

## Harris Experience Autumn Newsletter - 2017



*Former Harris Sixth Formers now at top Russell Group universities discussing their university applications and experiences with Harris Experience Advanced (HEA) Year 12s at Harris South Norwood and Westminster.*

*Pictured above (L to R): Adina, Charlie, Theya, Ollie, Anthony, Reanna, Ashley, and Sarra.*



held two separate events at Harris South Norwood and Harris Westminster Sixth Form, respectively. Speaking to around three hundred students from twenty different academies across the two days, the alumni conveyed their journeys, insights and tips drawn from their own experiences preparing for and applying to highly competitive universities. The topics explored spanned the spectrum of need-to-know areas, including personal statement 'dos and don'ts'; university living and finances; advanced study skills; and busting myths and stereotypes on how to pick the right university. After an initial panel discussion the event then devolved into a number of small group discussions, where the alumni fielded further questions from our Year 12s. An atmosphere of inspiration and rapport accompanied each discussion and provided us all with a rousing crescendo to pull the curtain on another eventful autumn across the programme.



The Harris Experience Advanced enjoyed an inspiring and atmospheric finale to the term this December when we welcomed fifteen former students back to speak to current Year 12s about their experiences at a range of top UK universities – including Birmingham, Warwick, King's College, Queen Mary, Imperial College, and St George's. Given the large size and geographical spread of this year's Sixth Form cohort, we

Indeed, there has been a wealth of enriching activity taking place across the five year groups involved in the Harris Experience this term. Whilst our [twitter feed](#) is perhaps the best window for those seeking omniscience, please find a few highlights illustrated here:



Alongside the aforementioned group event, our Year 12 HEA students have participated in a number of subject specific activities, including lectures, masterclasses, and taster days across London, Oxford, and Cambridge. Highlights here include: the Cambridge Literary Festival, Imperial College's Vision Medical Conference, a day exploring Social Entrepreneurialism with Newcastle University London Campus, and the launch of our new 'Thinking Further' History and English enrichment programme with Dr Janet Floyd of King's College London. Alongside these initiatives, students attended a series of eye-opening STEM masterclasses at the University of Cambridge, and biologists participated in a challenging sequence of activities on pressing research issues at King's College Hospital with a range of top scientists thanks to our long-term partners: Dr Macbean and Dr Lunt of King's Muscle Lab.



Within their own academies, many Year 12s have been participating in a consistent weekly maths enrichment club with mathematicians from King's College London hosted across a number of Sixth Forms. Meanwhile, humanities and social science specialists have been learning about and debating pressing ethical issues through the prism of world literature with philosophers from the London School of Economics. Please find a news article from LSE on this initiative [here](#). We look forward to introducing an engineering programme in collaboration with University College London next term, who will also be delivering a series of academic lectures at Harris Academy Purley.

In the meantime, nineteen of our Year 13 cohort will be keeping their fingers crossed over the Christmas break as they wait to hear the result of their Oxbridge interviews. We were delighted such a strong number of students passed through the various stages of Oxford and Cambridge's highly demanding application process, and had the opportunity to demonstrate their ability in and passion for their subjects in-person. These included maths, classics, natural sciences, English, modern languages, HSPS, history, medicine, law, Japanese, and geography. Indeed, we are very proud that these students and hundreds of their peers are set to attend an impressive spread of top Russell Group universities in 2018, including many of those which comprise the prestigious 'Sutton Trust 13' – particularly popular this year are Bristol, Warwick, Imperial, UCL, Edinburgh, and LSE. With their applications submitted and, for many so far, choices confirmed, we wish them all a well-deserved and relaxing Christmas break.

The Autumn term has, as ever, been an exciting time for students on the Harris Experience Programme. It's the term in which we get to meet our fresh faced and eager new Year 9 cohort, as well as when we get a chance to have a final send-off after an amazing three years with our Year 11 students. This academic year got off to a fantastic start, as we welcomed a new cohort of Year 9 students on to the programme in September. Our launch event, held this year at Harris City Academy Crystal Palace, gave our students an introduction to what the programme has to offer them over the course of their academic careers. The discussion centred on how the programme will run in the immediate future, as well as some of the opportunities that will be made available to them as they progress through each year. Perhaps the most exciting aspect of the event were our student speakers, who gave their unique insights and experiences to those just joining the programme. Our students had the great honour of hearing from Year 13s, who are the first ever to have been through the full five year journey on the Harris Experience. These students explained how to make the most of the programme, emphasising that, above everything else, going into new experiences with an open mind is the key to success.

