

Year 12 Opportunities for Prospective Applicants

Thanks to the outreach work of universities and colleges, professional bodies and widening participation charities, there now exist a wide range of opportunities for UK maintained-sector students to explore Higher Education in the years before they come to apply. While many providers offer opportunities for KS4 pupils, or even younger year groups, most of these initiatives are targeted at Year 12 students and are specifically intended to encourage those students to study a particular subject at university or to apply to particular institutions, or to help them to understand what they need to do at university if they wish to pursue a particular career and how they can get there. Alongside other enrichment activities, such as wider reading, these can provide a valuable way to engage in supra-curricular exploration of students' academic interests and to explore the options available to them at university.

Cambridge, like many other top universities, does not expect its applicants to have engaged in any of these programmes because it does not judge applicants on the opportunities they have had access to during their education. However, we receive many emails from students and teachers asking whether opportunities such as these exist, so we have compiled this resource sheet to help students find the initiatives that are available to them, should they wish to take advantage of them during Year 12. It is our hope that this document will enable more students to participate in these initiatives if they wish to. Such opportunities may then provide students with additional experiences to discuss in their personal statements, or to put on their CVs in the future, but that is a secondary aim. Most importantly, students should enjoy these experiences: rather than feeling pressured to do something just because it might look 'impressive', they should use it as an opportunity to develop their own academic interests.

It should be pointed out that, in addition to those listed below, there exist many other events and programmes that are run by companies who charge participants substantial fees to attend. The University of Cambridge would not recommend that students pay to attend such courses or purchase support resources, but that they explore instead the wide variety of events, programmes and activities that are freely available through charitable widening participation initiatives.

In the final section of this document students can also find advice and guidance to help them approach providers about work experience and other opportunities. This section has been compiled in collaboration with the University Careers Service, based on their advice to graduates of the university. It is hoped that students will find this section useful in supporting them to carry out their own independent research into the opportunities available to them.

Disclaimer: the selection of WP events, programmes, initiatives and support resources listed below have been gathered from university and departmental websites, as well as the websites of charities, agencies and professional bodies and other online resources. It is not expected that applicants to Cambridge will have participated in any of them and you are never expected to pay for anything. Their purpose is not to prepare students to apply to university and students will not be at a disadvantage when applying to Cambridge if they have not succeeded in obtaining a place on any of these programmes. Many have strict eligibility criteria in accordance with the aim to widen participation in Higher Education, so it may well be that you are not eligible for some of them. Unless otherwise stated, the initiatives and resources are not endorsed by the University of Cambridge or Christ's College, which have no formal connection with them.

Summer Schools and Residential Programmes

Cambridge University Sutton Trust Summer School:

A programme of free, week-long, subject-specific residentials at the University of Cambridge for Year 12 students studying at a UK state school. Held annually in August, they offer over twenty hours of teaching from a world expert in one of twenty-six different subject groups. These provide a real sense of what it is like to study at Cambridge and also offer a taste of student life at the university, with activities like a chauffeured punt tour down the River Cam and a 'Formal Hall' celebratory dinner on the final night. Applications take place every year in January.

<https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/events/summer-schools>

Several other universities also offer Sutton Trust Summer Schools. You can find out more here:

<https://summerschools.suttontrust.com/>

Cambridge College Summer Schools and Residential:

All Cambridge Colleges host their own annual calendar of residential events and summer schools. Most are aimed at students in Year 12, but some are for Year 11s and younger students. You can find out more on individual College websites. For example, Christ's College's events are listed here:

<https://www.christs.cam.ac.uk/outreach-and-access>

You can find listings of all events run by the University of Cambridge and its Colleges here:

<https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/events-listing>

UNIQ Summer Schools:

Oxford University's equivalent of the Sutton Trust residential programme, held in Oxford every year in July and August for Year 12 state school pupils. Like the Sutton Trust it is free to attend and offers a programme of subject-specific teaching from academics at the university and social activities. Applications open every year in December.

