

AMES (Cambridge)

My fascination with China began after reading Jung Chang's 'Wild Swans'. I was intrigued by the author's portrayal of China compared to my limited impressions of it, especially the rapid transformation of a country from dynastic rule to a place where Communism has been able to thrive. I found the depiction of a country which seems to have so many contradictions in its nature to be extremely compelling.

From there I developed a real interest in Mao's period of rule and its consequences, which led me to read 'Mao's Great Famine' by Frank Dikötter. As some of the shocking statistics he stated have only just been released to the public, it caused me to question how much the West really knows and understands about China. Wanting to discover more about this period, I read Sun Shuyun's 'The Long March' alongside Adeline Yen Mah's 'Falling Leaves'. The shocking descriptions of the fate of early communists contrasted with the glorified accounts in other histories of these events, which made me realise how the West's knowledge of China has been transformed in the recent past. This was juxtaposed with the moving portrait of the subsequent ramifications of this era described in 'Falling Leaves' and so I am curious to learn about how far China has recovered from this period, as well as how Chinese literature was influenced by it. My linguistic curiosity was also aroused by reading Yen Mah's biographical account. The chapter titles of this book were written in both Chinese and English, and I was amazed at how so few Chinese characters could translate into such complex and beautiful English. This strengthened my ambition to learn this language.

Away from my studies, I am a member of the Japanese society at my school. This has allowed me to gain a wider knowledge and enthusiasm for learning about the traditions and customs of East Asian society, such as the wealth of national celebrations. I keep up to date with current affairs in China by reading a variety of online websites. As many websites now translate Weibo comments about news stories, this has made me aware of the diversity of issues faced by China today, and how they are affecting the Chinese themselves. Furthermore, having already had an interest in Korean and Japanese popular culture, I have begun to listen to some Chinese pop artists and have watched some Taiwanese dramas. These reveal not only the extreme cultural changes that the Far East has been and is going through, but also the strong American influence on their entertainment industries. I am interested in this meeting of cultures and what the effects of this could be in the future.

Studying both French and Latin at school has given me a solid grounding in the skills needed to study a foreign language. As well as this I have always loved learning about cultures and languages other than my own, leading me to gain a GCSE short course in Ancient Greek and a survival level certificate in Russian. I furthered my language skills by attending a summer school for beginner languages, which has given me a taste for learning a language at University level, and made me keen to pursue this degree. Latin and English Literature AS levels have also impressed upon me the importance not only of learning a language, but also reading its literature.

Volunteering in a charity shop for over a year has honed my communicative abilities and I have interacted with many people from diverse backgrounds, making me more empathetic. As a Vice-Captain of my school, I have also gained great confidence along with responsibility and have had to learn how to manage my time effectively. Additionally this role requires me to work with a wide range of staff and students, improving my teamwork and leadership.

My future aim is to live and work in China as a teacher, and so this is the perfect degree for me. I am constantly intrigued by the changing face of China and would love to extend this passion by studying its language and literature.

AMES (Cambridge)

In the modern world Japan's influence cannot be denied, from the popularity of Japanese anime to their influence on the technology industry, Japan is a crucial part of the modern world. After a holiday in Japan in 2013, I further discovered my huge love of its culture and history. Visiting Kyoto in particular was a stunning experience, with shrines next to businesses, integrated into the framework of a modern city. Japanese as a language has grown increasingly important in the modern world since Japan re-emerged as a superpower after World War 2. With one of the most varied and unusual writing systems, Japanese provides a new challenge unlike any I have tackled before, giving me the chance to learn a language, a skill increasingly important in the modern world.

My main interest is Japan's history, from being a nation ruled by the disparate daimyo to a modern superpower with the third largest economy in the world. I find the most interest in the modern history of the Japanese Empire and have read around this topic with books like 'Modern Japanese Society 1868 - 1994'. Study in the Japanese language will give me an opportunity to explore texts from Japanese history first hand and discover a range of new sources of information not accessible from available translations. Furthermore, I am completing an Extended Project Qualification which not only will further my history skills, but also display my affinity for Japanese history by studying the title "Did Imperialism lead to Japan entering World War 2?", providing an opportunity to demonstrate independent learning skills from the research undertaken. This project requires me to study the history of Japan from the Meiji Restoration up until the Pearl Harbour attacks in 1941. I have therefore been able to enrich my knowledge of Japanese history further, learning in depth about change in Japan moving into World War 2, such as the rise of militarism and nationalism. I also have had work published in my school's law journal on the title "Why is the conviction rate so high in Japan?" leading me to further my understanding of issues in modern Japan and its legal system.

At A Level I have been able to study subjects from a range of areas, from Maths to Physics to History, and this has given me a range of skills that can be applied in many situations. Maths and Further Maths are two subjects that require the constant uptake of challenging new ideas at a fast rate, and my strength in mathematics shows that I have the ability to understand and learn new concepts quickly, and if necessary do extra work to solidify my understanding of the new ideas. Conversely, History has afforded me the chance to demonstrate critical analysis skills, developing my ability to construct detailed and reasoned arguments, both from own knowledge and a range of sources representing a spectrum of views. Computing has led me to learn a high level programming language and many of the skills used in learning a programming language can be similarly applied to learning a modern foreign language, thus giving me the experience of learning a 'language' from scratch.

Outside of school, I attend a Japanese tutor, giving me the opportunity to gain experience with the language before a degree, and this has required me to develop my time-keeping skills to balance my tutor work with my studies. I also volunteered to participate in community work organised by my school over the past year, working with year five at a local primary school allowing me to develop my communication skills, vital for speaking a new language. Furthermore, this has given me important experience with teaching, as after my degree I intend to train as a teacher.

Japan is an incredible country. I am extremely excited about studying Japanese at a higher level and relish the opportunity to spend a year abroad there where I can immerse myself in Japanese culture, language and history.

Biology (Oxford)

I didn't seize the idea to study biology; rather, it seized me. I refer to the fateful time in my youth when I first set eyes upon a blue tit. Everything about it fascinated me; the contrasting colours, the behaviour, the flight, to name a few. This encounter sparked off my undying love for the natural world. In the following years my interests broadened to include biology as a whole, but my main interests are still nature and evolution. Yet what draws me in the most is the subject's long list of unanswered questions. Why are moths attracted to light? Why do whales beach themselves? Why are humans so keen to find extraterrestrial life when so much remains undiscovered on Earth?

In school I demonstrate a passion for biology stretching outside the A-level course. I frequently attend my school's Natural Sciences Society because I enjoy learning from others about scientific matters which were previously unknown to me. I wrote an article on albatrosses for this society's latest journal, an article on the Mediterranean monk seal for the school academic journal and an article on symbiosis for the school magazine. Writing these articles helped me to learn more about species of conservation concern and understand the degree of interdependence between species. I am also completing an EPQ on "How have organisms evolved to carry out parthenogenesis?", which is truly rewarding because my independent research for the project challenges the idea of asexual reproduction as an evolutionary dead end. Last Easter I attended a Biology Masterclass at Trinity College, Oxford, where I was most impressed by the diversity of the collection in the city's natural history museum.

I am an avid reader too, and have experience in practical conservation. Most notably I read "The Selfish Gene" and "River Out Of Eden" by Dawkins. The former was an eye-opener because most of what I found in this book I had never thought about before. I have since found examples elsewhere supporting the selfish gene theory e.g. the foam secreted by male Japanese quail which supposedly increases the number of offspring they father. Such examples help me to evaluate a scientific theory's credibility. In addition, the magazine "Biological Sciences Review" has reinforced key A-level concepts and increased my wider understanding of biology. Last year I attended an RSPB conservation event at Saltholme reserve, where I worked on habitat restoration. This setting improved my ability to interact with others, which I feel is crucial in the world of science. Last summer I undertook an expedition to South Africa with Operation Wallacea, where I collected data during survey work, shedding light on my possible career route of research scientist.

Outside the academic realm I have various hobbies. Most frequently I indulge in birdwatching and photography, both of which help to increase my patience, a valuable trait for any scientist, I feel. I have also volunteered for my local birdwatching club. Whenever I birdwatch, I send my sightings to the BTO to help them with their research and keep my own meticulous record of the species I see each year, as I think that data sharing and detailed record-keeping are invaluable scientific skills. Attending a photographic exhibition by the BWPA encouraged me to combine my passions for nature and photography more successfully, as I know that photographs can be vital to scientific work e.g. in trying to identify a species or declaring a species as new to science.

In conclusion, I wish to study biology at university because I absolutely feel that no other course would suit me as much as this one. Habits such as wider reading and correspondence have cleared paths leading to new material, offering an incomparable level of enrichment, and while I expect a biology degree to be undoubtedly challenging, I believe my related hobbies and personal qualities of conscientiousness and curiosity will aid me in my efforts to flourish in the face of such a challenge.

Biology (Oxford)

A childhood fascination with the living world, sparked by afternoons spent talking to omniscient naturalists, instilled in me a deep passion for entomology. Delving further has opened my eyes to fields such as evolutionary biology and taxonomy, awe-inspiring in their breadth, yet articulate in their attention to detail, which must so often be based upon observing nature to verify predictions, rather than by controlled experiments. It is indeed only through this further reading that I have been able to appreciate more deeply such a unique subject area, and become certain that I wish to study biology at the highest level I can.

I enjoyed work experience last summer with both the country park rangers and the Natural History Museum's coleopterists. Experiencing practical entomology was deeply gratifying, with the rangers (through fieldwork) at the Museum through observing curation and identification techniques. Whilst there I also attended a fascinating symposium on biodiversity in Borneo, which reinforced for me the significance of fields such as entomology. In addition, reading many field guides, plus texts such as 'Bugs Britannica' and 'The Insects' (Gullan and Cranston), has augmented my confidence with naturalism; a subject which, on top of providing basis for so much theoretical biology, is indeed of such inherent importance in its own right. The YASS course I took last year, centred on '99% Ape,' introduced me to evolutionary biology. This synergised well with my personal reading, with my Extended Project Qualification on the level of selection being based around 'The Selfish Gene,' an inspiring read. I have since enjoyed reading more Dawkins and also Gould, since I feel a balance between their often contrasting standpoints is important, in particular concerning issues such as the level of selection and the debate between punctuated equilibrium and phyletic gradualism. I have also found that reading Maynard Smith's 'Evolutionary Genetics' has granted me a deeper understanding of the subject, in particular by exploring the underlying detail behind crucial biological concepts, but also through familiarising me with the concepts and terminology required to appreciate wider academic literature, which I have since found great enjoyment in exploring.

Within school I founded a Natural Sciences Society in September 2011, for which I have published three journals, plus giving talks on insects, life itself, sexual conflict, and evolutionary game theory. I have organised weekly lecture trips to UCL and also to conferences at Cambridge, on top of arranging external speakers and a tour of the Natural History Museum. I have enjoyed the wider exposure to concepts throughout Science which this has afforded me, giving me a more holistic appreciation of ideas, something I value highly. I have also consequently been given many opportunities to take leadership roles and show initiative, which were tested again on my World Challenge expedition to Botswana and Namibia. Equally importantly, I feel that writing independently on many biological topics, and attending a substantial number of lectures, have been valuable preparation for a biology degree; I have reinforced these skills as well as my enthusiasm through a residential biology master class at Trinity College, Oxford. I have also played chess and debated for the school for a number of years, learning how to think quickly, phrase arguments clearly, and respond well under high pressure - for instance through competing in Millfield International Chess competition several times, and in regional debating and public speaking competitions.

As a subject which has never ceased to captivate me, studying biology at university is a life-ambition. Indeed, whilst it would be the completion of one goal, it would open the door to so many more; I have relished studying biology at every level thus far, and feel certain that this will always be the case.