Year 9 students have also enjoyed their first visit to Christie's Auction House, where they had a chance to discuss the cultural value of art, as well as the links art has with every other subject. Students were even allowed to handle a selection of pieces, some of which were centuries old! The day finished with a dissection of Holbein's *The Ambassadors*, looking at how minute details in artwork can help us to explore social, literary and moral themes in a historical context. Students were encouraged to see the discussion as a puzzle; to think through the various questions they had about the painting, and to answer them systematically with the help of the experts in attendance. Many thanks to the fantastic team at Christie's Education, who led this session.



Imperial College London was the destination for the first Harris Experience event of the year for our Year 10 students. Here, students were given an insight into a variety of scientific disciplines, such as particle physics and gastrointestinal biology. There was particular enthusiasm in the room for the discussion of nuclear fusion, a pioneering method of energy creation which could become a reality as early as 2050. We were also treated to a range of practical experiments that illustrated some of the stranger and more esoteric aspects of science. Particularly interesting was the demonstration of a camera which could capture infrared light, which is normally invisible to the human eye, which we use in everyday life and yet never actually see. Fittingly entitled 'Mystery Science', this was a fascinating insight into areas of science which may seem strange and illogical, and how we can come to understand these phenomena through the application of the scientific method.



Students also had an opportunity to discuss the admissions process for Imperial College London, and discovered what it was like to study at a world leading research institution. We hope that our students left Imperial inspired, and that in the years to come some of those who attended the day will themselves return to Imperial for study and research!

*Neil Monteiro presenting Year 10 students with seemingly impossible architecture during their lecture series at Imperial College London*

On the 29<sup>th</sup> November, this term's programme for Year 10 students culminated in a visit to the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden, to watch a dual matinee performance of *La cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci*. Often performed together, these operas tell tales of betrayal and vengeance in southern Italy. The vast majority of students in attendance reported that they had never seen an opera before, and so this was a new experience for almost all in attendance. They were enraptured by the performances, which were by turns comedic and tragic. By the end of the performance, students who had initial reservations about watching plays staged solely in Italian had had a change of heart, with the opera ending to rapturous applause. We hope that all of our Year 10 students can now enthusiastically recommend the opera to others, and see why it is an enduringly popular art form.



*The end of a fantastic performance and beginning of a long round of standing ovations from our Year 10 cohort at the Royal Opera House this November*

We are also very excited to report on our Year 11 Aporia workshops, a new aspect of the Harris Experience programme designed to give our students a head start in the advanced thinking and analytical skills needed for A Level study. These sessions began with a discussion on A Level and university choices, with current HEA students presenting their own experiences of Post 16 education to the current Year 11s. The day then moved on to the workshop proper, where students discussed a range of topical moral and ethical issues, from how the media shapes opinion and discourse to what is the meaning of life itself. Throughout these debates, participants identified the logical strategies used in their arguments, and discussed how these can be applied. The sessions ended with a practical focus on memory techniques, which no doubt will come in useful as students embark on their GCSE exams in the summer! These sessions have been delivered in collaboration with Peter Worley. Peter is CEO of the acclaimed 'Philosophy Foundation', a Visiting Research Associate at King's College London, and author of a range of acclaimed books including *The If Machine: Philosophical Enquiry in the Classroom*. The sessions were not only useful, but also greatly enjoyable, and we look forward to continuing and refining this aspect of the programme moving forward. Below is a reflection on the experience from two students at Harris Academy Bromley:

*'The philosophy workshop provided us with a truly valuable opportunity to explore critical thinking outside of our typical classroom setting. The leader of the session, Peter, aimed the lesson on convincing us that we were already excellent philosophers and could already think philosophically. We began by going around the room and talking to each other about current newspaper articles, discussing the different ideas within them, enabling us to become more comfortable within the group and more comfortable sharing our opinions. We then considered the different approaches to certain controversial topics such as terrorism and how the LGBT community are portrayed in the media. We soon realised that the way in which many of us discussed the topics involved key philosophical ideas, and we even found ourselves learning new terminology relating to philosophy and critical thinking. It was a thoroughly interesting workshop and we found it useful to begin to think in new ways. Our favourite part of the day was towards the end when we took part in an activity aimed at improving our memory skills. We were astonished to see that simply by linking a word with an image, we were able to recall lists of random words with ease.'*

**Jazz Carlisle and Ella Hardisty, Harris Academy Bromley**

With an exciting range of activity on the near horizon for this Spring Term – including our fantastic Year 10 study days at the University of Cambridge – we would like to say a huge thank you to all our partners and the Academy staff across the federation who help make the programme such a special and enriching experience for us all.

**Henry Langdon and Daniel Turner, Harris Experience.**



*Year 11 students debating issues and learning advanced analytical skills with Peter Worley of the Philosophy Foundation*