

Higher Education and Global Initiatives Team



Ms Marya Akhtar
Director of Higher Education
and Global Initiatives

After a postgraduate degree in Economics, I went on to complete my PGCE from University of London and started my teaching career in 1992 as a teacher of Economics. Before joining Downe, I gained valuable experience as a Head of Year and in Higher Education Guidance at an Independent day school.

I joined Downe in 2006 where I head the Higher Education and Global Initiatives Department. In my time here, I have successfully completed my postgraduate certificate in managing HE Guidance from University of Cambridge. I teach A Level Economics and am also a Sixth Form Tutor.

I thoroughly enjoy helping girls shape their futures through appropriate options choices in the Fourth and Fifth years, and guiding them on university admissions and equipping them with the transferable skills needed for a smooth transition into Higher Education after Sixth Form.

Over the last few years, I have overseen the expansion of this department into specialist areas, such as overseas universities applications, medicine applications, Oxbridge applications and creative applications. We have a dedicated team that introduces girls to the 'world of work' through work shadowing, the Oyster Society, the Gap Year Fair and i2i Programme which helps arrange internships for girls. We also collaborate with the Foundation Office on the very popular DH LINKS initiative that connects our girls to our parent and alumnae communities for specialist guidance and experience in industry.

I also head the Global Initiatives team guiding girls towards becoming global citizens.



Mrs Sarah Barnard
Overseas University
Coordinator

I graduated from St Andrews with an MA in Modern History before teaching History at St Leonards School where I was also Assistant Housemistress in the Upper Sixth House. I then spent five years at St Mary's, Wantage teaching History and Politics as well as being Head of Year and continuing with some boarding duties. I arrived at Downe House in 2005 as History Teacher and Assistant Head of Sixth Form and am Housemistress of Tedworth.

As my American universities role expanded, I stepped down as Assistant Head of Sixth Form and have spent the last few years developing this area and it now encompasses all non UK universities.

The process for applying to the US has been streamlined and, as well as offering in-house SAT tuition, all the UVI girls have an individually tailored programme which involves a weekly meeting to oversee their applications. For applications to other countries, such as Canada, a fortnightly meeting is usually used.

Over the last few years girls have begun to explore higher education opportunities on a much more global level. Girls have gained places at universities in the US, Canada, Australia, Hong Kong and Ireland. We are keen to encourage girls to be able to apply to the best universities possible and many of these fall outside the UK. We aim to raise interest in the many courses taught in English at European universities, especially in the Netherlands and Scandinavia.



Mr Andrew Atherton
Head of Oxbridge and
Medical Applications

After receiving a first class honours degree from Lancaster University in English Literature, I was then awarded a full AHRC scholarship for both my MA, for which I received a Distinction, and also my PhD in twentieth-century literature, now in its final stages. I have also published a short monograph and several academic papers, and delivered a number of lectures at academic conferences, both in the UK and abroad. Before joining Downe House, I taught undergraduate-level English Literature for five years at the University of Kent and also played a role in the admissions process.

In my role as Head of Oxbridge and Medicine Applications, I coordinate the team of expert teachers who mentor and assist the girls who are applying to any course at either Oxford or Cambridge, or to medical degrees, through the early UCAS application process. Being amongst the most competitive university courses available, with increasingly complex admissions procedures, we help to guide and prepare applicants for the process. As well as meeting with me, girls with aspirations for early application will meet regularly with their mentor, who is a subject specialist, in order to guide them through the idiosyncrasies of their specific course whilst also helping to cultivate a deeper love of the subject. As such, this is a hugely gratifying role with both a practical and academic purpose. Together we not only provide support for the UCAS application itself and the various tests and interviews that go with it, but we also aim to enrich the girls' intellectual experiences as they prepare for the next step in their academic career.



Mrs Sofia McClymont
World of Work
Coordinator

I graduated from Cardiff University with a degree in Law and went on to complete a Diploma in Legal Practice, at Cardiff Law School. I was one of the lucky few to secure a training contract with a national law firm whose main office was in Cardiff and there I spent a further two years training, before I qualified as an Employment Law solicitor.

Seven years later, I left the world of law and took on the role of Assistant Housemistress in AGS in May 2013 and then AGS Housemistress in 2014. Being keen to be involved in the students' academic development as well, I joined the Higher Education Department as World of Work Coordinator and I find that my practical experiences prove a useful resource to draw on for the students.

