Azeez: an IntoUniversity success story

Farah Ahmad recently paid a visit to IntoUniversity Haringey North to speak to Azeez, an alumnus of the centre who is currently reading for a degree in Medicine at UCL. Azeez graciously came in on the day after his end-of-year exams to talk about his time at the centre and to reflect upon his first year at university. Azeez and his two younger siblings, Nabeel and Aisha, started attending the centre shortly after it first opened in autumn 2009. While at university Azeez continues to see his mentor, Connor, on a regular basis.

After being told about a previously shy Azeez by the Haringey North team, it was a pleasure to meet an enthusiastic and confident young man. Azeez agreed that he would have also described himself in this way when he first started attending the centre. His confidence has grown immensely, something he says is ‘important for me for the future. Especially in interviews, you have to be able to project yourself really well. Along with this is the kind of help that you get at IntoUniversity and they’re really happy to do that.’ With the support of IntoUniversity Haringey North staff, Azeez was accepted at UCL to study Medicine and has been able to continue his aspiration of becoming a doctor.

Both as a student at the centre and, now as a university student, Azeez mentions that he particularly valued the IntoUniversity Mentoring programme. His current mentor, Connor, has been ‘really valuable’ throughout the whole process, especially during the transition from A-levels to university. The one-to-one meetings during which Azeez and Connor have been able to discuss academic life, ‘work experience and volunteering’ as well as having fun and ‘playing games’ have been particular highlights for Azeez. He also comments that he found speaking to Connor helpful in envisaging life at university: ‘It’s good to have another person who’s gone through university that you can talk to from time to time.’

Farah Ahmad
Farah has been a Fundraising Officer at IntoUniversity Head Office since September 2015 and is responsible for individual giving. Before joining the charity, Farah studied for an MSc in Social and Cultural Psychology at the London School of Economics and, prior to that, gained her BSc in Biology with Psychology from Queen Mary, University of London. Like many of IntoUniversity’s students, Farah is the first-generation in her family to go on to Higher Education.

Azeez: an IntoUniversity success story

Azeez Ahmad
Azeez Nauzer
Into University Haringey North
University College London
Medicine

Azeez was particularly grateful for the support of former Haringey North Centre Leader, Rob Line, who helped him with his personal statement for university. The hours spent perfecting Azeez’s application meant that he was able to attain an interview to study Medicine at UCL. ‘Every day I would go to Rob and say “I corrected it, what can I do to improve?” And for around an hour every day, during the summer holidays, we would go through and improve it. I think I went to the centre about ten days in a row.’

The commitment of Rob and the rest of the centre team demonstrated to Azeez ‘the kind of help that you get at IntoUniversity and they’re really happy to do that.’ With the support of IntoUniversity Haringey North staff, Azeez was accepted at UCL to study Medicine and has been able to continue his aspiration of becoming a doctor.

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Azeez’s motivation for wanting to become a doctor stems from being passionate about Medicine and wanting to be ‘there for people in need and help them.’ Azeez values the opportunities IntoUniversity has provided and the decisions he has made along the way and states: ‘I’m in such a good position, I have to take advantage of the opportunity… I just want to have a good life.’

Like many university students, Azeez found his first year of study tough, in particular the volume of work he had to manage as a medical student. Azeez quickly learned how to study better for his exams: ‘You have to make a conscious decision about what’s more important… can I do this later or can I do this now? You have to be decisive and that’s something you have to learn as a medical student.’

When asked what he has enjoyed most so far at university, Azeez says: ‘I like the independence and learning about the sciences in greater detail.’

Azeez tells me that he has especially relished the opportunity to learn about the human anatomy, and is very much looking forward to starting clinical medicine in later years.

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University made me fall in love with stories again

Can you tell us about your educational background?
I went to primary school at St Matthias on the Warwick Road in London, just after the war, but was soon sent off to boarding school in Sussex – the Abbey, Ashhurst Wood. I was there for six years, hated being away from home, loved rugby and singing. Then I went off to a school in Canterbury, the King’s School, where I got more used to being away from home and still loved rugby and singing. We wore strange uniforms, wing collars, black jackets, booties. And when I was older I got to wear a scarlet gown, which made me feel very important.

