



B E R K H A M S T E D

– 1541 –

Natalie – Berkhamsted School Sep 2017 – July 2019

**A LEVEL GRADES: MATHS A* PHYSICS A* BIOLOGY A*
CHINESE A***

**UNIVERSITY OFFER: DENTISTRY AT BRISTOL UNIVERSITY &
UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG**



Interview

Congratulations on your excellent results – well done! Thank you for doing this interview it is much appreciated and may help future students that may come from Hong Kong and would like to study at Berkhamsted.

If I remember you were concerned about the standard of education you were to receive on entering Berkhamsted. Please could you provide some thoughts on the following academic aspects of studying at Berkhamsted.

What did you think of the quality of teaching? Please refer to the individual subjects:

Mathematics: My teachers were very helpful and gave really detailed explanations of the methods in each topic and tips to avoid making silly mistakes. Whenever I have any uncertainties about the material taught, they are always willing to explain even further by showing the step by step workings. However, with the new syllabus, I find that sometimes the teachers are not very clear with the level of knowledge I have to know before the exam, especially with the large data set in statistics and mechanics.



Biology: My teachers gave important advices for me to write more precise answers and supported me when I had difficulties understanding concepts in the textbook. My teacher also helped a lot by making us practice writing the 25 marks essay before the exam so that I was familiar with the standards of the essay hence I was able to maximise my marks. However, this subject involves a lot of self-studying, learning and memorising that the teachers may not have provided a lot of help and tips with the most efficient way of learning which made me feel lost occasionally.

Chemistry: In Physical Chemistry, my teacher arranged many practical lessons for my class so that I can visualise the experiment set up better and have first handed experience of conducting the experiment. This helped a lot for answering more complex practical based questions in the exam. However, I would have wanted more support to handle complex calculation problems. In Organic Chemistry, my teacher explained the mechanisms of each reaction really well and would even go out of syllabus to enrich my understanding of the mechanism. He also gave many tips when handling 6 markers levelled response questions in the exam which was really useful.

The results that you achieved were excellent how hard was it for you to do this? Did you need to spend large parts of the weekend working?

I did spend a lot of time outside of school to study and revise for tests and exams throughout my course. I didn't find it too hard in year 12 as I was able to manage my time by doing homework in my free lessons and reviewing the content at night. In year 13 I found it much more challenging as the step up between year 12 to year 13 is quite big, so that I have to spend even more time to understand and learn the content thoroughly. I think the level of help and support I got from my teacher had definitely made my learning experience easier and smoother.

Your aim was to study dentistry – how were you helped and guided to do this, both by subject teachers and also by outside clubs and activities, university visits and career guidance?

I received so much help from the school through the arrangement of the work experience week by the end of year 12. I was able to secure a work placement at a private dental clinic in town, where I work shadowed a very experienced dentist and his dental team. This was very precious experience that consolidated my aim to go to a dental school in the future. I also received help from the school to attend medical students info day, where I learned about the UKCAT exam and the different systems in medical schools. The interview preparation day introduced the multiple mini interviews (MMI) to me so that I know how to prepare for the questions that are likely to come up on the day of interview. I was also able to receive guidance by Mr. Tanweer, who gave me advice with my personal statement, UCAS application and even more detailed interview preparation specifically to dental schools. Lastly, my Biology teachers, Head of House and boarding house staff also helped



me through the interview process by having many practices with me to make me more confident and stayed positive throughout the process.

Did you make use of the Mini MBA, Extended Project, and other opportunities on offer?

My friends and I joined the Young Enterprise programme in year 12 where we had the opportunity to set out our own company to sell our own designs on Christmas cards and other decorations. This not only allowed me to have a chance to work with a team, but also to communicate with customers and our business advisors, which definitely helped me with my communication abilities in my interviews. I also started doing the Extended Project Qualification but did not complete it at last as it does not help to lower my offer grades. However, my EPQ was based on a dental topic so I still had a good opportunity to do self-directed research on a dentally related topic, which helped with my personal statement.