<http://www.uniq.ox.ac.uk/>

Local Summer Schools:

There may also be options provided by universities and schools near to you. Contact your local universities or independent schools and ask them whether they host 'widening participation' or 'outreach and access to higher education' residential events. This category of events is usually free to attend, as opposed to expensive commercial summer schools, but may have certain eligibility criteria. For example, if you live in London, you might want to investigate the following options:

- King's College London, K+ programme: <http://kplus.london/>
- Imperial College London, Summer Schools: <http://www.imperial.ac.uk/be-inspired/student-recruitment-and-outreach/schools-and-colleges/students/on-campus-activities/summer-schools/>
- University College London, Summer Schools: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/prospective-students/widening-participation/activities/summer-schools>
- Harrow School 'Lumina' Oxbridge Application Course: <http://www.luminacourse.org.uk/>

Other examples around the country include:

- University of Bath – Summer Schools
<http://www.bath.ac.uk/campaigns/experience-our-year-12-summer-schools/>
- University of Birmingham – Access to Birmingham (A2B)
<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/teachers/pupil-opportunities/post-16/access-to-birmingham.aspx>

- University of Bristol – Access to Bristol
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/study/teachers/post-16/access/>
- University of Nottingham – Nottingham Potential Summer School
<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/schoolsliasion/services/nottingham-potential-summer-school.aspx>
- University of York – York Experience Summer School (YESS)
<https://www.york.ac.uk/schools-and-colleges/post-16/summer-school/>
- University of Warwick – Experience Warwick
<https://warwick.ac.uk/study/outreach/whatweoffer/summer-schools/>

Wherever you live, there will almost certainly be something like this being provided locally. Ask your UCAS/Sixth Form team at your school about what students have done in the past, email your nearest universities early in Year 12 and check their websites to find out.

Subject-Specific Initiatives – General

University of Cambridge Subject Masterclasses:

Subject Masterclasses are subject-specific events that offer students a flavour of undergraduate study and an introduction to the University of Cambridge. They are aimed at Year 12 students who intend to apply to highly selective universities and cover a wide range of subjects. You can find information about upcoming masterclasses and book places here:

<https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/events/masterclasses>

Many of the university's departments and faculties also hold similar subject-specific events.

Remember to check the general listing page for future events:

<https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/events-listing>

Cambridge College Subject 'Taster Days':

Many Cambridge Colleges run subject-specific 'taster days' throughout the year. These are usually free to attend, but may have eligibility criteria. In the first instance, it is worth checking which College is your region's Link College and emailing them or checking their website. You can do this here: <https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/colleges/area-links>

Sutton Trust 'Pathways to Professions' Programmes:

In addition to their residentials, the Sutton Trust also runs a series of pathways programmes related to particular careers and their associated university degree subjects. These free programmes include subject-specific lectures and workshops, work experience, mentoring from a current student in a related discipline and UCAS application support. As of 2018, programmes exist for the following subjects/careers:

- Banking and Finance
- Coding/Computer Science
- Law
- Medicine
- STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths)

You can find out more here: <https://www.suttontrust.com/programmes/>

Other University 'Taster Days':

As is the case for summer schools, many universities run 'taster days' and other subject-specific events for students from state schools in their local area. Check out the Widening Participation sections of local universities' websites and email their outreach teams to ask about events taking place near to you.

Subject-Specific Initiatives – Sciences

In addition to the wide range of 'taster days' and other events available for many subjects, there are also a number of science-specific options.

In2science:

In2science provide a programme for gifted Year 12 pupils. Pupils considering studying science, technology, engineering or maths (STEM) at university attend skills days and workshops and receive advice on UCAS applications. The highlight of the programme is a two-week placement in a real research lab over the summer, where pupils work alongside practicing scientists to gain insight into scientific research. The application deadline is usually in March. You can find out more and check if you are eligible here: <http://in2scienceuk.org/>

Nuffield Trust Research Placements:

Nuffield Research Placements provide over 1,100 students each year with the opportunity to work alongside professional scientists for 4-6 weeks during the summer holidays. You work with the scientist on a research project, carrying out real research and seeing what it is like to have a career in this field. At the end of the project you write a report, receive a certificate and have the chance to enter your project for a British Science Association Gold CREST Award, which could lead to you attending national and international science fairs with your work! Go to <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/nuffield-research-placements> for more information. The deadline for applications varies depending upon which local scheme you enter, but is usually between March and May.

EDT STEM Placements:

The Engineering Development Trust (EDT) provide a range of STEM enrichment activities for young people, from four-day residential to six-month projects for gap year students. See here for more information: <http://www.etrust.org.uk/young-people>

Subject/Career-Specific Advice and Guidance

The routes into certain subjects or careers can seem very complicated and confusing, especially if you don't have anyone who can give you up-to-date, accurate advice. Thankfully, there are lots of guides available online produced by educational charities and professional bodies to support students who are interested in studying these subjects or pursuing these careers.