Part of my remit is to run the Oyster Society and I invite a variety of speakers and companies to come to school to talk to girls from the Upper Fifth to Upper Sixth. The talks range from providing a general overview of specific industries, right the way through to sharing stories with the girls to help inspire and encourage them.

I also organise an annual Gap Year Fair which provides ideas and advice to help make the best of a gap year, be that undertaking a professional role or taking up charity work overseas. In addition, I organise work shadowing and run the i2i Programme of internships, which provide a practical insight into the world of work. We are fortunate to have links with companies such as Morgan Stanley, Deloitte, Louis Vuitton, Sotheby's and JP Morgan, to name but a few.

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Miss Ellie Clark
Higher Education Advisor
and Creative Applications
Coordinator

Throughout my career I have worked in various schools in my role as a Psychology Teacher, including two years at an International School in Beijing. In my teaching posts I have always held the role of Sixth Form Tutor and so have been heavily involved in the UCAS process with multiple cohorts, including students applying for, and successfully gaining places at, Oxford and Cambridge and various prestigious universities both in the UK and overseas.

In September 2014 I joined Downe House and am Housemistress of York EC and a Higher Education Advisor and the Creative Applications Coordinator in the HEGI Team. As part of my role I provide individualised guidance for the Sixth Form girls to take them through the UCAS or creative applications process. I am an Oxbridge mentor specialising in Psychology and Social Sciences. I also coordinate the Post Qualification Applications for students who are applying or reapplying to university after leaving Downe House. I work closely with the rest of the Higher Education team to provide a network of expertise that the girls can utilise in order to ensure they make the best Higher Education decisions for them. Living in house with the Sixth Form girls allows me to support them effectively and means I am well placed to dispense Higher Education advice and guidance around the clock.



Mrs Nic Riddle
Options Advisor

I graduated from Otago University in New Zealand with a degree in Physical Education before gaining a Diploma in Teaching at the Auckland College of Education.

I spent two years teaching in the north of New Zealand to gain my Teacher Registration qualification before travelling abroad on an extended OE via South East Asia and the Middle East arriving in UK in 1991. Four years later (and some further travel in Africa, Europe and USA) I was back in NZ. I taught in two co-educational state schools as Head of PE and Outdoor Education before marrying my husband, Tony, who persuaded me to travel to the UK again for a short visit.

Years later we are still here! We both started at Downe House in January 2005; I began my pastoral journey as Housemistress of Aisholt for three years before taking time out to start a family. I am also Head of PSHE and have been teaching the Higher Education programme from Remove to Upper Fifth in that time.

I am very excited to have joined the Higher Education team as Options Advisor. It is so much more rewarding to be part of the individual guidance programme with the girls as they plan for their future and GCSE and A Level options.



Mrs Helen Knight
Higher Education
and Global Initiatives
Administrator

My background is in travel management, delivering complete travel consultancy programmes to high profile clients including Mercedes Benz, Porsche and Sony.

I moved to Newbury in 2001 to manage the Travel office at the Vodafone Headquarters. My strong organisational skills then led me to become a Project Manager. My previous role was working for a retail software company where I was involved in the launch of the new e-Commerce website for Hamleys.

I enjoy getting involved in events and activities at my children's school and within The Scout Association. Previously, I worked for Usborne Books helping local schools improve their library resources.

At Downe House I support the Higher Education and Global Initiatives team. I am responsible for coordinating all aspects of administration including events which are held throughout the year.



Miss Laura Myers
Student Exchange
Coordinator

After graduating from Leeds Metropolitan University with a degree in Sports Business Management in 2011, I went on to complete my teacher training (GTP) at Woodhouse Grove School in Leeds where I taught PE and History, as well as being a Resident Tutor. I moved to London in 2012 to work at Channing School, Highgate, where I taught PE and PSHE before wanting a return to boarding and moving to Downe House in 2013.

I am currently the Assistant Housemistress in Aisholt, which I love, and I teach PE and PSHE – working with girls on topics such as health, careers, body image and sex education. I also run various netball teams across the school. I have recently joined the Global Initiatives Team.

Having been on an exchange to Westminster School, Adelaide when I was 16, I know how it feels to go on an exchange and what to expect. I returned to Westminster in 2010 to work in the Girls Boarding House and in the PE Department after a period of travelling. These experiences in Australia help me to make contacts with other schools around the world and to help prepare both staff and pupils for the exciting opportunities that we will offer here at Downe.