Chemistry (Oxford)

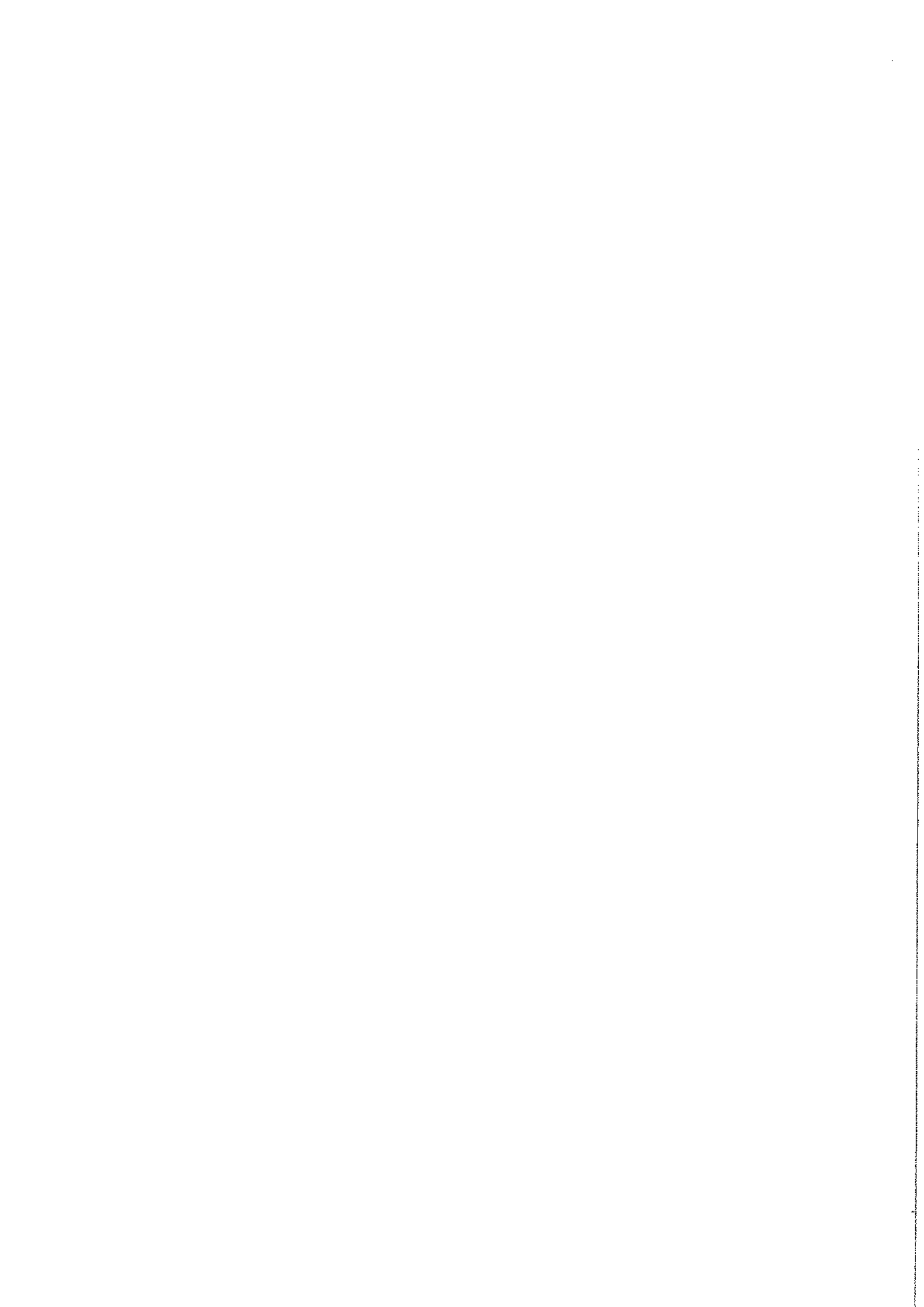
A brief mention of graphene in an otherwise ordinary school assembly is why am I in the position of wanting to dedicate the next few years of my life to study chemistry. It was a discussion about graphene's potential to improve the process of desalination that led me to researching the material and other examples of how chemistry based research is producing ingenious solutions to serious problems society faces. Since then my interest in Chemistry has increased exponentially and I have become strongly motivated to continue the subject beyond the A level course.

This had led me to expand my knowledge of certain areas of the subject that were mentioned in the A-level course. Which I achieved by reviewing books such 'Why chemicals reactions happen?' A book I found very engaging as it introduced me to more complex theory on topics such as atomic and molecular orbitals. Using molecular orbitals to explain why for example nucleophiles attack certain bonds in a structure gave me a greater understanding of why particular reactions had their specific outcomes. Furthermore, I was introduced to the use of quantum mechanics and wavefunctions in chemistry and I was fascinated to see how they are used to describe electron distribution. The book was my first experience of theory beyond the A-level course and I found it to be far more compelling than anything I had previously studied. Consequently, this strengthened my opinion that pursuing a degree in Chemistry would allow me study a subject I was passionate about.

Another piece of wider academic literature I found useful was 'Renewable energy: Power for a sustainable future.' I chose to read this book as I had developed an interest in certain related topics such as the use of organic chemistry in developing alternative fuel sources. The book reiterated the value of studying chemistry as it offered me an insight to the vast range of careers available in the sustainable energy industry alone. Additionally a course that gives me the option to use the knowledge I learn to improve the way in which the environment is treated even in a minor way is another major reason why I find the opportunity to study chemistry so appealing.

On the other hand I understand how demanding pursuing a degree in Chemistry can be. Therefore, I try to involve myself in other activities than the necessary academic work. I volunteer at a local charity for several hours during weekends which has taught me the importance of being organised. Furthermore, I try to expand my knowledge on certain areas of Chemistry by taking part in a natural science society, participating in wider reading and attending public lectures. I try to keep busy to prove to myself that I will be able to handle the demands of further education.

I believe I am ready for the change that comes with attending university and I am also eager to experience the independence both academically and socially that is associated with further education. To conclude considering how fascinating I find chemistry, the various skills I will attain and consequently the vast range of career options that will be available to me, I would greatly appreciate the opportunity of studying chemistry exclusively.



Economics (Cambridge)

The way Economics acts with and against Politics is one of the defining features of how our society works. This process has always fascinated me and I hope to explore it further while at university.

One aspect of the subject that particularly interests me is Development Economics, especially in relation to Africa. During the recent summer holidays, I was fortunate enough to be part of a World Challenge expedition team; this enabled me to experience four incredible weeks travelling through southern Africa. As well as teaching me a lot about problem solving, teamwork and commitment, it also deepened my interest in the impact of foreign intervention on the African condition. This was the basis for an EPQ which considered how Western powers' economical, political and even philosophical ideologies can have far reaching consequences. I developed this further by reading books such as 'The Bottom Billion' by Paul Collier, as well as William Easterly's 'The White Man's Burden', which offered an interesting explanation of how and why foreign aid has failed to significantly improve African underdevelopment. This has led me to believe that, despite selfless efforts by both multilateral and bilateral agencies, policies such as the conditionality of the IMF's loans and high agricultural subsidies in developed countries can only damage African development.

The involvement of China as the emerging superpower in Africa and indeed across the world is also something that intrigues me and I am looking forward to engaging with it in my university studies. Dambisa Moyo can often be seen as a divisive figure when it comes to her ideas about the failures of Western aid in Africa and the need to dramatically reduce it; however, she is also one of many commentators who notes that China's hunt for resources will continue to impact greatly on the development of the continent.

In addition to being our school's Economics Prefect, I am involved in the Political Economy Society, where recent talks have included how Belgium managed to reduce the impact of the worsening global economy after 2008 by failing to elect a government. The A-Level teaching of the Macro captured my attention, looking at the government's role in managing objectives. I found Ha-Joon Chang's '23 Things They Don't Tell You About Capitalism' a great contrasting view to the curriculum as it challenges several mistaken beliefs of the free market today. Economics does play a key role in my school life; however, I feel that my other subjects also complement my chosen university course well. Mathematics is of course integral to the workings of Economics (as well as providing a good base for formal logic), while History has supplied valuable essay, judgement and communication skills.

As well as my academic interests, I have also been a part of my school's Cricket and Rugby first teams for a number of years which have both helped me develop good teamwork and communication skills. After being involved with my local cricket team for quite a while, I found helping to coach the younger players can be just as rewarding, and have recently completed my first coaching course successfully. I am also grade five on the Flute and participate in the Greenwich Youth Band. Although taking part in these activities as well as school responsibilities requires good time management, they are an enjoyable part of life outside of school and I am looking forward to using the opportunities at university to continue with music and sport especially, as well as university life in general.

I feel that through hard work, I will be able to make full use of my time at university to develop my skills and ideas. I am keen to learn as much as possible in order to inform my understanding of how the world works with regards to Economics. Above all, I am eager to use university as a chance for a more independent form of learning in the subject that I enjoy most.

Economics (Cambridge)

The great economic problem of infinite wants and scarce resources is even more poignant today. Due to a rapidly increasing population and greater demand for resources from developing countries, a solution is needed. This huge challenge, identified by Malthus, drew me to Economics and was addressed in 'Prosperity without Growth'. Though I think that further innovation will allow the world's population to continue to grow and become more affluent, I agree with Tim Jackson that this will require a Keynesian government stimulus in most major economies, with large scale investment in green technology to increase efficiency. This has the potential both to end the recession and allow the world economy to continue to grow within its ecological limits.

The continent of Africa will be the source of much of this increased demand in the future. I read Paul Collier's book 'The Bottom Billion' and I found it particularly interesting to discover that his ideas on aid were very different to Dambisa Moyo's, whose lecture on Africa I attended. I disagree with Moyo that aid is damaging to Africa because whilst it has been mismanaged in the past, it could make a large difference if it were better targeted. Although aid alone will not be able to solve the complex problems of these countries, I think that more aid should be given with a long-term view of increasing stability in post-conflict situations. This should include more technical aid, which could provide the skills and expertise to support countries as they undergo reforms, as advocated by Paul Collier.

Although I had an interest in Economics long before starting my A-levels, studying the subject in a formal environment has confirmed my desire to take it further. In the course, I found exchange rates and their effects on all parts of the economy particularly fascinating. I read several articles in 'The Economist' about China's manipulation of their exchange rates and how this has increased their advantage over other countries in the manufacturing sector. This has enabled them to sustain rapid growth through the creation of manufacturing jobs, though it is clear that they are already losing their comparative advantage to countries with lower labour costs. I enjoy Mathematics, an important skill for all economists, particularly statistics, and I hope that I can develop this strength through my study of Economics. I passed an Open University course, 'An Introduction to Finance', in which I studied the banking system and the banking crisis. This independent study at a high level demonstrates my essay writing skills, which would be critical in an Economics degree.

At school I attend Political Economy Society and Debating Society. I was in a team that won the Sixth Form debating cup. At the regional Model United Nations my team represented Poland and we were highly commended. This highlighted the contrasting needs for the United Nations of different countries. During my study of German, I have taken part in two exchange programmes, on which I was able to improve my speaking skills and learn more about German culture. My exchange family's views, that Greek profligacy was to blame for Greece's current problems, were fascinating. I was also a German 'buddy', helping a pupil through his GCSE, and I have begun coaching for the 11+ outside school. I am a very keen chess player, and have played for my county, at both adult and junior level, my school and my club. I am now captain of the school team; a position that has helped me to develop teamwork and leadership skills.

Economics is a truly stimulating subject and I have really enjoyed my A-level course as well as the wider reading I have done. I really look forward to the challenge of an Economics degree..

Engineering (Oxford)

With hindsight, my initial fascination with modelling and creating miniature versions of interesting machines was probably an early sign of what was to become a long term interest, the choice of my university degree and, hopefully, the basis of a highly rewarding career. Designing and building a miniature cable car from scratch gave me experience of gears and motors, the underpinnings of a wide range of propulsion systems. This interest has grown into an enthusiasm for the processes behind jet engines and other machines, and a desire to study engineering at a higher level.

A great deal of knowledge of mechanical engineering comes from my physics, maths, and chemistry A levels, and learning about how forces affect particles has been a highlight. However I have supplemented this with background reading of authors such as Klaus Hunecke. Through reading his book "Jet Engines: Fundamentals of Theory, Design and Operation" I have gained an awareness of how designs can be altered over time to improve efficiency. For example, the combustion chamber of a gas turbine engine has evolved from a can-type design to the annular-type employed today. This has brought a 25% reduction in weight as well as much improved circumferential pressure equalization with corresponding performance benefits. My Extended Project Qualification is based around finding the best engineering solution to reduce strain on London's transport network, and has allowed me to target a well-known national issue from an engineering perspective. In doing this I have broadened my interest in the subject from the largely mechanical - how and why things happen - to a concern for the ethical, environmental and practical dilemmas that engineers such as Brunel have faced while working on large scale projects. The qualification also gave me a fantastic opportunity to develop my independent research skills.

This summer I was fortunate enough to take part in work experience with WorleyParsons, which gave me a valuable insight into the roles of engineers of different disciplines when designing oil rigs and chemical plants. As well as gaining a broader understanding of all branches of engineering, I was also able to develop my own skills. Working in a team I studied the mechanical features of bikes to select the design that best fulfilled my client's criteria. I then presented my findings to the group, giving me practice in communicating ideas to a large number of people. During the experience I was also challenged to find the best way to build a pipeline across a river. After considering many options it turned out I had ignored the nearby bridge that the pipe could have been mounted to at a significantly lower cost. This experience impressed upon me the importance of considering all possibilities when faced with an engineering challenge. Hopefully my forthcoming week with Capita Infrastructure will further develop my understanding of the engineering industry.

Outside school I also have extensive non-academic interests. I represent Globe Rowing Club, London Youth Rowing, and Royal Greenwich in a variety of sculling events. My medals have included Gold at the 2013 London Youth Games in the coxed double sculls. Training with the squad throughout the year, up to six days a week, has enabled me to develop my time management skills and improved my ability to work effectively in a team. These are both useful qualities for an engineer. I also took part in a four week World Challenge expedition to Thailand in the summer of 2014. Leading the team for four days involved organising twenty teenagers through a trek and crucial planning period, so was a great challenge for my communication skills.

