





# Class of 2015 - Students of Character

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## MIA EVANS

My journey through the University of Birmingham school has shaped me to be the person I am today. When I first started UoBS I had little confidence and was shy but due to the opportunities and support available I have been able to build my confidence and reach new heights.

My new found confidence has found me singing and playing piano onstage in multiple school concerts, giving me a chance to express myself and my feelings. For enrichment I loved Band Factory, we came together as a group sharing our love for music. At the end of the term we were able to perform songs we had worked hard on; it was an amazing chance to connect with others while learning a new instrument. In that time, I learnt how to play the bass guitar and developed my resilience.

In 2019, I was fortunate enough to take part in Hack The Midland's which consisted of coding our own program. Our program was designed to allow children with learning disabilities to express their feelings, depending on the input the program would change colour and play music, it was really an amazing experience where I learnt new coding techniques. At the event, I had the opportunity to talk to people who work in the NHS in designing new software for patients, giving me the chance to learn the significant impact that technology can have in diagnostics and treatment in the NHS. It also allowed me to build my curiosity and enthusiasm to continue to learn how technology and medicine cross-over.

There have been so many opportunities at UoBS but my main highlight was meeting Prince Harry and Meghan Markle at a STEM event. The event was to celebrate women in STEM, this made me feel proud to be female and really boosted my confidence. This is an opportunity I wouldn't have had the privilege of if I wasn't a member of UoBS.

I have gained lifelong friends who I have completed my bronze and silver DofE with. The experience challenged me not only physically but also mentally. It allowed to build my resilience and test my boundaries, developing skills like determination and focus. For the volunteering aspect of DofE, I volunteered at my local church and my local newsagents which has equipped me with confidence and communication skills, while working as a team with my colleagues. I still regularly volunteer in my community with my church, working as a Head Chorister for the children's choir and performing readings in services gaining vital character skills like kindness and understanding.

Due to shielding, I was unable to attend school but continued my studies at home using my school text books and other resources enabling me to develop my organisation and time management skills as well as giving me a greater appreciation for learning. The staff at UoBs helped me and supported me through all of it, they offered extra sessions to help me keep on top of school work. Lockdown gave me a chance to connect with myself, where I realised that I have the strength to get through any difficult situations in my life no matter what uncertainty may lie in my path.

The character virtues I have developed on my journey have given me a foundation to continue to build upon in the next chapter of my life. I am very thankful for the incredible teachers and friends who have guided me on my path, these memories will live with me forever.

I am proud to be a member of UoBS, thank you.

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## WALEED KHAN

It is often said that the best period of anyone's life is the time they spend at school. This is undoubtedly the golden era, which they recall nostalgically for the rest of their life. We have waited for this moment all our lives, the moment when we graduate from high school. The moment when we leave our childhood behind and step into the world to forge our own paths in life. I will forever be grateful to have been a part of University of Birmingham School.

It was at UoBS where I began my journey as a foreign student after going through a horrific terrorist attack in Pakistan. A scared, anxious and nervous young teenager in a completely different environment and new culture completely clueless about how he is going to achieve his goals and adjust in this new atmosphere. My mind was full of doubts. Little did I know that after 5 years I would not only be a step ahead in reaching my goals but would also make lots of trustworthy friends and have so many unforgettable memories in the school. Friends that would later go on to become my second family and teachers, which would become a beacon of guidance for me in the darkness.

One of the most memorable part of my journey at UoBS is my first ever speech in year 8 when I got the opportunity to share my story with everyone in the assembly. After being hospitalised for almost two years it was my first ever interaction with such a large group of people in these two years. I was both nervous and anxious. I got a standing ovation after my speech which was really surprising and overwhelming for me. It was at this moment when I realised the impact that my story and words can have on someone's life. I fall short of words, the way everyone at UoBS embraced me with open arms, encouraged and motivated me. This was the turning point for me. After that, I started doing motivational speeches. I have had opportunities to speak at different schools, universities, conferences and summits.