Medicine and Related Subjects:

- British Medical Association (BMA) complete guide to becoming a doctor: <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice/career/studying-medicine/becoming-a-doctor>
- Medical Schools Council (MSC) guide for applicants: <https://www.medschools.ac.uk/studying-medicine/applications>
- 'Step into the NHS' website: <https://www.stepintohenhs.nhs.uk/>
- St George's University 'A Taste of Medicine': <http://www.tasteofmedicine.com/index.htm>
- NHS Health Careers website: <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/>

Veterinary Medicine:

- British Veterinary Association guide to becoming a vet:
<https://www.bva.co.uk/professional-development/careers/becoming-a-vet/>
- Royal College 'Veterinary Science... for all Walks of Life' careers information booklet:
<https://www.rcvs.org.uk/news-and-views/publications/walks-of-life/>
- Association of Veterinary Students 'Getting into Vet School' guide:
<http://www.avukireland.co.uk/getting-into-vet-school/>

Engineering:

- i-want-to-study-engineering.org guides (highly recommended website):
<http://i-want-to-study-engineering.org/experience/>
<http://i-want-to-study-engineering.org/choosesubjects/>
- Tomorrow's Engineers guide:
<http://www.tomorrowseengineers.org.uk/media/1947/te-booklet-web-from-idea-to-career.pdf>
- Target Careers 'How do I get into engineering?' guide:
<https://targetcareers.co.uk/career-sectors/engineering/86-how-do-i-get-into-engineering>

Law:

- McBrides Guides website:
<https://mcbridesguides.com/>
- Prospects 'How to become a lawyer':
<https://www.prospects.ac.uk/jobs-and-work-experience/job-sectors/law-sector/how-to-become-a-lawyer>
- Target Careers 'How do I get into law?' guide:
<https://targetcareers.co.uk/career-sectors/law/202-how-do-i-get-into-law>

Banking, Finance, etc.:

- Target Careers guide:
<https://targetcareers.co.uk/career-sectors/finance/70-how-do-i-get-into-finance>
- Chartered Institute for Securities and Investment 'get into finance' guide:
<https://www.cisi.org/cisiweb2/get-into-finance/get-into-finance>

Psychology:

- British Psychological Society careers guide:
<https://careers.bps.org.uk/>

Architecture:

- Royal Institute of British Architects guide:
<https://www.architecture.com/education-cpd-and-careers/how-to-become-an-architect>

Journalism:

- Target Careers guide:
<https://targetcareers.co.uk/career-sectors/media/315123-how-do-i-get-into-a-career-in-journalism>

Politics, International Affairs, etc.:

- Prospects guide:
<https://www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/what-can-i-do-with-my-degree/politics-and-international-relations>

Work Experience

Work experience is less important for a Cambridge application than it is for many other universities, but there are some subjects, such as medicine and veterinary medicine, where it is more relevant. Generally speaking, relevant work experience that develops your understanding of your subject and/or its professional dimension is unlikely to be a disadvantage to any application and if your school requires you to undertake a programme of work experience during Year 12 it is in your interests to ensure that this is spent in a way that is beneficial to your future studies.

Many students struggle to find relevant work experience, particularly if they don't know what they want to study or what future careers they are interested in. You should discuss this with your tutor, Sixth Form year team or UCAS/Careers Advisers in school. Once you have narrowed down your options, the following resources might help you to find relevant work experience opportunities.

Student Ladder:

This website lists careers related opportunities for students at all levels of education. It has a section devoted to work experience placements for Sixth Form students in the following professional sectors: banking, media, law, science, medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine.

<https://www.studentladder.co.uk/Work-Experience/work-experience.html>

Success at School:

Success at School is a careers website specifically for students. You can explore careers and find advice and guidance appropriate to your age group. Like Student Ladder, they also list work experience opportunities. A good place to start on this website is here:

<https://successatschool.org/advice/work-experience>

Groundwork:

Groundwork is a charity that supports 16-24 year olds to engage with their local communities. Student support is a big part of their work and they have two sections of their website that contain guidance about how to find and organise your own work experience placements.