At school, my membership of the Physics and Engineering society has exposed me to the wide range of opportunities this subject has to offer, and I know that studying engineering at university will allow me to pursue what is both a diverse, ever changing subject, and a captivating hobby.

Engineering (Cambridge)

Five of the eight Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations are directly related to chemical engineering. From eradicating poverty and hunger to combating diseases and ensuring environmental sustainability, chemical engineering has huge potential to solve real life problems and improve the lives of millions. I am keen to study for a degree in chemical engineering to gain the tools to tackle these challenges through the development and application of my abilities in maths, science, problem solving and innovation. I have enjoyed studying heat and energy transfer as part of my A level chemistry course and am enthusiastic to study thermodynamics in an engineering context. Applying thermodynamic principles to increase efficiency and reduce the cost and environmental impact of processes particularly excites me.

My desire to read chemical engineering was confirmed by a broad-based engineering Headstart course at Manchester University in July 2012. The workshops were real first year university tasks and I found them extremely interesting as I could use my problem solving skills to propose a solution. One task involved pumping water from one container to another and my team excelled in developing a fully functioning system which was cost-effective, efficient and could drain fully. The potential to engineer such projects into large scale processes, like providing clean water sources, drives my interest in chemical engineering.

During a week of engineering work experience at BP in 2010, I researched the process of extracting oil and gas from subsea reservoirs and its subsequent transformation into usable energy. My task was to size and select a gas turbine generator system for an offshore production platform by assessing the anticipated electrical demands on the facility. In making my recommendation, I considered capital cost and operating efficiency as well as safety and environmental issues. I deepened my technical knowledge by consulting with experts in electrical and offshore engineering. At the end of the week, I delivered a well received multi media presentation and was awarded with the British Science Association Silver CREST award.

During Year 12, I have participated in the Young Enterprise scheme. Amongst many competitors, my presentation was influential in my team's selection to represent the school. I led the marketing and product development for the team and designed and produced sustainably sourced cufflinks, memory sticks and Christmas decorations. I utilised various manufacturing methods including cutting Christmas decorations from acrylic using computer-aided design software to programme a laser cutter. My team advanced from the local final to reach the regional final.

Participating in sport is a passion. I developed leadership skills through captaining both my school and club cricket teams in all age groups. These skills have been put to use and further developed by coaching a local primary school football team. I also play football for a local team, reaching the U17 cup final last season. I am an accomplished musician and recently achieved a merit in grade 8 violin performance. I have used my musicianship to teach myself to play the drums, acoustic guitar and bass guitar and play in a rock band. Having achieved the Bronze and completed all sections for the Silver Duke of Edinburgh Award, I am now planning for the expedition section of the Gold award. Participating in the Duke of Edinburgh Award has improved my team working and practical problem solving skills.

I am looking forward to studying chemical engineering in an intellectually challenging environment where I will develop skills that will have a positive impact on real life issues:

English (Oxford)

Studying English has introduced me to a rich and varied world of ideas and possibilities. I now intend to continue this journey at university, so that I can expand and build on the foundations that school and my own reading and interests have helped establish. To borrow from Heaney, I want to 'dig' more deeply into the soil of the subject.

As my studies have progressed, I have developed greater sensitivity to text and context, learning to build an argument through the close analysis of language, form and structure and to complement it with historical inquiry and awareness. Unpicking the language and plot of *Jekyll and Hyde* is like unpicking the seams of Victorian society and looking under the mask of civilisation.

I have always read widely and my interests have led me from the early Anglo-Saxon world of *Beowulf* to the post-colonial Africa of Chinua Achebe, but what delights me as much as the differences between these works are often the similarities that they throw up. The voiceless, alien threat to society that *Beowulf* confronts drew some distinct parallels with the colonial encounters described in *Things Fall Apart*. This led me to consider how a society presents 'the other' through its literature and this is one of the themes I have chosen to explore within my EPQ.

I consider myself lucky to have encountered a variety of literary experiences from an early age but as my tastes have changed I find myself striving to sharpen my tools of analysis and develop a wider knowledge of theoretical practice. Eagleton's *Literary Theory: An Introduction* encouraged me to ask fundamental questions about what literature is and how it works, the different theories and discourse giving critical insights into how we see the world. Reading this and Sutherland's short essays in *Is Heathcliff A Murderer?* has inspired me to question more deeply the relationship between literature and our world.

The sixth form has reinforced my interest in language and literature and I have particularly enjoyed the seminar style discussions alongside the opportunities to form my own interpretations of texts in essays. My studies in French and Latin have enriched my enjoyment of English by enhancing my linguistic awareness, paying close attention to the complexities of grammar and the subtleties of translation, and expanding the map of my literary and cultural knowledge.

I am a keen member of my school's Theatre Society which arranges outings to a range of fringe and mainstream productions. At school I have also directed and staged plays by Synge and Brecht. These helped me engage with texts as performances, challenged my organisational abilities and aided my skills of communication. This year I have taken responsibility for organising St Olave's Cultural Evening, an entertaining mix of poetry, music and dance that celebrates the diversity of cultures and social backgrounds within our school. I enjoy acting and have tried my hand at writing a short play at a series of workshops run through the National Theatre. My study of literature is inseparable from my interest in the craft of writing and one of my great pleasures has been to develop my own poetry blog.

I chair the Literature and Philosophy Societies at school, which have both proved to be popular forums for some lively discussion and talks. The wide ranging topics and exchanges with colleagues have helped broaden my knowledge base and develop my aptitude for critical thought and argument, all of which feeds back into my study of literature.

Outside of school, I have a paper round and volunteer at a local Oxfam book shop. I have represented my school for rugby and fives and enjoy swimming and cycling. As an enthusiastic musician I perform in a band and enjoy a range of music from Debussy to Talking Heads. I also have a strong interest in other elements of culture such as art and film, an engagement which I feel supplements my study and love of literature.

English (Cambridge)

My interests are lit up by literature - prose and verse encompass everything that has happened, is happening and could ever be imagined. Literature is colourful, creative and absurd but all about real life. While reading can be an escape from reality, narrative can be used to explore issues and complex ideas.

Literature is an art; its construction, context, intricacy and the response it evokes inspire me to create something myself. It would be a privilege to study further something that makes me happy.

Buying "The Ninth Life of Louis Drax" at ten confirmed my interest in the power of narrative, introducing me to multi-narrative perspectives. It revealed a world outside my own experience, opening my eyes to a sophisticated style that made me reflect and question the reliability of the narrator. It triggered my scepticism and suspicion but encouraged my tolerance and empathy - alerting me to the truth that there are many ways of seeing the world around us.

This was reaffirmed when studying "Enduring Love". Realising Joe Rose's obsessional rationalism presented a distorted view of love made me reflect on the distortion that the novel, as a form, brings to representation and, in turn, encouraged me to read E.M. Forster's "Aspects of the Novel".

Science-fiction's fantastic imaginative force captivates me - and I enjoy watching the theme played out, from Miranda's 'brave new world' to Aldous Huxley's version of the brave future. While, visiting Venice, Florence and Fiesole made me understand the inspiration that the Italian Grand Tour provided to Keats in 'Ode to a Nightingale'.

Seeing the pediments at Olympia has made me appreciate how stories were told before they were written down. Homer's "The Iliad" and Virgil's "Aeneid" have developed my close reading skills and contextual understanding, complemented by reading Heaney's "Hercules and Antaeus" and seeing the National's production of "Antigone".

The influence of Classical Literature pervades my studies most obviously in Yeats and Shakespeare. Visiting the amphitheatre at Epidaurus, seeing the broken artefacts, refined my understanding of the power and longevity of literature.

I aspire to be a writer/director and texts studied for Theatre Studies have encouraged me to think about how they translate to performance and reception theory. The theme of persecution in "Death and the Maiden," "Kindertransport" and "Our Country's Good" made me explore Agard's "Flag", Hardy's "Drummer Hodge", "Slaughter House 5" and "The Book Thief" - a text I was introduced to through World Book Night 2012.

As Creative Director in a school production of Macbeth my interpretation was strongly influenced by the RSC's production of "The Tempest" and "The Taming of the Shrew" alongside Hytner's "Hamlet" from The National. Modern political productions like "Saved" and "Posh", with their complex layering, have challenged me to think differently.

My Personal Investigation for A2 art has been exploring narrative in response to Ovid's Metamorphoses. Creating a portfolio has made me appreciate the connections authors make; for example the thematic concerns in Austen's "Emma" and "Pride and Prejudice".

I was proud to win the "Poetry Live!" competition 2011 and perform my poem at the 2012 event where I met John Agard and Simon Armitage. I have written a play for NT "New Views", giving me more experience of the freedom and frustrations of practical writing and run a KS3 Drama Club.

As Senior Prefect I have to juggle my academic commitments with school responsibilities. I am Netball Captain and work part time at Waitrose.

As an enthusiastic, reliable and diligent student I am keen to pursue my love of literature as a stepping stone to a career as a writer.

Geography (Oxford)

As a race, we regard our greatest attribute to be our rationality, yet we continue to suspend this when confronted by the challenge of anthropogenic climate change. Our society has not yet developed effective political, economic or social structures to tackle the type of complex compromises required to make a difference. A multidisciplinary perspective is crucial in order to contribute to the study, the mitigation and the practical debate regarding climate change. Geography offers this holistic approach to study the relationship between our civilisation and our earth.

The New Scientist, and most recently delving into Naomi Klein 'This Changes Everything', has awoken my sense of moral duty to explore the issue of climate change. Klein exposes climate change as an issue founded on the inequality of capitalism. Her holistic approach to the issue is thought-provoking and has inspired me to direct my Extended Project Qualification title towards exploring the factors that shape peoples' attitude to climate change. Daniel Kahneman's collection of research entitled 'Judgment under Uncertainty' offers psychological explanations to the public's often passive and indifferent attitude to climate change, additionally it introduces the heuristics used in decision making, and the prevalence and scope of biases in our thinking. In addition, I recently attended an LSE public lecture discussing international cooperation and climate change, where experts in their field shared their view on the effectiveness of government mitigation policies to combat global warming. The intellectually stimulating presentation highlighted political agendas as the largest obstacle in taking progressive steps to mitigate climate change. Yet I feel the climate change debate needs to evolve, the agenda needs to revolve around facilitating change and motivating the implementation of practical solutions.

Spending three years in South Africa meant I experienced a country at a different stage of development to the UK. It is evident that the country is still haunted by the scars of apartheid, evident by the inequality of wealth and social injustice. By volunteering in the Mount Mariah orphanage, situated in a Durban township, I worked with families who were in very different situations to myself, only then did I truly grasp the hardship of poverty. This has ignited my interest in the politics of development.

My other A2 options, Physics and Maths, complement the analytic areas of Geography, especially when synthesising and evaluating statistics and figures. It has enabled me to approach complex research findings appropriately and logically, especially the S1 and S2 modules in Maths. They have developed my statistical skill set, useful when reviewing research, identifying trends and drawing conclusions from numerical evidence.

As a keen athlete, I dedicate 10 hours a week to playing netball, representing my club and region at many national events. My participation in competitive level sport has enriched my skill set in leadership, time management and team work, having captained my regional, club and school team. I recognise what a team needs, often it is not a conventional leader, one who directs and gives order, but instead a motivator especially through times of exhaustion and hardship. Players are constantly subjected to criticism and feedback, which has developed my resilience, and I recognise its pivotal role in any learning process. The role of CEO in my Young Enterprise group enabled me to further develop these crucial skills, leading us to win best presentation at the district finals.

Geography takes a multi-disciplinary perspective that enables the subject to amalgamate seemingly incongruent issues into a common playing field; it is the thread that combines the poles. This diversity drives my curiosity and passion for the subject and I eagerly await to further my geographical studies through intellectual challenge and debate.

Geography (Cambridge)

My enjoyment for Geography stems from the many family holidays to my grandparents' bungalow in Frinton-on-Sea in Essex as a young child. It was there that my grandfather's passion for Geography was passed on to me during our long conversations about coastal landforms and the different engineering projects such as the introduction of a riprap barrier in the area to prevent further erosion of the coastline and to save the SSSIs and Naze Tower from the sea. This enthusiasm for the subject has only grown during my studies in secondary education, particularly more recently at A level.

Over the last year, I have found myself thoroughly engaged by how issues such as global warming, earthquakes and tsunamis have an effect on populations both at the time of event or in the aftermath. Television coverage of large catastrophes, such as in Haiti and Japan, have engaged and stimulated my thoughts on how the natural world affects humanity. Despite my initial fascination for Physical Geography, I have become increasingly engrossed in the human side of Geography during my A-Level studies. I have especially enjoyed our work on pro-natalist and anti-natalist policies such as those in China and Iran, along with the implications on the age of the population and how this affects the dependency ratio and the services provided in these areas. Through my exploration of courses, I have found that BA Geography provides a diverse programme which will continue to deepen my interest and understanding of how important Geography is in the world today. Thus, this has stimulated my excitement at the prospect of studying Geography at university.