What did having the opportunity to go to university mean for you? Did gaining a degree from King’s College London open doors?
I didn’t go straight to university but chose the army instead, and went to Sandhurst, where officers are trained. I liked the uniform, the good food and the friends I made, but hated being shouted at, and decided army life was not for me. I met and married my wife, Clare, when we were really young, because we loved one another, and had children really young; three of them. Then I went off to university at King’s College London, to start all over again. It was at King’s that I came into contact with some of the classic stories such as Beowulf and Sir Gawain and The Green Knight. I loved them and have never forgotten listening to one professor who used to sit on the edge of the desk and read to us with incredible passion. It made me fall in love with stories again that I hadn’t connected with since listening to my mother read when I was a child. I got my degree in French and English – just – and decided to become a teacher.

What took you from teaching to writing? What inspired you to become a children’s author?
I loved reading stories to the children, and they seemed to like it too. We were teaching at a little village primary school in Kent, at Wickhambreaux, when I ran out of other writers’ stories to read, so started making up some of my own.

War Horse is a well-loved and celebrated novel for many. Where did you get the inspiration for it?
Clare and I have lived in Iddesleigh, in Devon, since 1975. It’s home, and I love it, and it’s where I belong. It’s where I know. My children have grown up here, my grandchildren come here. It’s the place I like to be when I’m not travelling around doing book things. And because I know it so well, I write about it a lot. That’s why I wrote War Horse, which is based pretty much here, on a Devon farm. I wrote that particular story from meeting an old soldier, Wilfred Ellis, thirty five years ago in the Duke of York pub down the road, when he told me about going to the First World War as a young man.

And that in itself is all part of being in Devon – you get an idea of the rhythm of life. How we all have our place or time on this earth. There’s the church, and you maybe get christened there, and you may get married there, and you may end up in the graveyard there. I know the people who planted the trees and ploughed the land, where they live and where they work. And you don’t know that until you stay in the place long enough. It’s England as it has been for 1,000 years. It’s quite a literary part of Devon. Ted Hughes, who was a great inspiration to me and an early encourager of my work, was a neighbour until his death in 1998, and the Torridge, at the end of my lane, which is one of the country’s great salmon rivers, is the setting for Henry Williamson’s Yanka the Otter.

What do you see as the most pressing social issue for young people in the UK today? What do you see as the key to tackling this problem?
I have been working recently on a short WWF Climate Coalition Film, I Wish for You, with actors Jeremy Irons and Maxine Peake.1

It was based on a letter I wrote from a grandfather to his granddaughter and sums up my answer to this question: If I have learnt anything in my long life, it’s this. Our earth is a living breathing being, and we must hurt her no more. We are using her, fouling the air and the sea, making a dustbin of the land, a sewer of the oceans, a graveyard of her creatures. We have to learn to love our earth again, love her as much as I love you and you love me. For you and I, we are a part of this living planet, part of our earth’s great family. 

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qs5LJt7TM
Universities’ outreach efforts must be matched by rising GCSE attainment

Nobody doubts that equality in access to Higher Education is a core component of social mobility – a concept that looks at whether someone in their 30s is in a better position than their parents were. Looking at the chances of 18 year olds going to university acts as an early warning system for how ‘equal’ their opportunities will be in ten or twenty years’ time.

Today more people go to university than got five good GCSEs twenty years ago, so it’s clear that participation in Higher Education has increased significantly - mainly driven by improvements in GCSE attainment.

And yet students are still written off as far as Higher Education is concerned if they don’t get decent GCSEs – and that’s currently 43% of state school pupils. Eating in to this 43% of non-achievers at GCSE could be termed ‘increasing participation’. Making inroads into the sub-groups who have much lower participation is the challenge of widening participation.

In terms of access to Higher Education, while differences between rich and poor continued to get smaller last year, other dimensions of equality moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap in terms of access to Higher Education, while differences between rich and poor continued to get smaller last year, other dimensions of equality moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap in terms of access to Higher Education, while differences between rich and poor continued to get smaller last year, other dimensions of equality moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart. For example, the gap between young men and women worsened, moved further apart.
We are delighted to announce that this month we will be opening our 12th London centre, in the Borough of Islington, expanding the IntoUniversity network to 22 centres. Our North Islington centre will be part-funded by a consortium of four independent schools over the next three years: Westminster School, St Paul’s Girls’ School, City of London School and Eton College. In this piece, we hear from each of the Heads as to why they have chosen to support IntoUniversity and, specifically, our work in Islington.

Patrick Derham, Head Master, Westminster School
Vice-Chair of Trustees, IntoUniversity

My involvement with IntoUniversity goes back over ten years. It has been a privilege for me to have seen it grow into what is a groundbreaking national charity that is dealing with the very real issues of inequality, disadvantage and social mobility that are the greatest challenges facing our society.