My teachers and school have helped and supported me throughout this journey by providing me with some great opportunities, some of which includes running for MYP in the Birmingham youth parliament elections and being given the opportunity to be a part of Beatfreaks event as a keynote speaker at the Birmingham Symphony Hall. Plus I also have the honour to be an ambassador for the amazing #IWillCampaign which was again something I was introduced to by our Head Teacher. I was very lucky to have been mentored by some amazing teachers and non-teaching staff members. Inside school, I have also had the chance to be Head Prefect in year 11 and I was part of the student guild. All these opportunities have assisted me to learn skills such as leadership skills; it has helped me improve my communication skills and has allowed me to further improve my organisational skills. It has also taught me how to work as a team.

The school has also provided us with many opportunities where we could challenge ourselves physically. Going on DofE gave us a chance to challenge ourselves beyond our comfort zone and work as a team. Competing in different sporting competitions such as cricket, handball and other sporting events plus representing our school are some of my great memories from the school.

There are plenty of teachers at UoBS that have helped and guided me in excelling in my academic studies who were always there whenever I needed a suggestion about something. The character I developed was all possible because of my friends and teacher who have always been there for me whenever I needed them. Learning about character education has also helped me to further develop my character. We learned about character virtue such as honesty, courage, compassion, generosity and resilience, as well as learning them, applying them to my life has changed a lot of things for me.

As we are coming to the end of our school time, the walls of this school bear the story of the most precious years of my life. The feeling of having wonderful people around us is very beautiful but moving away from them is very hard to bear. But as they say it's a part of life so we have to accept it. For the last five years every person in this school has played an important role in shaping me and a making me into the person I am today. I will always be grateful to each one of my friends, all of my teachers and non-teaching faculties at the school for countless and priceless memories of a lifetime.



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## KAITLYN MCKELLAR

My time at the University of Birmingham School has truly transformed my outlook on education. The experience of attending this school is one that most do not get to experience.

These unique experiences began in Year 7 where the first trip we went on was to the University of Birmingham to view the oldest version of the Quran. This experience demonstrated the school's dedication to ensuring we are exposed to a wide range of cultures. This trip ignited my curiosity into the world of Religious Studies and was one of the reasons for why I decided to pursue RS as a GCSE.

An experience that I believe helped me to transform as a person was the Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award. Although the experience was challenging, it allowed me to contribute to the school community when I began to volunteer in the school library. This experience meant that I would help create school reading challenges. This led to my passion of reading extending to wanting others to experience the joy of reading. This also contributed to my passion for English Literature, something I would go on to study at A Level.

Being at the University of Birmingham School has allowed me to experience things that many who attend other schools never have the opportunity to. One example of this was the transition day at the University, where we were taught the process of how to make ice cream and learnt what astronauts eat in space.

During Year 12, when the country was hit by another lockdown, learning was moved online. This was a new experience that I believed I would have struggled with if I hadn't had the support of the school who gave me the opportunity to take control of my own learning. This independence allowed me to mature and realise the importance of a healthy work-life balance.

Before Covid had impacted the country, I was part of the student council and became a year representative in the student guild. Being part of the guild meant that I and my guild peers had the responsibility of ensuring all opinions were heard and represented. This required organisational skills and the confidence to speak in front of the year group, something my Year 7 self would struggle with.

I attribute my experience at the University of Birmingham school with what I'm going on to study at university during the next academic year. The impact my teachers have inspired me to pursue primary education initial teaching training, where I hope to have some impact on my pupils that my teachers had on me.

I don't think I can truly explain the positive impact this school has had on my life. From an underachieving Year 7 to a flourishing Year 13 who has achieved everything she never thought possible, this school has been there supporting me every step of the way and for that I can not say thank you enough.



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## LAURENCE BAKER

Right from the moment I first joined UOB School in 2015, the uniqueness of the school stood out to me.

I remember really enjoying Year 7 due to many aspects, ranging from fun teaching and lessons to friendship building activities in our forms, such as cooking classes, setting up and maintaining fruit and vegetable gardens and creating mosaics with the help of our art teacher.

**Collectiveness was valued right away and I feel this massively helped to integrate us all into the school and prevent any serious cases of bullying or behavioural issues. Everyone got along with everyone, teacher and students alike.**

The uniqueness and bravery of the school was summed up by the school's policy on behaviour, with no detentions in Year 7. I feel that this helped to instil a feeling of self-control within us as we were trusted to behave well by ourselves.

This was also supported by a quote favoured by founding Head Principal, Mr Roden – “Character's doing the right thing at the right time for the right reasons even when no one is watching.”