This year, my coursework fieldwork trip to Malham Tarn in Yorkshire presented a great insight into how geography works in the empirical world, allowing me to apply geographical principles that I had learnt. Although our main focus was on how river variables changed downstream, I found great interest in the differing development of the area from urban to rural and the affects this has on the area and how this is assessed through development indicators. I have also been interested in the development of the high street, looking at how services provided have changed over the last few decades. I have recently attended extracurricular lectures to further my knowledge on topics in both human and physical geography outside the curriculum including a talk on 'Population and the future' and I intend to go to talks in the future with the Geographical Society. This experience has cemented my passion for Geography in general, along with my choice to study it at university.

Away from Geography, I have completed two work experience placements, the first at CBRE where I worked for two weeks learning about commercial property which improved my mapping and sample analysis skills. Secondly, at S J Berwin where I was introduced to different aspects of law. From both of these experiences I have greatly enhanced my communication and analytical skills, my ability to work well under pressure and my ability to approach issues from multiple perspectives. Furthermore, I have volunteered at a Save the Children charity shop for just over a year which has improved my confidence and my ability to work efficiently. I also have a great interest in travelling and have recently visited Canada where I had the opportunity to see Niagara Falls, and Massachusetts where I took particular interest in the English pilgrims on the Mayflower who produced the first instance of a democratic society in the 'New World'. I am a hard working, confident and well rounded individual which has been reflected in my appointment as an academic prefect. I am extremely excited at the prospect of exploring new interests and widening my passion and knowledge of Geography during my undergraduate studies.

History - Ancient & Modern (Oxford)

Beginning with a fascination with historical tales and the deeds of great men as a young boy, which progressed into an interest in military history, especially the campaigns of Marius, Caesar and Napoleon, I have developed my interest in history, which grew with time into enthusiasm for studying the politics behind warfare. Independently I have looked carefully at the history of Fifth Century Athens and First Century Rome, as well as the more modern Napoleonic era and the links between them - from Napoleon's emulation of the ancient world in his military and politics to his use of ancient symbolism. The further study of history has the greatest appeal to me, and the vast breadth of a subject that underpins our modern world has ensured the development of my interest over the years as I have read more widely and my gaze has shifted. The politics of Athens and the gradual organic creation of the political system in conjunction with the perceptions of ideal ruling systems present throughout history is a current focal point of my studies, inspiring my EPQ on how far the politics of the modern world and the underlying ideologies differ from those prior to the 'demise' of democracy in Athens - a question that allows me to study in depth interconnections of the modern and ancient worlds.

Separated by land and sea, I became interested as to why two superpowers of the Fifth Century, Athens and Sparta, should have different types of government, and in the contrast of democratic and undemocratic elements of Sparta - to which end my reading has focused on Aristotle's 'Constitution of Athens' as well as Xenophon the Orator's and the 'Politeia' of the Spartans. I have also compared Plato's 'Republic' with 'The Communist Manifesto' to try to understand more thoroughly the relationship between theory and practice, and through my reading of Geoffrey Ellis' excellent 'Napoleon (Profiles in power)' I have expanded my knowledge of his own very much personalised system of power.

My reading on Athens and Sparta and his unique position as the "Father of History" for his methods and research led me to Herodotus; through reading 'The Histories' I both delved into the incredible success of the Greeks in overcoming their existence as a patchwork of individual chauvinistic city states to defeat the Persian empire, and the potential effect of the alternative: lost democratic culture; an immeasurably impoverished legacy inherited by Rome and by extension modern Europe that would lead to a vastly different world. These recurring key points of potential diversion in history are a significant aspect of why I find history so uniquely interesting.

To further my study of the ingredients of our world today I examined the origins of Islam, reading Tom Holland's 'In the Shadow of the Sword', and in reading around it I was especially interested to come across criticism of his work by Glen Bowersock that slammed his "ignorance of current research and lack of linguistic and historical acumen". His criticism of this book demonstrated to me not just the importance of peer review in history but the constant intellectual debate raging around certain key topics.

Within school I have spoken at Classics society, written for History Society magazine and run and participated in Lower and Upper School Debating, giving me an understanding of formulating a concise and logical argument. I completed Duke of Edinburgh Bronze and Silver and undertook World Challenge; planning and raising £3600 to travel to Africa, while raising £2000 for charity. I have also been a keen member of the History Society and Political Economy Society and through these have gained a wider perspective of historical events and the skills needed to evaluate them: especially useful when considering the development of the political process over the centuries and the influences of the ancient world on it, and have been able to pursue a subject that is both an academic discipline and a fascinating hobby.

On my visit to Cuba last summer, it was the country's history that most attracted me; the crumbling colonial Spanish colonnades contrasted so bizarrely with the old American coupés - this juxtaposition sparked a series of historical connections in my wider reading that has cemented my desire to study History at university. The Spanish-American War presented itself as a singularly fascinating area for study; immensely popular at the time, it was emblematic of the fate of both the old and the new world in the 20th Century.

The different historical interpretations of the war between Spain and the USA proved ripe for comparative enquiry. The conflict was perfect for any historian with a drum to beat; Zinn paints the picture of a hapless America dragged into an evil war by evil millionaires and evil journalists; O'Toole presented 'An American Epic' - a tale of governmental incompetence and individual heroism; Brogan sees it as the USA inevitably filling the void left by a no longer expanding British Empire. During my reading of this conflict, I read What is History by E H Carr - which heightened my understanding of these contradictory histories; Zinn evidently reflects the historical view of a society still reeling from the atrocities of Vietnam, subjunctively longing for a world where America had retained its glorious isolation. Brogan on the other hand reflected a worldview with China, rather than Soviet Communism dominating the horizon - an apologist for American Imperialism in light of the decline of the West.

Whilst I was reading about the Spanish American War and the rise of the American Empire, I began to notice some similarities to my reading of Ancient History - in undertaking the EPQ, I chose the question "To what extent was the growth of Empire responsible for the downfall of democracy in Ancient Rome?" I could see historiographical parallels between Roman and American expansion; those that saw Rome inevitably filling the vacuum left by a declining Greek Empire contrasted with those that saw the growth of Empire as an expression of Roman values, the militaristic state inevitably conquering its neighbours. These parallels have made me intent on studying a degree that covers both Ancient and Modern history, as I believe the two to be inseparable in gaining a fuller understanding not only of our past, but of how our past shapes our present.

Extra curricular activities help to shape who I am. In my role as president of History Society I have encouraged historical discussion within school as well as leading trips to lectures at London Universities. I have also started a series of podcasts with a fellow student covering an historical event for every year of the 20th century; we're only four years in, but I have personally researched and presented on the formation of U.S Steel and the building of the Berlin-Baghdad railway. Outside of historical interests, I am currently directing my second dramatic production - The History Boys - as well as having appeared in several others - notably in a billowing blue dress as the Dowager Lady Bracknell; my involvement in drama has given me greater team working skills and confidence. I have competed in public speaking at a national level in front of several thousand people - being a finalist in the Jack Petchey Speak Out! Competition in 2012. I am also involved in music at school, as I have attained grade 6 flute and play regularly in school orchestras and bands; the challenges of attending rehearsals both musical and theatrical has put my time management skills to the test and encouraged better organisation of my academic work and school life in general. Furthermore, time spent at a solicitor's in Holborn and Snaresbrook Crown Court has developed my research and analytical skills whilst convincing me not to pursue law. To conclude, I am a highly motivated and committed student, with a love of historical study, who would thrive in the rigorous academic environment of a university degree.

History (Oxford)

As a historian I relish the contemplation of varied evolving viewpoints and forming my own perspectives. After reading "History and The Historians" by John Warren I was made acutely aware that there is no empirical way of interpreting an event or period in history, or any true consensus from historians. I was particularly intrigued by Post Modernism, which I had previously encountered in English Literature, the concept that history is simply a subjective narrative and essentially a work of fiction, which cannot even be given a degree of reliability by language, itself being highly idiosyncratic. Although I disagree largely with the assumptions made by post modernists, who would be content to render events such as the Holocaust as "morally subjective", I nevertheless enjoyed the critique of Western imperialist history, described as "Orientalism" by Edward Said, a pioneer of the movement. The attraction of History is that it allows freedom of thought, debate and is a dynamic academic study.

I am fascinated by the progression of ideas, ideologies and political movements, which often lead to social changes, affecting the narrative of global history. After reading "Chavs, The Demonization Of The Working Class" by Owen Jones, I became critical of the victory of Thatcherism, which challenged not only the social democratic post war consensus, but redefined how the British class system would operate alongside monetarist economic policy. I admired this work as it reflected an often-controversial view of modern Britain, rejected by the current political establishment. The focal point of the polemic study was the role of class in society and the deliberate denigration of the working class for political ends, by both the Conservatives and New Labour. The focus upon class as the main determinant of political and historical development, was in the vein of Marxist historiography. Although I largely appreciate this "economic base" view of human behaviour, I am critical of the rejection of social and cultural factors, which are essential to historical change. Hobsbawm shares a similar analysis of Marxist teachings and his work "The New Century", a synoptic overview of major trends during the last century, masterfully draws links and similarities between events and modes of thought, using class, culture and science to explain progress.

My passion for political history has influenced my EPQ, entitled "To what extent did Attlee's 1945-51 government attempt to revolutionise Britain?" I explore the significance of Attlee's reforming ministry, seeking to answer whether Labour truly did implement Socialist policies and lay the framework for a "New Jerusalem". I concluded that Labour did indeed establish a groundbreaking settlement, which was achieved despite the context of debt, industrial decline and a waning Empire. In the words of Nye Bevan "Socialism is the language of priorities" and the NHS, welfare state and legacy of full employment changed the lives of working people for a generation. Despite class divisions remaining in place and a state capitalist approach to nationalisation, Labour fulfilled their commitment to the electorate.

Last year I carried out work experience in Parliament with Simon Hughes, deputy leader of the Liberal Democrats. This furnished me with an awareness of the machinery at the heart of the political system, the complexities of law making and history behind our democracy. Outside of the syllabus I have demonstrated a passion for history, being president of the school History Society. As well as leading my own presentations on topics including the "Paris Commune of 1871", I organise speakers, external talks (including the visit of a Cambridge Professor) and after school trips to lectures and museums. My role in History Society broadens my own historical awareness as I can learn from my peers, exhibits leadership and ingenuity of my own, whilst crucially helping to share my own fervour for the subject with others.

History (Cambridge)

What really sparked my interest in History was listening to some of my family's stories, particularly my great-grandmother's daring escape from the Bolsheviks' massacre of her family in 1917. When in Year 6 we studied the Russian Revolution, it was therefore of enormous interest to me and really began my curiosity for, not only how History shapes the world we live in on a large scale, but also who we are and where we have come from. One of my favourite books when I was younger was E.H. Gombrich's 'A little History of the World', especially the opinions he held, as an Austrian, towards the Treaty of Versailles and Wilson's 'betrayal'. This was my first encounter with non-British views of History and inspired me to look beyond the textbook. I hoped to achieve this through my school's History society, editing the magazine and presenting talks on Napoleon III and Scott & Shackleton with a future talk on Japan in the pipeline. For both of these topics two distinct interpretations were given. Bresler in his biography took any opportunity to praise Napoleon III whereas Bierman's account was very critical of Napoleon and his rise to power. Similarly Ranulph Fiennes in his Scott biography counters modern convention, defending Scott's actions and decisions from personal experience. I am a keen supporter of the school's Classics and Political Economy Societies as Political and Ancient History also appeal to me. I have recently completed a YASS course in Archaeology which helped me to develop my understanding of ancient civilisations, something I have always found fascinating, and opened up many new stimulating fields to me.

My study of the French Revolution was an incredibly enjoyable aspect of the AS syllabus. Our detailed investigation of primary sources in particular was a new approach to History I found very exciting. I am currently reading Eric Hobsbawm's 'The Age of Revolution' which considers the impact of the French (and the Industrial) Revolution not only in Europe but in world politics, culture and ideology. It provides a compelling argument for the revolution's importance and, by the revolution's encouragement of similar British liberalism, complements our course on Gladstone and Disraeli. In both these courses the different approaches to interpreting the political and moral incentives behind the sources and acts were of great interest to me. Even more fascinating however were the links created between the various factors giving a glimpse into how each event is totally reliant on a huge array of causes. This reinforced my belief that to really understand the modern world, History is vital.

Through volunteering at the Horniman Museum, I help provide an interactive approach to History for children (and often their parents too!). My aim is to get them involved in a subject that has absorbed me for years and pass on my enthusiasm. As a member of the Air Training Corps I have a strong sense of commitment, duty and leadership as well as an ability to perform well under pressure. My communication has also been honed not only at cadets, but in drama, most recently in a production of 'Our Country's Good'. I have also shown commitment to music and sport, working towards my Grade 6 French Horn award and representing the school in squash. As Chairman of the Sixth Form Council I am responsible for organising the leavers' event, ensuring the Sixth Form's facilities are maintained and also providing a voice in school affairs. This summer I completed a World Challenge expedition to Africa which was an incredible experience giving me an insight of tribal African culture. However it also taught me huge independence and was a truly inspirational month, it is something I am very eager to repeat in the future.