I am quite clear that my role as Vice-Chair of Trustees is one of the most satisfying parts of my working life. IntoUniversity is transforming lives and that transformation is at the heart of what all successful educational institutions aspire to do.

Clarissa Farr, High Mistress, St Paul’s Girls’ School

As the Head of a selective, academic independent school I’ve always been uncomfortable about the UK’s poor record for promoting social mobility. We have our own bursary programme with 11% of our pupils currently receiving funding and through that, I’ve seen first-hand how access to an excellent education can change a life. One of our bursary students who has had a degree in Maths and now working in Insurance, described her education at St Paul’s as ‘the most incredible, life-changing gift I could ever have received’. Her words were in my mind when St Paul’s Girls’ School was approached to support the new IntoUniversity centre in North Islington.

It’s easy to deploy resources thinly over many projects: what we wanted was to build a long-term commitment to something that would produce lasting results over time. When I visited the premises for the new centre, walking there from the underground station I began thinking about the children living in the borough and what the centre might do for them: lifting their aspirations and widening their horizons. I was struck to be told by the IntoUniversity staff that many would never have left their home area, even to travel to central London, never mind having a day at the seaside.

Everyone, whatever their background, should be encouraged to embrace new experiences and aim high.

The philosophy of IntoUniversity has aspiration at its heart: looking above and beyond what is immediate, to what might be – to what you might do and become, through aiming for a university education. IntoUniversity has already changed many young people’s lives for the better and we are proud to be a part of this new initiative.

Simon Henderson, Head Master, Eton College

Eton College is delighted to be supporting the Islington centre of IntoUniversity. As Head Master I believe passionately in the power of education to change lives. The best cultures draw on multiple thoughts, multiple backgrounds and multiple perspectives and it is crucial for this country that our talented young people are able to fully develop those talents, whatever their personal circumstances.

Those currently at school will end up doing multiple jobs, many of which have not been invented yet – because no one has thought of them – or will be done in very different ways to how they are currently. This means that education is more important than ever. We need a generation of young people with knowledge and skills, but also with ambition and resolve. We need them to be creative and to be willing to think for themselves. We need them to have the confidence to challenge themselves to do things they can’t quite do yet and to have the resilience to deal with setbacks. We need them to have integrity and the moral courage to stand up for what they believe in. We need them to be excellent communicators, to embrace working with and learning from others and to develop an open-minded and outward-looking mentality, so that they are ready and willing to contribute to their wider community.

A university education helps young people develop all these things, but sometimes individuals need a little help along the way and it is through the great work of organisations such as IntoUniversity that aspirations can be raised, talent can be fulfilled and social mobility can improve. This benefits not just the young people directly involved in these programmes, but also benefits their families, their communities and society at large.

Sarah Fletcher, Head, City of London School

I am delighted that my school will be a founding partner of a new IntoUniversity centre in Islington. Islington is one of the most polarised boroughs in London, with disparities in wealth and future prospects clearly evident. The opportunity to be part of a new venture here is particularly welcome, as we draw many of our own pupils from this area. This partnership will give us the chance to increase our impact in the local community, with the project directly benefiting hundreds of boys and girls every year.

City of London School has a long history of service and of generosity to others. 10% of our boys are on full fee assistance, living proof that success in life does not have to be limited by background or financial means, but that being given the opportunity to thrive can make all the difference. As educators we see it all the time: success is an interdependent mix of skills and resources. At its base is natural talent; in whatever field that may be. The will to work is indispensable, as is the opportunity to study in peace and quiet, and to discuss ideas with like-minded people. The acquisition of knowledge and understanding is essential if the world is to be navigated with any kind of assurance. The development of ‘soft’ or ‘essential’ skills paves the way to working with others, and gives confidence in presentation. Perhaps most importantly, there has to be encouragement to see beyond the present, so that the mirror which reflects back the here and now transforms into a window to a different future. IntoUniversity provides a wonderful service in all these respects.

The City of London Schools, which include primary and secondary Academies, alongside the three independent schools, are already committed to working together to improve education in London. The country needs to nurture its talent and to find fresh ideas and inspiration from across the social spectrum if it is to thrive. Encouraging social mobility should not be a choice, but an imperative, and I am therefore proud to support IntoUniversity in its mission.

Enabling all young people to become authors of their own life stories.

I am thrilled that four leading and successful independent schools have come together to support this new IntoUniversity centre in Islington. All four schools recognise that we have a part to play in enabling all young people to become authors of their own life stories. I am grateful to my colleagues and each of them has written passionately about why they wanted to be part of the IntoUniversity story.