

# College Faces

## Equality & Diversity

### Would you like to be a mentor?

We would love to hear from Old Members, from all professions, who are willing to join our alumni and student mentoring schemes. For more information please email [sara.watson@ccc.ox.ac.uk](mailto:sara.watson@ccc.ox.ac.uk).

The length of each mentorship is envisaged as being one year, after which mentors/mentees may continue or leave the scheme.



## FROM THE EAST MIDLANDS TO OXFORD

Wes Bond (PPE) comes from a single-parent, working class background in the East Midlands. Throughout his school life he was a recipient of free school meals. He is excited about the new, parallel mentoring scheme for 'first generation' students. He talked to us about being the first in his family to go to university and what the mentoring scheme will mean for him.

### What barriers did you experience that may have prevented you applying to Oxford?

Not being familiar with Student Finance, I was worried that I would not be able to afford to live in the South, particularly in Oxford. I also had doubts that I was the 'right' person for Oxford. None of my friends had applied to Oxford, none of my family had gone to university and I was worried that I would not be able to find friends or a group to fit in with. Finally, education was not valued in my family and further education was considered to be a waste of time particularly since I had been offered an apprenticeship with an accountancy firm.

### What changed your perspective of Oxford?

I think the largest contributing factor was the interview. My visit to Oxford, spending time exploring the city and college dispelled my misconceptions completely. I realised that college food, the college bar and on-site accommodation were all reasonably priced. The people I met were from diverse backgrounds, some similar to mine, and were open-minded, non-judgmental and extremely respectful. The subject ambassadors explained about teaching and activities and reassured me that Corpus was an inclusive and exciting environment.

### How did it feel when you got your offer?

The day I got my offer was stressful. After the interview I had decided I didn't just want to go to Oxford, I needed to go to Oxford. The experience, the people, the teaching style, the architecture and atmosphere. It was the complete package. I remember waking up early, refreshing my email, checking the group chat. I was not the first to receive the email, four or five PPEists got theirs before me. When it finally came through, I felt like a muggle who had got into Hogwarts. The rush, the happiness, the excitement, it is not something that can really be expressed in words, but it was one of the best moments of my life.

### What surprised you when you arrived?

I am a keen sportsman. Growing up, I played for two football teams as well as my local rugby team. I thought that at Oxford sports would be a low priority but what I found out in Freshers' Week was that sport was almost guaranteed with the collegiate system. Also, I had seen a reading list for my subject and was wondering how I would afford the books. I was surprised to find the exceptionally well-stocked libraries, dotted all around Oxford, with the Corpus Library providing every book I would need. The final thing I had not taken into account was

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the scholarship and bursary financial aid I was entitled to. I was worried about how I would afford activities with friends. What I had missed was that, under the means tested criteria, I would be granted additional funds. With this being the case, a financial burden, which had caused me such stress over the summer, vanished.

### What will having an alumni mentor mean for you?

I am looking forward to connecting with someone who has experienced Corpus like I have. Specifically, it will give me something I have not had before – guidance. With my background, I am not able to ask people around me for employment advice, whether I should be considering postgrad studies, or where my CV or interview skills might need improvement. I hope my mentor will give me the reassurance, advice and opportunities that are not easily accessed by those of us who are 'first generation' students.

## Gaining new perspectives

### Mentors and mentees reflect on what they have learnt from the Black and Minority Ethnic Student and Alumni Mentoring Scheme.

**Paul Ralley (Maths, 1992) has been a mentor for Willow Farr (Maths and Philosophy):**

**Willow writes:** "The outcome for me so far has been amazing. I have learnt about many careers which might suit my skills which I had never heard of before. I have learnt how to sell myself and built my confidence. Paul supported me through the process of applying for a job and gave me valuable advice on how to navigate the professional world. I am very happy to have accepted a graduate role in software development for a financial services company in London. I definitely hope to continue working with Paul in the future, and would recommend the scheme to anyone considering how best to develop and achieve their career goals."

**Paul writes:** "Willow and I have talked through the areas of early career progression and job applications. We discussed the various roles she could consider, what those roles entailed, what recruiters were looking for, and how to demonstrate her skills and potential. Willow has incredible promise, so I was confident that in making herself known to various recruiters, she would soon attract interview offers and hopefully then job offers, as happened for her. She did this through application/CV discussions, interview preparation based on scenarios she had experienced, and promotion

though LinkedIn, which generated a lead for the role she secured. We also spent time discussing the structure of the industry she was applying to, to give her the background she needed to be confident at interview. At the scheme dinner I was told that she had shared some nuggets from our discussions with her friends, so it is great to have a potential wider impact!"

**Hassan Damluji (Oriental Studies, 2001)** spoke at the Dinner for the Black and Minority Ethnic Student and Alumni Mentoring Scheme in February. "What is sometimes missed when thinking about mentoring, is how enriching it is for the mentor. This is not limited to a 'good feeling' that you are helping someone else. There is a lot that can be learned, that is tangibly useful, from the experience. Rarely as we go through our careers do we have the opportunity to step back, take some perspective, think about how far we have come. Rarely as we get older do we have the opportunity to engage deeply with people of a different generation, and think about what we might have lost or forgotten, or what simply we have never known, that younger people can teach us. Yes, there is a positive feeling of altruism associated with mentoring, but as I look back on the last year working with Effie on the Corpus mentoring scheme, what stands out most for me is what I have learned."