Mainly, however, I hope to continue and further my passion for History in the coming years, a passion which has captured my imagination for almost half my life.

HSPS (Cambridge)

Curled up on the sofa with a book called 'Children Just Like Me' by A. and B. Kindersley is one of my earliest childhood memories. It showed real children living in wildly different circumstances across the world in terms comprehensible to a child, illustrating their school, home and everyday life. This early preoccupation with how others live developed into an interest in internationalism, equity and politics and eventually my choice of degree subject.

Studying the development of British democracy and the French Revolution at A level showed me the recurring themes and contrasts in history and their relevance to contemporary politics. Out of a wish to understand more about the precise positioning of the Labour Party and how political philosophy can be translated into implementable policies I read Phillip Gould's 'The Unfinished Revolution'. His analysis of the emergence of New Labour reveals the difficulties of adapting to electoral opinion whilst maintaining ideological continuity and consistent social policy. I like mathematics and quantitative analysis and his quasi-epidemiological view of shifts in support for political parties is intriguing. I closely examined a more particular policy in my Extended Project Qualification about asylum seeker destitution. In it I investigated the difficulties faced by asylum seekers and the political challenges and intractable nature of the problem.

The different ideas people have about fairness and equality, and how individuals, communities and states organise themselves and interact with each other seem inherently interesting to me. Exploring these issues, I read 'Justice' by Michael Sandel, in which he examines the ways in which morality and politics connect and I became interested in how different societies attempt to balance the tensions between individual freedoms and the common good. In Barbara Demick's 'Nothing to Envy', set in North Korea where personal freedoms are severely limited, I began to understand the fundamental importance of free speech to politics, international relations and stable societies. Chairing my school's Amnesty International group allowed me to further develop an interest in the notions of citizenship, equality and human rights. I initiated a school campaign for the continuing involvement of women in the Afghan Peace Process and hosted an information night attended by representatives from Amnesty and legal organisation Liberty. I was then invited by the Foreign Office Minister Alistair Burt to attend a seminar on the issue.

Visiting my sister in Ecuador I witnessed the work of a charity providing education for street market children and stayed with an indigenous tribe of the Amazon rainforest along the River Napo. This experience reinforced my awareness of the wide variation of opportunities afforded in different cultural contexts and inspired my wish to take a gap year. I have continued to pursue these interests by regularly attending lectures, including one by JM Severino at the LSE on the international, social and economic impacts of global policy and changing demographics.

I enjoy reading widely around social issues, recently Libby Brooks 'Story of Childhood'. I have gained work experience at Matrix law chambers and the House of Commons, obtaining a close-up view of the British judiciary and political systems. I helped produce my school history magazine, participating in the Political Economy society, Culture Committee, Theatre Society and drama productions, playing the organ, ukulele and piano and singing in the choir. I surf, sail, am a bartender at the Royal Opera House and have won a paid internship at KPMG to fund travelling to South America to improve my Spanish.

HSPS (Cambridge)

Growing up in Lewisham has opened my eyes to a range of contentious political and social issues. Were the riots of 2011 a justified expression of political alienation, or simply a disregard for the law? Will the redevelopment of Lewisham town centre help bring prosperity to the area, or drive out poorer residents as a result of gentrification? Polarising debates such as these have fuelled my interest in politics, sociology and other social sciences, motivating me to study a degree in which I can use multiple academic disciplines to fully explore the complex issues we face today.

Studying the mass politicisation of urban workers in revolutionary France sparked my initial interest in how democracies have developed across the world, prompting me to read Lijphart's 'Patterns of Democracy'. I found this comparative analysis of different democratic states extremely perceptive as a critique of majoritarian democracies, thus affirming my own belief that fundamental changes are needed within the British political system in order to address issues such as the lack of a representative voting system. Keen to examine the role played by individual leaders, I read 'The Prince' and was struck by the relevance of Machiavelli's analysis to political leaders in Western democracies today, despite the historical origins of the text. For me, the electoral success of the Conservatives in 2015, following the punitive programme of austerity pursued by David Cameron and George Osborne, reinforced Machiavelli's belief that a 'cruel prince' can still win the favour of his people.

Attending a Politics Summer School with the Debate Chamber allowed me to examine social issues, such as income inequality, from a political viewpoint, highlighting the links between politics and other social sciences. Wilkinson and Pickett's 'The Spirit Level' offered me a sociological perspective on how these increasing economic disparities exacerbate problems such as crime and mental illness, while 'Mind the Gap' by Mount presented convincing arguments as to how these inequalities reinforce the ideas of social classes within Britain - divisions which I have seen manifest themselves in London through education and housing. Independent research has enabled me to combine my growing interest in sociology with other political and economic concepts. In my entry for the Royal Economic Society's essay competition I argued how high levels of income inequality hinder economic growth, while I am using my Extended Project Qualification to explore the impact of social media on the 2015 general election, discovering that targeted advertising was particularly successful in attracting voters.

In my role as co-president of my school's Political Economy society, I have helped promote student engagement with politics, demonstrating my organisational abilities by arranging weekly talks from both pupils and external speakers. Working in the offices of my local MP, as well as campaigning in multiple elections, has given me a unique insight as to how politicians and political parties operate, furthering my knowledge of contemporary politics and British democracy. On top of this, learning to play the cello and piano has improved my time-management skills, balancing extra-curricular activities alongside my studies. I am also an active member of the Scout Association, serving as a Patrol Leader in my unit at the World Scout Jamboree in Japan in the summer of 2015. This experience helped me to develop key leadership qualities, while visiting the Hiroshima Peace Park during my trip highlighted the importance of global political cooperation to prevent conflict.

As I have become more politically and socially aware, my desire to fully explore and understand the problems facing modern societies has grown rapidly. The opportunity to examine these issues from a range of perspectives appeals to me on both a personal and academic level, motivating me to study an interdisciplinary degree at university.

Law (Oxford)

From the right to freedom to the right to privacy, the law is both a universal tool of resolution, and an instrument of change; this has awakened my sense of justice, and encouraged my natural curiosity for the way in which society interacts as a whole.

Whilst my interests focus predominantly on the role of law in politics, I endeavour to expand my legal knowledge through my school's Law Society, of which I am currently the President. Through discussions and presentations, as well as the inception of our cross-curricular legal journal, designed and edited by myself, the society's aim is to discover more about the relevance of the law within current affairs. Over a recent discussion about defamation law, one issue raised was the problem of free speech becoming a civil liability, and under which circumstances censorship is necessary. I believe there is no real boundary, and my interest in questions regarding such moral absolutes is one that I am eager to cultivate at a higher level.

My interest in law is augmented by a fascination with its social application. Helena Kennedy's 'Eve was Framed' has opened my eyes to the role of women in law; this awareness has been complemented by my research into Femin Ijtihad, an organisation that seeks to improve the defence of women's rights in South Asian courts. In addition, the way in which culture, religion and the law affect women are concepts I have explored through my Extended Project. My involvement in Amnesty International has taught me the relevance of human rights on law; as a keen debater, I am constantly inspired to analyse this through a range of different perspectives, and have been placed among the top four teams in the London Debate Challenge.

During my time in a barrister's chambers, working with clerks alerted me to the importance of organising cases prior to their presentation. Further time spent witnessing a trial gave me insight into the investigative and rational qualities required of barristers, similar to the skills I have gained as an economist and a mathematician. In addition, a week working in litigation and commercial contracts highlighted the need for linguistic precision in the study of law, something I feel I have acquired through my study of French and English. Uniting these assets with my innate love of intellectual stimulation has served to advance my legal aspirations.

My communication skills have been honed by my involvement in the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts, with whom I have gained a Grade 8 in Communications and have ranked among the top students in the country. Utilising these in my role as the Marketing Director of a Young Enterprise team has permitted me to express my opinions with clarity, invaluable in my role as an Ambassador Prefect. Volunteering with St. John Ambulance has also required a high level of discipline, further reflected in my ongoing dedication to the arts: I am working towards Grade 8 in flute, which I have played in several national orchestras. An integral part of my extra-curricular life is in my pursuit of Indian classical dance, which allows me to maintain an element of my heritage and a healthy appreciation for other cultures. The combination of my interests in so many areas mirrors the diversity of the study of law.

My ideas on morality and pragmatism are consistently challenged by the evolutionary nature of the law, and the resourceful, yet logical nature of its manifestation. The notion of studying law, therefore, is one that continues to excite me as I look to the future, both with the aim of practicing as a barrister, and in using the law as a catalyst for progression.

Law (Cambridge)

Exciting and perpetually evolving, Law has a greater impact on society than any other subject. When considering the world around me, it is clear that everybody is affected by Law, and I am looking forward to embarking on a challenging and rewarding career path through the study of Law at University.

Having read Glanville Williams' "Learning the Law", which I found informative and stimulating, my desire to read Law was reinforced. Gaining an understanding of the English court system and familiarising myself with legal terminology, exam techniques and the research skills promoted by the book will be invaluable to me throughout my studies. I also enjoyed the case study approach of Barnard, O'Sullivan and Virgo's "What about Law?", and was very interested by the legal judgments in the sections on Tort and the Law of Contract.

I was extremely privileged to undertake my first work experience placement at Clifford Chance, shadowing Helen Carty, a Partner at the firm. Following a session of initial training on the IT systems, I was introduced to current cases being worked on in litigation. Whilst at Clifford Chance, I read through case notes and listened to conference calls with clients, which provided me with valuable insight into the work of solicitors. I was also tasked with researching and producing a one-page summary on the International Criminal Court. At the end of my placement, I was advised that Clifford Chance would welcome me back for further training, and invited to apply for their Vacation Scheme for Law students in the second year of their degree. This will allow me to put into practice the knowledge I have acquired whilst studying for my Law degree, and I look forward to this with great anticipation.

In July, I enjoyed a mini-pupillage with 7 Bell Yard Chambers, London, observing a variety of Crown Court cases, and learning about the distinct and different roles of solicitors and barristers. My time in the courts was interesting and eye-opening and confirmed that my decision to enter the legal profession is right for me. Reading Law at University will equip me with the subject knowledge prerequisite to a career in Law, and this will be supported by the skills I have developed in analysis and problem-solving.

This year, I have been able to successfully time-manage my A Level courses and embark on a Science module with The Open University (completed and passed this Spring), and I have commenced the study of a second. For recreation, I enjoy walking and playing squash, finding that these pastimes allow me to focus and concentrate on my studies in addition to keeping me fit.

I am currently a Sixth Form Science Prefect, a position of responsibility which I take very seriously, and always uphold to the best of my ability. This year, my roles as a Prefect have included helping to prepare an assembly, visiting a primary school to assist the students with their learning, and teaching primary school groups in a Year 5 Maths and Science day.

In summary, I am excited to be commencing my Law degree next year. I believe that as I progress, I will be able to make an informed decision as to how I should specialise and I look forward to my journey of discovery at University.

Maths (Oxford)

Mathematics is commonly referred to as the language of the universe. It is a discipline required to understand everything, from the formation of black holes in space to the current economic climate. It is this underpinning of everything that drives my passion for mathematics. One of my primary beliefs is that to thoroughly understand a topic, you must first learn the principles. I hope that studying mathematics to a degree level will enable me to master the basics of a range of scientific disciplines.

My interest in maths began at a young age, and was clear at primary school. There, and across the whole duration of my education, I achieved many certificates in all three levels of the UKMT Maths Challenge, and was a member of the school's Maths Challenge team. Having gone to secondary school a year early, I found that my interest was propelled by the introduction of more advanced concepts.

My commitment to mathematics and my enthusiasm to understand the topics of maths has proved itself through my excellent GCSE and AS results. To embellish this I am keen to broaden my knowledge beyond the curriculum. For instance, I learned about the basic concepts of matrices in my FP1 module and became very interested, so researched the topic. I watched a series of lectures given at MIT by Prof. Strang, that I found on the MIT Open Courseware website, to further my understanding. This presented me with basic topics of university level Linear Algebra, such as Gaussian Elimination, Eigenvectors and Eigenvalues. I discovered that their application is crucial in a wide scope of areas, ranging from computing to civil engineering to business. Another example, in my D1 module, I learned about the Simplex Method. Again, I read more about the method, and found that this mathematical technique, developed by George Dantzig, was used as a method of optimising the effectiveness of rations. It is now widely used in economics and finance. Through my explorations I observed that mathematics is a science of a boundless nature, something I find fascinating and endearing about the field. Studying Physics at A-Level has given me a wider understanding of the applied uses of mathematics, as many of the subjects have a considerable basis in maths. Numerous formulae used in the course can be derived mathematically, an activity I find engaging. Through countless practical experiments, Chemistry has taught me the importance of accuracy and rigour, a skill vital in the subject field of Mathematics. I am also extending my academic work in Maths by attending STEP classes, and studying an extra Further Maths module, FP3. Over the summer, I had a week of work experience at SpreadCo, a leading spread betting and CFD trading company. There, I picked up some advanced IT skills related to the Software Development Life Cycle, including programming languages such as C#, Python and F#, and the use of QA testing techniques. In addition, I learnt how maths is a vital instrument for instant calculations required by the trading market, and for modelling real world financial scenarios. Outside of my curricular studies, I play for my school's 1st XV rugby team. We recently toured South America, giving me a much needed experience of different cultures. I am also a cofounder of my school Maths Society, where we help fellow students broaden their mathematical horizons. Last year I was a member of the year 12 Young Enterprise team. All these activities have provided me with important teamwork skills that will undoubtedly be helpful not only at university, but also later in my career.