**The clear emphasis on character education has undoubtedly shaped any who attended UoBS, regardless of the length of their time here.**

On a personal level, the education we experienced on character allowed me to develop my virtues, with key ones including empathy, determination and curiosity (something very useful when studying A-Levels).

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## **PAYEL GHOSE**

I remember walking through the doors and looking up at the stairs and thinking, wow, I cannot imagine walking up all those stairs but little did I know it would be part of my daily school life and part of so many memories that have made me who I am!

**Indeed this school has given me the best memories of my whole school life and I'm so grateful for the many moments, particularly from Christmas fares, concerts, enrichment and many more with my friends of 7 years!**

The form times where we had learnt and practised character virtues had set me up well for life and had given me a mindset that still currently help me overcome challenges in life. It's your character that people notice when you first walk in the room and it's the first skill you start with before attempting any task in life. Knowing this, I've come across life with a new outlook and it's just been a little easier to make decisions.

Doing bronze DofE has been a highlight of my school life and has given me the chance to move out of my comfort zone and by the end, I was extremely proud of my achievements. Walking out in the fields in an unknown area with just a map and my friends, as well as camping outside, was definitely something I was initially afraid to do but the amount of determination, courage and self-discipline this took was incredible and I was extremely proud coming out of it.

There have been many events through school that have given me moments of joy and happiness, one of which was our music band formed amongst my friends that has definitely been a highlight throughout year 8 to year 11. This opportunity has given me confidence to perform, alongside the repeated use of teamwork (certainly an important skill for the world of work) and especially solidify my friendship with my peers who have helped me throughout 7 years through my ups and downs. Performing in after-school concerts and Christmas fairs was a joy to do with crafts being made for charity and it felt very good to be helping people in need with our own creations.

**In the future I hope to be able to enter the field of aerospace engineering and I know that the skills I had learnt and the person I had become because of my memories and experience has set me up well to go out and be a part of the world of work and hopefully travel the world! I am truly grateful for the memories I have made and for my teachers who have helped me become the person I am and my friends who have stuck with me through thick and thin. All of which was possible by choosing this school! An unforgettable, unique part of my life!**



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## **DAN LOCKWOOD**

“Don’t start chasing applause and acclaim. That way lies madness” – Ron Ulysses Swanson.

**In many ways this sums up my seven-year journey at the University of Birmingham School: this school has taught me, as well as so much else, the true value of self-motivation, and genuinely caring about and working for my own achievements.**

One of my earliest memories of UoBS is of visiting an exhibition of one of the oldest copies of the Quran at the University of Birmingham. Coming from a mostly white and Christian primary school, the diversity at UoBS was lovely, and so important in learning more about others and the world. The theme of diversity is so hugely important, not only of people, but of experiences that I have been lucky enough to have had access to through the school.

The Duke of Edinburgh Award is a perfect example of this, as the skills I have practiced and improved; the experience of competing with the school hockey team; and the incredible memories I have from the expeditions really have helped me grow and evolve as a person, learning self-discipline and self-reliance, as well as the virtue of helping other people and being helped by them. The experience of being a part of the school as it grew into what it is today was incredible. Being part of the first ever school orchestra, jazz band and many other ensembles was wonderful, and I remember performing at the Birmingham music for youth festival in year 9 vividly.

**As a musician, being part of such a welcoming and vibrant musical culture helped me develop not only my instrumental skill, but also my musicianship; and the memories of concerts will stay with me for years. The enrichment programme has been, for me, the most important part of the UoBS experience.**

The sheer amount of things that our year has been able to experience has been truly unique, such as water sports at Edgbaston reservoir in challenge week; or playing softball at the Birmingham School games, among many more indelible experiences which have really helped me find out what I enjoy doing, and then give me plenty of chances to do just that. GCSEs and A-Levels, while of course not exactly fun, gave me a chance to engage with the academic subjects I enjoyed in much more detail, and I was able to do that because of the extraordinary teachers which I have been fortunate enough to have had at the University of Birmingham School.

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## MEGAN BESSANT

Although our journey has been quite different to usual, it has shaped us to be the people we want to be today, it has helped us grow in ways that we don't even realise.