Berkhamsted has large numbers of day students and a small number of UK boarders, did you find it easy to integrate, make friends and enjoy studying in a UK environment? What advice would you give to someone thinking of this school - would you recommend it?

It was very hard to make firm friendships with day students at first as they have known each other for a very long time. However, I was still able to make friends that have just joined Berkhamsted in Sixth Form, so that they were also in the same situation with me. I also made friends by sitting with day students during class and talking to them more, instead of just sitting with other overseas boarders in class. Joining them for lunch and possibly going to the common room more often will also help to make more UK friends. The day students are actually very friendly, welcoming and talkative once you talk to them more often.

What was the quality and seriousness of the students that you studied with:

Most of the students that I studied with are smart and always ask questions when they are unsure. Sometimes they can be slightly loud but most of the time the teacher has the ability to control the class to ensure that sufficient amount of work is done before class ends. They are also willing to teach each other if they see someone struggling and even ask for extra help from teachers out of class time. When preparing for A-Levels, we had many lessons with independent revision sessions as well as some whole class discussions and knowledge recall. Generally, I would say the class environment and atmosphere is really good for learning.

You decided to return to HK rather than take up the offer at Bristol. What influenced this decision? What would your advice to other HK students be?

This decision is mostly due to the high ranking of Dentistry in the University of Hong Kong and the guaranteed license in Hong Kong after graduation. I also figured that with a 5 year



B E R K H A M S T E D

– 1541 –

stressful course, I would rather stay in my home as it is a long period of time away from home if I decided to take the offer at Bristol. I wouldn't have chosen universities in HK if I was studying other courses as I really enjoyed studying abroad and learning to be more independent. I would advise other HK students to apply to HK universities as a back-up choice but still think clearly about the future opportunities and weigh up the pros and cons before making a final decision.

What did you think of the location of Berkhamsted – proximity to Heathrow and to get into London:

I really liked Berkhamsted as it is a small town and people are very nice in this town. Travelling to and from Heathrow Airport is very convenient, I usually share a taxi/ uber with my friends to the airport and it takes around 40 mins. Getting to London is also very quick, only a 30 mins direct train ride and the frequency of trains is also very high. This makes travelling to host families for half term, going to London for the weekend and university visits very easy to plan for.

Did you enjoy being in a town environment rather than a closed campus – any thoughts?

Yes, I actually enjoyed it more than I thought I would. This is because a closed campus may feel really enclosed and controlled even on weekends, whereas living in the boarding house across the street from the main campus feels like I was more integrated with the town and community and I don't have the pressure from the school in my free time. Also, the level of freedom is higher so transiting to universities will be easier.

Did you get involved in extra-curricular activities? Were there enough opportunities on offer?

I did squash for games in year 13 which was really enjoyable to learn a new sport overseas. Sometimes I will also go to the gym after prep time at night, play badminton on the weekends and run around in the backyard of the boarding house. However, I think the boarding house should arrange more activities during the weekends like going to ikea, cinema or visiting a museum...

How did you enjoy the Girls' House? Were you well looked after? What were the highlights? What could be improved?

I enjoyed my time at the Girl's House as I was well looked after and the level of cleanliness in the house is very high. I still feel quite free as there is no 'lights out time' but only a time to return to our rooms which I find reasonable. We have movie nights, birthday celebrations and cooking meals together in the weekends are very fun and helps to bond people together. I think it can be greatly improved by being more diverse and having boarders from all parts of the world, as most of the girls are from Mainland China and Hong Kong at the moment, which limits the culture exchange experience that I was anticipating before I went to Berkhamsted.



B E R K H A M S T E D

— 1541 —

Finally, if you were to recommend Berkhamsted to other students from Hong Kong in summing up what are the positive things you would say?

1. Good experience to learn about English culture and their methods of teaching
2. Very safe and comfortable environment in town and boarding house
3. Good support from the school for university applications, work experience and interview preparations (but only limited to medical students/ oxbridge)
4. Support from teachers as they are very helpful, caring and passionate to their work and the quality of teaching is generally high
5. Kind and friendly day students once you get to know them
6. High level of freedom in the boarding house, some rules but I think that is very reasonable and understandable