I am enthusiastically and optimistically determined to complete my undergraduate studies in mathematics successfully and hopefully to continue to postgraduate level, where advanced research and challenges are open for me to contribute in the science I enjoy most.

Maths (Cambridge)

I have excelled at Maths since an early age and have always found joy in finding how things work. As Maths underpins almost everything in modern society, the key to understanding everything is understanding Maths. I believe that studying it will prepare me for a wide variety of potential careers. I find maths to be one of the most interesting and useful subjects in existence and enjoy using it to solve problems, both mathematical and otherwise. I was appointed as a Maths Prefect, which allowed me the opportunity to assist the learning of others in the weekly maths clinics, where I mostly aided other members of my year group with their mathematical studies. As a prefect I also helped with the school's Year 5 Maths and Science Day, where I was a co-ordinator for the maths carousel, leading primary students and co-ordinating my fellow prefects in their roles. I felt that my prefecture has aided both my team skills and leadership skills, as well as enhancing my mathematical skills through teaching others.

Amongst other books, I've particularly learnt from the book 'Chaos' by James Gleick. I found this supplemented my understanding of Chaos Theory, which I had gained from writing and presenting my Higher Project on Chaos the previous year. Reading 'Chaos' enlightened my understanding of the realms of mathematical and scientific research and how they interact with each other, as well as enhancing in my understanding of Chaos Theory from the previous year. Following this I have written a mathematical article for my school's academic journal regarding the discoveries of Lorenz and his contributions to Chaos Theory, which was well received. I am currently working on an extended project on mathematical philosophy, entitled 'Was Maths discovered or invented?' Whilst this project is still under way, it has already been an informative experience into the thoughts behind maths and its role in the universe that I am enjoying discovering.

As a former Scout I achieved the Chief Scout's Gold Award, the highest badge of Scouting, which required the large amount of hard work and dedication that I put into any project that I undertake, be it academic or not. This led to me attending an Explorer Troop, through which I gained access to a variety of volunteering and leadership opportunities, as well as the opportunity to try many activities that I wouldn't have normally attempted, and these widened my personal horizons.

I play the oboe, having recently achieved Grade 5, and I regularly play in a wind band at the borough's music centre. I feel that through playing the oboe I am able to adapt to new situations (such as a new piece of music) quickly; a skill that I find also transfers well into my academic work: I am able to adapt and learn new skills easily and can readily take to difficult tasks.

In the UKMT Maths Challenge I have regularly come top of my year group and, on three occasions, school. I have qualified for the first Olympiad round every year that I have attempted the challenge. I believe that this shows my mathematical skill is of a high level. I regularly attend STEP and MAT classes in order to prepare for these additional examinations and have thus far found them to be enjoyable as they challenge and extend beyond the A-Level course. I help manage the school's Film Club, where I organise the scheduling for my fellow leaders. My mathematical ability lends itself to this role, with the use of logical skills in time tabling the use of cameras, and organisational skills in the allocation of tasks at the club's meetings.

I will attend a trip to CERN in October that I hope will help me to learn even more about areas of physics that I enjoy. I look forward to being able to see the frontier of scientific discovery in action. I am excited for the challenges of studying at university and hope that I will gain experiences that will equip me well for the future.

Medicine (Oxford)

When we personalise disease, it becomes far more striking than considering it on a scale too large to fathom. It is inspiring that this poignant notion is mirrored in the fabric of the NHS where individualised healthcare is implemented on a mass scale. My appreciation of the body's complexities, in both its resilience and its frailty, motivates me to study science and the privilege of supporting people in difficulty inspires me to pursue Medicine.

I find the 'Why' questions of science, in a proximate and more recently in an evolutionary sense, are most exciting and so I have been motivated to develop my interests beyond the AS syllabus. For instance, 'Why We Get Sick,' discusses how evolutionary principles can inform medical knowledge and practice. Here, my favourite idea was the Trade-Off hypothesis, which argues that many of the body's perceived flaws are in fact compromises made over time. This synergised well with further reading from Student BMJ, which has deepened my interest in the applications of science. Whilst researching breast cancer for my EPQ, I was fascinated to learn about the controversies of mammographic screening and the modalities of therapy in the NHS. I also enjoyed reading 'The Epigenetics Revolution,' where I was interested to learn how DNA methylation is a mechanism in gene repression, which is essential to cell differentiation. I have recently begun an Open University module, 'Molecules, Medicines and Drugs,' to explore the biochemistry of such processes further. Having read more widely, I realise how little I know but at the same time I relish the enormity of the science that I am yet to encounter.

Whilst shadowing doctors in both primary and secondary care, I witnessed the reality of good clinical practice. Communication skills were crucial in probing, informing and supporting patients whilst teamwork, as evident in multidisciplinary meetings, transcended the intuitions of any one doctor. Observing doctors evaluate risks versus benefits before requesting endoscopies or coronary angiograms, showed me how technology is used responsibly to inform diagnoses. The distinction between obligation and compassion was also demonstrated to me when the consultant spent time reassuring a particularly distressed patient with Parkinson's disease. It was inspiring for me to witness and it illustrated how the role of a doctor goes beyond diagnosing and treating. Eager to understand how neurological degenerative diseases developed, I chose to study Parkinson's disease for my Biology AS report. I was interested to learn how a loss of dopaminergic neurons affected mood as well as movement. Volunteering at my local hospital over seven months, where I fed and spoke to patients, revealed to me that medicine is often about managing disease rather than curing it. I found it challenging to engage patients but empathising with them and persevering nonetheless was gratifying.

In addition to my studies I have immersed myself in many enjoyable activities. As School Captain I have sharpened my communication skills by leading and delegating when organising school events whereas as vice-president of Medics Society I have enjoyed a supportive role. Having represented my school in both cricket and basketball, I have learned the value of teamwork. Taking lead roles in school plays was a rewarding experience because of the intriguing characters I played. I also cherish the exposure to a unique musical culture that I gained in achieving distinction in my Grade 6 Karnatik Percussion practical and theory exams.

I'm aware that medicine is a challenging profession, which requires considerable personal sacrifice, but I feel I have the empathy, interpersonal skills and desire to care for people in order to succeed as a doctor. Above all, I can fulfill my passion for science in the social context of serving not just individual patients but the community at large.

Medicine (Cambridge)

Medicine is a multifaceted, dynamic field that I would like to be part of. I am an enthusiastic learner and have essential qualities, which when further developed, would make me a responsible and worthy practitioner. The deep job satisfaction and commitment my parents show to their medical careers has impacted on me enormously and inspired me to become a doctor. The plethora of medical literature around the house is indicative of how continuous learning is an integral part of being a doctor. This aspect, together with the empathetic and diagnostic roles of a doctor, appeal to my personality.

Over the past two years I was lucky to gain placements in both primary and secondary care, which enhanced my understanding of applied sciences and further confirmed my resolve to study medicine. Cumulatively, I observed and appreciated a wide range of essential interpersonal skills, pertinent to the practice of medicine. Shadowing a GP, I was impressed by how the doctor approached his patients and conducted his consultations. Listening and talking to a patient in a very holistic and familiar way showed that there was mutual trust and respect between them. My experience with a Breast Unit highlighted how doctors have to be very skilful and able, in order to recall from the thorough knowledge of their specialism to apply to individual cases. This was very much demonstrated when I attended two MDT meetings and the diagnostic and prognostic clinics that followed. Care of a patient who needed replacement of privately performed cosmetic implants enhanced my understanding of the complex issues of NHS funding. Another case of a lady who had returned after alternative cancer therapy tested the consultant's patience, knowledge and persuasive skills for her to agree to conventional scans. I have learnt that all doctors, be it at a GP surgery or hospital, require the same skills of passion and commitment to patient centred care.

My time at an IVF Unit and a Research Oncology Unit emphasised the importance of new knowledge in the development of medicine. These placements and attendance at two medicine master classes inspired me to conduct my own personal research and contribute articles and presentations to school journals and societies. The topics I covered were IVF, Herceptin Treatment for Breast Cancer and Passive Smoking. These projects greatly enhanced my analytical reading and writing skills. I enjoy reading the BMJ and popular medical books such as Do No Harm and Bad Science. I was particularly impressed by the way Ben Goldacre critically scrutinises alternative remedies, which highlighted the importance of evidence-based medicine to me.

I hold several positions of leadership at school, the most responsible being Vice Captain of School. Volunteering at a charity shop for nine months and my on going commitment on a hospital ward has enriched my cultural and social understanding. Having to manage my time positively and productively is challenging but continues to be energising and motivating. Accomplishing the bronze and silver DofE awards encouraged me to take on a bigger challenge. My recent expedition as a research volunteer in the Peruvian Amazon taught me how to adjust and adapt to an unfamiliar, demanding environment and to work with team members with differing temperaments. Playing in the school's rugby 1st team is both immense fun and therapeutic. Working with others towards the same goal has impressed on me how collaborative effort can be very rewarding. My varied extra-curricular activities enable me to think more laterally and become more competent and confident in articulating my ideas.

My experiences so far have contributed towards my personal maturity and inculcated in me the importance of diligence, dedication and determination. I am passionate about medicine. I have confidence in my stamina and ability to rise to the demanding rigours of medical studies and to the socially responsible and accountable career that follows.

MFL (Oxford)

Languages and literature define the way I think, speak and regard the world around me. I believe that they have greatly influenced my development, both intellectually and emotionally. I feel that literature gives me a second perspective and introduces me to new ideas, which enable me to understand the importance of language and its role in life.

With a bilingual background, an East-meets-West upbringing in both south London and the Sri Lankan hill country, it was only natural that I should fall in love with language study. On reading Baudelaire's "L'invitation au voyage," I was struck by the ethereal nature of the language but was puzzled by his grouping of the contrasting concepts of luxury - which excites the mind - and calm. Lullaby-like, the tone seemed melancholic because the world created is so unreal. This left me wondering whether this reflected the disturbance of Baudelaire's own mind. I much preferred the peaceful poetry of Santa Teresa de Jesús, with "Nada te turbe" being particularly refreshing in its simplicity and depth of devotion.

What has surprised me is the similarity in styles across both languages. Literary styles often transcend their time periods - Maupassant's comic tone in showing poverty in "Le vieux" shares many similarities with Gabriel García Márquez's humorous voice in "El coronel no tiene quien le escriba." Both narrators use objects as key aspects of the narrative - Maupassant uses the unripe apple as a symbol of how poverty restricts the Chicots from reaching their full potential - the wait for it to ripen is akin to the wait for death. Márquez, in his quintessentially Latin American symbolism, uses the moth-eaten umbrella to represent Augustín, and how the colonel's happy memories have faded over time.

A curiosity to find out more about French and Spanish influences led me to explore Arabic culture. I was shocked by the depiction of Islamic women as weak in Driss Chraïbi's "Le passé simple", and was frankly disgusted by the father figure. However, on occasion I found Chraïbi's language and tone excessively harsh and detracting from the story itself. Inspired by Moroccan Arabic culture, I researched "loan words" borrowed from Arabic, particularly in Spanish, and I was astounded by the relationship between Islamic colonisation and linguistic changes. I also wrote the article "Le Maroc- L'escroc qui a volé mon cœur" for the Olavian Languages Journal.

Volunteering in India has honed my communication skills, through working at an elders' home, an ashram and teaching English to underprivileged children. My exposure to Hindi made me ponder the links between Indo-European languages and led to my Extended Project Qualification, based on the question "To what extent are Sanskrit and Latin related?"

Through my internship at the Spanish newspaper El Ibérico, I greatly improved my conversational Spanish. During a stint as a French and Spanish teaching assistant at the inAword languages school in Chennai, I led short activities and supported the teachers. I also joined the human rights organisation Redress as a volunteer translator. I am working towards my Grade 6 in guitar, and trained in Indian music and dance, founding an Indian music group. At school, I founded the Modern Languages Society - where we discuss topics from cinema and music to politics and history. I mentor two younger languages students, and created a Tamil language club. These activities led to my victories as Modern Languages winner and overall winner at the National Student of the Year Awards. My role as Vice-Captain of School has also encouraged me to develop a strong work ethic and good time management.

I firmly believe that every language I have studied has offered me a new vision, and I feel excited at the prospect of further developing my wider perspectives. Undoubtedly, my study of French and Spanish has shown me so many additional ways of exploration and self-expression, and I hope I will continue to find more.