When I first enrolled at this school it was quite a scary thought, not knowing anyone or what the teaching would be like, not knowing anything really. We were just told to trust the process and Mr Roden always made sure to thank us all for trusting him with this new project. It was without a doubt a very scary experience to start a new school even on the first day it still hadn't been finished. This school has allowed me to meet friends that would last a lifetime and who I know would always be in my corner.

Over the course of my time in this school I have been able to do lots of different things and learn things I never thought I would've had the chance to anywhere else. The first couple of years were like a whirlwind, we met our tutors (Dr. Bownes) on the first day and our form Navy that we would go through our secondary school experience with. Navy won the first ever college cup of this school. Also, when I was in year 7, we hatched chicks and I had the opportunity to take 2 home alongside one of the first sixth formers as well. This was an amazing thing that the school allowed me to do, and they will forever be a part of me.

In year 7 we also had a carnival week which involved the whole school and we got to do different activities and then show them to the rest of the school. I got to do the radio one and I went round all of the teachers interviewing them about their first year at this school, this allowed everyone to get to know their teachers a lot better. Throughout secondary, we also got the chance to play music and me and my friends would perform on concert evenings and at open evenings in a band. In year 9, I got the opportunity to be taught by the wonderful Miss Cohen whose legacy will forever be held in our hearts.

One of my school highlights was being able to do work experience both in year 10 where I worked at a primary school and year 13 where I worked with the French department. This gave me a great insight into the career I would like to go into, and I will never forget this experience that I was allowed to uptake. Throughout my school journey, I have changed in many ways. I've become more confident through having the opportunities to help out at open evenings and even do assemblies. In year 10 and 11 I was a language prefect, languages day was always a busy day as it meant I was helping out, seeing all the different cultures from across our school community coming together to celebrate, doing assemblies and getting the whole school involved in what our school is meant to be about, inclusivity.

Without coming to this school, I know that I would have become a very different person and that's what I have to thank the teachers for. Without them I wouldn't be where I am today and that is something that they should be forever proud of, they need to realise how much of a difference they have made to each and every one of us who have stepped into that school. The teachers not only do their best in lessons, but they would also give up their time after school running revision sessions or helping with anything that we needed at any point.

I can't wait to see what this next chapter holds for all of us, and I wish everyone the best of success in what they go on to do and achieve.



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## ZARA KEYANI

Being the first cohort in a brand new school is not something that everyone gets to experience, but I am glad to have been part of the first year of The University of Birmingham School. We saw the walls being filled with various displays, classrooms being personalised and the community forming around us.

However, not only did we witness it, we were a part of it. The once empty school was slowly being filled with more and more students every year until eventually it was full.

**On top of being the first cohort, we were given opportunities that would be unavailable at other secondary schools due to the links with the University of Birmingham and went to the campus many times for things such as work experience and lectures. The character education made students more aware of how we treated each other, and especially when compared to experiences of friends from other schools, it made a safe and accepting environment for us.**

A unique aspect of the school is the diversity in students, created by the different catchment areas around Birmingham that allowed people of different backgrounds and upbringings to mix together. The school is in an area I had never had a reason to travel to before, so the commute and the area were both unknown to me. This allowed me to gain independence though, travelling the long bus journey and making friends with people on my bus route. I was able to get closer to people in my area, most of whom went to my primary school, becoming good friends because of our shared daily commute. In addition to the diversity of students, we have also been offered enrichment that is built into the school day. This was a way for us to try new things and explore our interests. I tended to lean towards the creative activities, my favourite being art club, and it gave me time to relax and enjoy myself with other people that enjoyed the same things as me.

We were also given the opportunity of doing The Duke of Edinburgh Award as an entire year group, which allowed me to take part in activities I usually wouldn't, most notably I volunteered in an Oxfam charity shop which increased my confidence and developed my social skills. These are things that I struggle with, and this experience helped to push me out of my comfort zone and grow as a person. I completed both the bronze and silver awards, of which the expeditions were the highlights. Though it was quite physically demanding, it was also a unique experience that I am glad to have had and will remember for the rest of my life.

**This school has given me many experiences and skills that have developed my character and also allowed me to forge friendships I hope will continue into the future. I'm glad to have been part of this journey, and I am satisfied with the person I am becoming because of it.**