick questions,” said one student, while another found that: “The video of the interview was a valuable indication of what to expect. It made the whole process clearer and less daunting.” Students found the event to be useful, and one commented: “I now have a better sense that I need to read widely, think critically and analytically about my subject, and make sure that I know my application!” demonstrating that they had been left with much to think about.



Whilst only four of the S7 Colleges attended this event there has also been buy-in and participation from others, such as Coulsdon and Strode’s Colleges, at previous meetings. There has been consistently good attendance throughout the year (ca 100 students in February, 150 in June, and 100 in October), which demonstrates the value that can be added by such inter-institutional collaborations. The programme will be available again in 2017 to all high flying academic students of the S7 Consortium, and it is hoped that more of the S7 Colleges will wish to participate and benefit in 2017.

The first session of 2017, for first year S7 students, will be at 16:30 in Godalming College on Wednesday 1st February. All relevant students are very welcome and more information will follow nearer the time.

October 2016