MFL (Oxford)

A profound desire to adopt the mindset of 'the native' whenever abroad has naturally led me to the study of language, for it is my belief that in order to truly comprehend a nation one must first examine its linguistic conventions. Whether it is being able to identify when to use the formal 'vouvoyer' rather than the informal 'tutoyer' in French conversation, or even understanding the vast disparity between written and spoken Czech, these fundamental nuances can profoundly affect both the tone and the message of what is being communicated.

Having attained a high level of proficiency in a range of European languages, I was eager to engage myself in Middle Eastern philosophy. Disheartened by the onslaught of negative media representation of the Arab world, I started to conduct my own research into the intricacies of the region; however, I believe that in order to fully appreciate a debate, it is paramount to be knowledgeable about what is said on both sides. It is my hope that by acquiring language skills in Arabic and Persian I will have access to a wealth of 'untapped' resources, too often overlooked in mainstream news outlets. Discerning the overarching national sentiment in these countries is invaluable to gaining an understanding of how this shapes both the cultural and political landscape.

I was particularly struck by the rich depictions of Syrian and Iranian cultures respectively in Khaled Khalifa's 'In Praise of Hatred' and Christopher de Bellaigue's 'In the Rose Garden of the Martyrs,' the former whose literary impact must surely be amplified when read in the original Arabic. Upon discovering an interview by Oriana Fallaci with Mohammad Reza Shah I was intrigued by his views on democracy, and his paradoxical attitudes towards women in society despite his apparently liberal efforts in the 'Enqelāb-e Sefid.' I have also explored Persian cinema, where Asghar Farhad's portrayals of domestic life reveal a side of Iranian society not often seen in the West, and I was impressed by how the director Jafar Panahi defies government censorship in 'Taxi Tehran' all the while framing it in a highly imaginative composition.

My previous independent study of languages has included teaching myself the 'Azбука' which unlocked a plethora of Russian literature, and I have also explored Norwegian, Serbian and Catalan among others as a stimulating intellectual exercise. A commission for an article from a Czech cultural magazine inspired me to read David Abram's 'Spell of the Sensuous,' examining how the shift from oral tradition to written culture has alienated us from the natural world and radically changed our perceptions of daily life. This compelled me to re-evaluate the purpose of language, and I began to contemplate the wider implications spoken word has in dictating the very fabric of our world through the evocation of the senses, ideas I developed further in my study of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

Between now and the new year I will be working and learning the rudiments of Persian while I reapply to university. From January to April I will go to Spain to work and improve my Spanish; after this I will re-sit my Spanish A level.

I believe that my fervent interest in the workings of languages paired with an assiduous approach to learning makes me suitable for this course, whilst exposing me to different worldviews that constantly challenge my perspectives. In addition to offering me the indispensable opportunity of living abroad, this degree would provide a platform for a fascinating career and bring a fresh insight to whichever field it leads me to.

Music (Cambridge)

My earliest memory of music is playing piano duets with my Granddad even before I began lessons aged 5, which engaged me with music from an early age and led to me taking up the piano, violin and more recently the organ. One aspect of music-making I enjoy regularly now is orchestral playing. With the Lydian Orchestra I performed Tchaikovsky's 5th Symphony which is now one of my favourite pieces because of the rich harmonies, elegant melodies and striking climatic points, particularly in the last movement. Playing this work in a full orchestra was very exciting and helped solidify that music is what I want to pursue. It also sparked an interest in the music of Tchaikovsky resulting in me exploring his life and music further in addition to my A-level studies, where I have the opportunity to analyse specific pieces in more detail. I have found it very interesting looking at how the different periods of music reflect different styles and how music has developed through the ages. For example the way in which Brahms writes for instruments and how that differs to composers from earlier periods such as Haydn or Holborne.

At a university study day we considered the question 'Why should we care who composed a work?'. Through discussions with other A-Level musicians, we evaluated the merits of both knowing and not knowing the composer of a piece to be performed. Previously I had always assumed the composer's identity was a vital factor when starting to prepare a performance; however, by not looking at the composer you can produce an original and personal performance with no preconceived ideas.

Being the Organ Scholar at my Church provides me with the opportunity to play regularly for services and I have gained an award in a KCOA Organ festival. Further keyboard experiences include solo, duet and orchestral performances, and accompanying. As a violinist, I lead three orchestras and am a member of Kent County Youth, the National Scout and Guide Symphony and the Lydian Orchestras. I also sing in several choirs and have been in the church choir for 9 years. As a member of the school Motet choir we won the Barnardos Choir of the Year Competition and were finalists in the Songs of Praise Choir of the Year Competition. At school I am a member of a number of choirs and have directed a vocal ensemble.

During a week's work experience in the music department of a Prep School I accompanied pupils in a concert and assembly as well as observing class and peripatetic music lessons. This showed me the role of music in education and gave me a broader idea of music's importance in society. Playing music to residents at a Care Home and teaching piano to young children have also been really rewarding experiences which have shown me how music can transcend generations.

By studying maths and sciences at A-Level I have developed problem solving and analytical skills which link into various parts of music. The logical patterns are similar to those found in aspects of music such as chorale harmonisation and these transferable skills have aided me in my studies.

Aside from music I enjoy playing sports, including tennis and netball, and volunteering at Brownies. Achieving my Sports Leaders Level 1 Award and Bronze D of E has provided me with opportunities for leadership and teamwork as have being a Patrol Leader in Guides, a subject mentor, a music prefect and a house music captain. Currently I am a Vice-Captain of the school which provides experiences for developing organisation, responsibility and public speaking. Additionally I founded and am President of Experimental Chemistry Society which helps younger pupils improve their knowledge in a fun, exciting way.

For me, being able to investigate a diverse range of styles and inform my own performances through my studies is an exciting prospect. I am keen to develop my understanding and skills as a musician at university and I look forward to undertaking this challenge.

Music (Cambridge)

Music is an art that inspires and drives me like no other. It has played a huge part in my life from my very first piano lesson to my most recent performances. I certainly wish to carry on studying music in the future.

I have a particular love of choral music, which originates from my 5 years as a Chorister at the Queen's Chapel of the Savoy - being Head Chorister for my final two. I have continued to develop this familiarity with sacred music by singing as a Choral Scholar at the Old Royal Naval College Chapel in my gap year. Along with the familiar liturgy, singing in the National Youth Choir has enabled me to diversify my repertoire to include more contemporary Choral works. In particular, I found singing a new commission, 'Exile' by Mark Simpson fascinating, especially the opportunity to work with a living composer. This allowed us in the choir to convey everything that he wanted without speculation or doubt, which made for a fantastic premiere.

Moreover, singing MacMillan's 'Lassie wad ye loe me', Schnittke's first Choir Concerto; 'O pavellitel sushcheva fsevo' and similarly influenced works with the London Youth Chamber Choir and Rodolfus Choir sparked my interest in the varied uses of folk tunes and Gregorian chant in pieces of music. I am especially engrossed by their use within more complex works. For example, my interest was piqued in discovering how Stravinsky modifies traditional Russian and Lithuanian folk songs to fit the strange and unsettling mood of the 'Rite of Spring'.

Performing with early music ensembles and studying with Simon Standage has instilled within me an intense interest in Baroque Music. I have exercised this by writing Pastiche compositions in the Baroque style, including the 3-voice Fugue that I submitted for my A level Composition. I feel that reading Fux's 'Gradus ad Parnassus' and the Orpheus Institute's 'Towards Tonality' have helped me to understand the aspects of Baroque Music theory, enhancing the understanding of harmony and voice leading that I gained from studying Bach Chorale-harmony. The study of counterpoint has been enjoyable for me, learning about the imitative styles of the Renaissance period as well as the more recent interpretations of these old techniques by composers such as Ligeti and Shostakovich.

Studying History has helped me to contextualise the writing of music, which greatly adds to its poignancy. I am fascinated by how much Rap serves as a reaction against widespread discrimination and subjugation of African Americans. Indeed, Keyes hypothesises that the emergence of Rap from Hip Hop - particularly the work of 'NWA' - was a reaction of the strongest kind against the Reagan administration's abandonment of civil rights and rhetorical emphasis on 'real America for real Americans'. Indeed, I find that as these struggles have continued, Rap has developed as artists such as Kanye West explore new avenues for their protest.

I am excited by the prospect of new ventures, undertaking World Challenge and Duke of Edinburgh expeditions. I also took up the organ recently, which has enhanced my ability to sight-read and score read. Studying Music at University is an exciting prospect and one that will certainly help me to consolidate and improve upon my interest in Music and Musicianship.

Philosophy's heterodox nature appeals to me greatly. I read Wittgenstein and am told that there are no genuine problems in philosophy, and yet I see him later retract the tenets of his work. Gödel shows me some theorems can't be proven; Van Inwagen suggests that we are cognitively incapable of solving the problem of free will. These disparate perspectives are what makes philosophy an exciting discipline. Psychology provides a counterpoint; not only for its practical implications in varied fields of philosophy, but also for the way it challenges us to investigate people and their nature in a wholly separate way. This intellectual challenge, of combining the empirical with the hypothetical, draws me to studying these two subjects in conjunction.

My interest in philosophy originated in a desire to enrich my study of physics; so I read Ayer's 'Language, Truth and Logic'. His writing on empirical hypotheses formed a fundamental challenge to the infallibility of the scientific method which propelled me towards studying philosophy rather than physics. Ayer's link with Wittgenstein led me to read Tejedor's 'Starting with Wittgenstein' which was a powerful introduction to his thinking. The notion that one could discount causality on the basis of language was imposing, but spurious; I found his discussion of private languages to be more considered and rewarding. A Debate Chamber course in philosophy, undertaken to engage with other interested students, and Papineau's 'Philosophical Devices' introduced me to formal logic. I was then able to tackle Roy Cook's 'Paradoxes', an expansive but detailed study of the logical paradox. Priest's Enclosure Schema appealed to my desire for neatness and was convincing in its identification of a universal circularity. Another in this series, 'Free Will' by Campbell, followed on from classroom discussion on the compatibility problem. Though I was impressed by Susan Wolf's 'Deep Self View', for it seems compatible with a lack of ultimate sourcehood and holds us morally responsible for our actions, Robert Kane's questionable 'Self Forming Actions' made me ponder the implications of psychophysics in philosophy.

My exploration of psychology rekindled my interest in technology (which helped my team win second place in the national Design Ventura competition 2014), specifically within neuroscience. My reading online had primarily focused on social psychology and the development of altruism in nature, so I decided to read 'Social Neuroscience', a collection of essays exploring the conjunction between social psychology and neuroscience. The use of event related potentials and fMRI scanners in experimentation around in- and outgroup recognition, and the implications of this data on racial bias, provided a contemporary grounding for my research, especially in the wake of police shootings in the US. The idea that even those who are explicitly inclusive could be affected by implicit bias has far-reaching moral implications. This book inspired me to join the Cognitive Neuroscience Society, which has exposed me to a world of neuroscientific research into cognition. Valerie Tiberius' 'Moral Psychology - A Contemporary Introduction' and the Open University's 'Introduction to Psychology' showed me a broader range of psychological research and methodology, and convinced me of the value of studying psychology alongside philosophy- problems of personal identity, moral responsibility and political theory are all permeated by psychology.

Outside of academic life, I successfully auditioned for the National Youth Theatre and participated in their two week residential training course, which taught me valuable communication and teamwork skills which have helped me as a Year 7 prefect. I enjoy sailing and rowing, and am keen to pursue these at university. Music is a passion of mine and 'An Introduction to the Philosophy of Music' by R.A. Sharpe has, as philosophy often does, enhanced my appreciation of it.

Philosophy (Cambridge)

Contrary to popular opinion, Philosophy is not, in Blackburn's words, "impractical, unworldly, weird", but is interesting to explore and relevant to modern day discussion. For example, the concepts of free will and determinism have clear implications for the criminal justice system. If Hard Determinism holds and humans are not responsible for their actions, retribution is irrelevant and unfair; the nature of true justice changes. This kind of practical, ethical question that challenges the assumptions of life fascinates me and is why I would like to study Philosophy at university. Rather than accepting or rejecting concepts based solely on face value, I try to evaluate arguments critically as they are presented. I have pursued this interest in greater depth by choosing to focus on human rights for my Extended Project and in my role as co-Chairperson of the Amnesty International Society at school.

Last summer, I was inspired by three taster days on aspects of Philosophy I had not previously studied. The lecture on Aesthetics talked about whether forgeries have the same aesthetic value as the original. Whereas some believe that aesthetic value should be measured solely on appearance, I believe that Art is more than this. It is an expression, as Dutton says, of human "innovation and originality". Forgery, however, is an entirely different skill, involving accurately reproducing subtle characteristics of the artist and as such cannot be judged by the same criteria.