<https://www.groundwork.org.uk/Sites/youthhub/pages/own-work-experience-placement-xmarks>

<https://www.groundwork.org.uk/Sites/youthhub/pages/finding-work-experience-school-and-college-students-xmarks>

Allabout Careers:

Allabout Careers is a careers exploration, job listing and advice website. It covers a huge range of careers and has a specific section on work experience. Start with the link below and explore other articles in this section for general guidance.

<https://www.allaboutcareers.com/careers-advice/work-experience/how-to-get-work-experience>

Law:

<https://www.thelawyerportal.com/free-guides/law-work-experience/law-work-experience-year-12/>

<https://www.allaboutlaw.co.uk/law-careers/law-firms/>

Medicine:

<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/career-planning/improving-your-chances/gaining-experience>

<https://www.themedicportal.com/a-guide-to-securing-clinical-work-experience/>

<https://www.themedicportal.com/how-to-gain-medical-work-experience/>

<https://www.stepintothenhhs.nhs.uk/work-experience>

<https://www.themedicportal.com/application-guide/work-experience/medical-school-requirements-medicine-work-experience/>

Veterinary Medicine:

<https://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/university/courses/veterinary/veterinary-work-experience>
<http://thenerdyvet.com/2012/07/01/vet-work-experience-top-tips/>

Engineering/Physics:

<http://www.physics.org/article-careers.asp?contentid=465>

Writing Emails

When applying for work experience and contacting possible employers, drafting a suitable speculative email is key to getting in touch, especially if the email is speculative and there is no pre-designed role. The goal of the email is not to gain you the position, but to convince them to email you back, having noticed you amidst all the other emails they will receive during their day. There are three key points to cover:

1. Why you?
Introduce yourself quickly and concisely, so the employer knows who you are and what you can offer.
2. Why them?
What do they do that makes you want to work for them? How could you help them with your work experience?
3. What you can offer
Make a clear proposal or request. Help the employer to understand what you want - that's part of being professional and not wasting their time. If you do have a CV, it is probably worth attaching it to the initial email, so they have all the information about you that they need. Don't worry if you don't, though; it's not expected pre-18.

Sample Email

Subject: Work experience enquiry in...

Dear Sir/Madam (or name, if known),

I am a Year 12 student at..., studying A-Levels in...

I am emailing to enquire about a possible work experience position with..., between the dates of... and...

I am hoping to gain some practical experience in... (field of work), because... (why do you want to work in this area, for this specific field – future career paths etc.?). I'm particularly interested in working for you because... (why do you want to work for their company, what about this position appeals to you?)

I am... (write a short paragraph on yourself and your achievements – no more than a few lines long. What evidence do you have that you are organised, motivated, creative, hard-working, a good leader etc.? Don't just use the buzzwords, give them some proof.)

I would be grateful for the opportunity, and thank you for taking the time to consider me. If it would not be possible for me to carry out work experience with you on these dates, please inform me of any alternate ways in which I could be involved.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully ("sincerely" if you know their name),

Your name

Contact details

How to follow-up:

- If you don't get a reply within a couple of weeks, it's OK to follow up politely. How you phrase the follow-up depends on the kind of conversation you had with your contact and what sort of person you think they are.
- Be polite. In fact, be extra polite. Most people read their emails in a hurry, and tone often gets misconstrued: "I haven't heard from you yet" is factual, but it could sound aggressive or accusatory. Better: "I'm writing to ask if you've had chance to consider my email..."
- Summarise briefly why you wrote in the first place, i.e. what you are asking for and how you think you can assist that employer with their work
- Try another method. Could you follow up by phone? Or would sending your contact a letter through the post get you noticed?

Final Tips

Hopefully this guide has given you a sense of the number of opportunities out there, whatever your subject or career interests. This list is far from exhaustive, so there may be other things you find by simply searching online. Whatever the case, by being a bit proactive in Year 12 you can easily find lots of exciting opportunities to explore your subject in more detail. Of course your first priority should be your studies, but, like all supra-curricular enrichment, these initiatives are unlikely to detract from your school work. On the contrary, many of them have the capacity to increase your knowledge and understanding of your subject area.

Please remember that applicants to Cambridge are not expected to have done any of the things in this guide. However, as a university we want to encourage students to make the most of the opportunities they do have access to because we believe it is positively beneficial to their personal and academic development. So, if you think something here looks interesting, then give it a try and see what happens. Good luck and we hope you enjoy pursuing your interests in more detail.