I have strengthened my interest in the history of ideas by reading Bryan Magee's 'The Story of Philosophy'. The section I found most interesting was on the pre-Socratic Greeks who produced phenomenal ideas with little information. I find the hypotheses of Thales and Anaximander particularly remarkable. They both argued scientific conclusions that were astonishingly close to what would not be proven for over 2000 years. Following this trail of highly influential developments from Thales to Newton is fascinating.

As a result of teaching children at my local church for the past five years, I have developed my ability to communicate complex ideas simply and concisely. This was a skill I further developed whilst participating in the Philosophy 4 Children scheme, as a mentor for year 7 pupils.

As a keen musician, I gained a Merit at Grade 8 on the clarinet and play in various bands and orchestras. After my GCSEs I ran a 4 day music workshop for a small group of 10 year olds, who performed their compositions to their year group at school. This was not only enjoyable but taught me how to construct and implement lesson plans, and to adapt them in unexpected circumstances. I have further developed my leadership and organisational skills through leading a fortnightly youth group at my local church. I have also enjoyed volunteering at my local library and working in a shop, both of which have helped me develop my interpersonal skills.

On my gap year I plan to gain work experience and then travel across South-East Asia, spending time particularly in China and Vietnam. I will use this year to mature and to broaden my perspectives of the world, as well as my self-discipline and independence before returning to academic study.

I welcome the challenge of university study, in particular the opportunity to form critical judgements on the most important and relevant questions of our time

Physics (Oxford)

Astrophysics explains our Universe by drawing on numerous disciplines, finding links between seemingly unconnected areas of science. While completing my EPQ on stellar nucleosynthesis, I was fascinated to see how chemical catalysis explains the CNO cycle of hydrogen burning in 2nd and 3rd generation stars, and how minute nuclear reactions dictate the giant features of star shells, clusters and galaxies. Yet what I find most intriguing about astronomy is how constantly humbling it is. The tenuous carbon production mechanism, calculated by Fred Hoyle using the anthropic principle and proven by Willy Fowler, shows a resonance reaction that is solely responsible for the carbon in our bodies. If a similar process was involved in oxygen burning, we wouldn't exist at all. It's realisations like this that make astrophysics my favourite science.

During my work experience at the Mullard Space Science Laboratory, I was part of a team designing the public outreach campaign for the 2021 SMILE space mission which will be conducted by the ESA and the CAS. We studied the successes of previous missions to develop a multi-stage plan that the scientists could follow to engage the public with their mission. We were so highly commended for this that we will perform follow up work on SMILE in the future and I will earn a Gold CREST Award. The Gaia mission team have requested our help too. I learnt a great deal from this week, furthering my knowledge of real research techniques in astrophysics, including how the Gaia telescope's photo-cells are arranged as well as how this can be used for varied measurements in its survey of the Milky Way. I constructed a 3D model of the Hyades cluster using Gaia data of stars' galactic velocities and learnt how to calculate the size and densities of Exoplanets from the change in luminosity caused by their transit. This helped me appreciate the way scientists gather information, how data is transferred in bits and the limitations of data packaging and instrument size in missions like QB50. I also learnt about the process of mission applications and how scientists have to tailor their missions to public interest and space agency budgets, which gave me insight I hope to employ in a career in astrophysics.

I have sought to deepen my scientific understanding both inside and outside the classroom. As President of the school Astronomy and the Natural Sciences societies, I organise talks and discussions and have given presentations on subjects including synesthesia and the Fermi Paradox. I also led the compilation of the first of the Society's two termly journals. In addition, I worked on a mobile app on Pulsars for The Bill Bryson Prize for Science Communication 2015. My app was placed in the top 100. I am the winner of the national Student of the Year Award in the Science and Engineering category for 2015.

As a school Vice-Captain, I lead a prefect team to organise the school's societies and outreach events, as well as co-editing the school's Academic Journal. I have participated in Dutch and Indian exchanges due to my role as an international ambassador. I greatly enjoy doing karate and was awarded the grade of 1st Kyu in Shotokan Karate by the Head of the Karate Union of Great Britain. I am now working to achieve my next grade of a 1st Dan black belt before I finish school. As an Explorer Scout I went on an expedition to Tanzania, where I managed our group's budget and made connections with locals in the villages where we distributed aid, taught in schools and built a playground for the local children. I am a keen actor and I was awarded full school colours for drama in Year 11 for my seven performances so far.

I believe I have the capability and enthusiasm to study astrophysics at a higher level. I hope that my experience of discussing science through talks, writing and technology will one day help me in my ambition to enrich peoples' knowledge and love of science.

Physics (Oxford)

Physics was not my first love; in my early school years my desire was to become a palaeontologist. As such I worked diligently in science lessons gaining my first tastes of physics learning about volume, atoms and why things float. These topics whetted my appetite for the subject and this was bolstered by my mother teaching me further about the areas we learnt in school. As I progressed through school I fell more in love with the subject, helped by an inspirational teacher and many trips to the Science Museum and Royal Observatory, Greenwich. I think that the breadth of understanding which can be derived from physics is the main reason why I am so enthralled by the subject. In what other discipline could one learn of the smallest building blocks of the quantum universe or the largest structures in the cosmos and everything in between? This all encompassing nature gives, for me, physics an edge over all other areas of study. I also believe that, since Physics studies the most basic properties of the universe, it is the most rewarding of the sciences. My enthusiasm for physics has led to me researching topics beyond the curriculum. This has strengthened my ability to solve problems within the subject and to further my interest and encourage me to read even more advanced material. I am currently working towards an EPQ which has significantly furthered my knowledge in the fields of particle physics and cosmology by focusing my reading on to the composition of dark matter, exploring neutrinos as candidates. My extended reading has also enabled me to successfully run, as chairman, the school Physics society. There is no subject that I desire to study more at university and it is my ambition to be involved in physics both at university and beyond.

My capabilities in physics must trace back to the fact that I have always been a strong mathematician. Without maths, physics would not exist in the form in which we understand it, as such I think it vital for a physicist to have a strong mathematical foundation. I have enjoyed maths since, when I was young, I found that I was very good at solving mathematical problems. I represented the school in the maths team challenge in year 8 and year 9 and was a reserve for the senior team as a year 12 student. In younger years I regularly had my answers, to questions set, published in the UKMT Problem Solving Journal. My background as a competent mathematician has helped me get to grips with more fundamental physics than I would otherwise have been able. I have attempted to even further extend my mathematical capabilities by attending a university taster course in maths at Royal Holloway. The taster course extended my mathematical skills and gave me a taste of university life. My love of solving problems within physics must surely stem from my mathematical roots.

Aside from my academic endeavours I am involved in a number of extra-curricular activities. Since first playing Eton Fives in year 7, I have been the top player in the year and now hold the role of Fives Captain which involves helping with the training of the younger players, supervising matches and organising the recruitment of new students. Not only does this role teach me leadership and organisational skills but to maintain the high octane pace of the sport at a high level requires dedication. These skills I transfer to my subject work as well. I also volunteer in a charity shop working every Saturday since August 2010. I work the shop floor which requires good communicational skills to deal with customers. I also feel that the longevity of my unpaid service at the shop demonstrates commitment, a quality which was also important in teaching myself to play guitar. Being able to manage school, volunteering and sport shows that I can timetable effectively, a skill that is very important in higher education. I therefore think that I would make a fine student at a university.

PPE (Oxford)

In recent years I have considered myself fortunate to witness an exciting period of rapid global change. From the changing political landscape of Britain, to the rise of new economic powerhouses; the way societies function and interact fascinates me. This intrigue has created a desire to understand government, economies and the principles which underpin them. PPE is a course that brings together my passions and offers an unparalleled breadth of learning.

Politics has long been an interest of mine and I regularly enjoy watching current affairs and political discussion programmes. Recently after reading a series of articles by the Economist columnist "Lexington" on the Republican primaries I took an interest in the developing extremism in the party, delivering a presentation on the subject to my school's Political Economy Society. Now as leader of this society, I have led many other discussions on such topical matters. I also take an interest in political history. Having read "The Federalist Papers", I thought the arguments for unity against foreign subversion were somewhat outdated in a post imperialist age although much of the arguments were surprisingly topical to the ideas of greater federalisation in Europe today.

Though not formally studied in school, Philosophy is something I have found intriguing. My first encounter with the subject, aged 10, was "The Philosophy Files", a young reader's introduction to the topic, opening me up to new concepts and ways of thinking. Since then I have read Simon Blackburn's "Think", a broad overview of key philosophers and ideas. I have also enjoyed classics like "The Prince", though I felt some of the ideas were happily no longer applicable in a modern context. From these I have developed an interest in the ideas of morality and free will, issues I hope to pursue further at university.

Both within and outside my school studies I have found Economics to be a fascinating topic, particularly the causes and consequences of the 2008 financial crisis. Michael Lewis' "The Big Short", gave an enlightening account of how investment banks were capable of misleading so many. Along with some time spent in unpaid work experience at an investment analysis firm, I feel I have gained a greater understanding of financial institutions. Having read other economics books supporting free markets, I found Ha-Joon Chang's "23 things..." an interesting counter-argument. Whilst I disagreed with several ideas, like how free trade is damaging developing nations and believed that there were limitations to the evidence used, I thought that some arguments like those on excessive CEO remuneration and the problem of overly mobile shareholders were more persuasive.

All these disciplines require an ability to deconstruct arguments. I feel I have been developing this and the ability to critically evaluate and clearly communicate arguments, most evidently as the leader of both my Sixth Form's Debating team and Bank of England Target 2.0 team. I have further built on this in my History and Economics A-levels through analysing sources and developing my own lines of argument.

Outside these interests I am proud to hold the position of Vice Captain of school and amongst many other responsibilities am organising the school's charitable activities this year. I take part in a variety of sports, particularly Rugby and Basketball. I am a member of Bromley Scouts and I am a Young Leader at my local troop. This summer I completed a World Challenge expedition to Ecuador. Along with the physical challenges faced it was an amazing cultural experience and gave me a first-hand look at a developing nation. Through these involvements I feel I have developed strong leadership and teamwork skills and feel a valued member of my school and wider community.

In all I do I am a committed and hard working individual. I am very excited at the prospect of pursuing my interests further and greatly look forward to studying PPE at university.

PPE (Oxford)

The year 2000 was a significant one in many ways and, for me, one was my first political memory: the Bush/Gore US Presidential Election. Coming as it did just after two years spent living in Hong Kong, the election cemented a realisation of the global scale of events. Early engagement with politics has matured into a broader concern with the moral and philosophical dimensions of economic and political processes, leading me to want to study PPE as my degree.

Throughout my academic studies I have sought to further my understanding of economics, politics and philosophy and their inter-relationships. Economics has been to the forefront of my studies, with History providing valuable context and analytical skills. In particular, studying the French Revolution led me to consider the compatibility of liberty and equality. I have developed this theme into an EPQ paper examining the question: do Western governments have a moral obligation to reduce income inequality?

This exploration of inequality has provided a focus for my reading. The utility principle from Mill's 'Utilitarianism' can be used to suggest that inequality is ethically unsound if it leads to society as a whole suffering. Machiavelli's realism in 'The Prince' argues that, where a social ill is so severe that it tends towards unrest and instability, it should not be pursued. While his perspective is valuable in establishing that the harshest realist would consider acute inequality harmful, I believe Machiavelli's criteria too extreme in a modern democratic state. Taking an economic approach to inequality, reduced social cohesion and unsustainable economic development are identified as consequences of inequalities in Coyle's 'The Economics of Enough', where she stresses that social capital is essential for a functioning economy. While Coyle is tentative in her policy suggestions, Stiglitz, in his 'The Price of Inequality', argues forcefully that growth is stifled when inequality is greatest, and convincingly advocates the duty of the state to temper the market and produce more equitable results. In contrast, Meltzer, in 'Why Capitalism?', regards the state as inefficient and regulation as certain to fail, a view I find defeatist.

In addition to exploring theories, I have gained practical experience of my interests. I heard both Stiglitz and Coyle speak at the LSE, as well as M. Moscovici, the French Finance Minister. His talk helped me understand the complexity of economic governance, with plans for fiscal adjustment, economic rebalancing, greater Eurozone integration and solidarity. I also aim to understand central banking through a forthcoming lecture by Mervyn King, especially as I am a part of my school's Bank of England 'Target 2.0' team. Visits to Parliament, Congress and the UN highlighted the adversarial, rather than consensual, nature of British politics, in contrast to the inspiring surroundings of Westminster.

Mindful of the Renaissance ideal of the Universal Man, I have also sought to foster the more creative aspects of my character. I enjoy speaking in the school Political Economy Society, debating team, and have been awarded best individual speaker prize at my borough Model UN. Music is an active interest and studying French horn to Grade 8 has offered opportunities to play with school and borough groups, performing at celebrated concert venues in the UK and Europe. Involvement in drama and sport, including participation in the Fives nationals, has also fostered a more rounded outlook. This polymath ideal applies to my chosen degree with its interdisciplinary rigour. Individually, politics, philosophy and economics are crucial areas of study, but it is in combination that they provide the most powerful insights into the complex events in the world around us.