Overcoming the odds: an IntoUniversity student journey

This edition, Emma Sacchi, Fundraising and Executive Support Officer at IU's Head Office, took the opportunity to find out a bit more about one of IntoUniversity's students, Mohamad Hussain, who has been attending IU Brent since 2009. He has just finished studying for A-levels in Maths, Chemistry and Arabic, and is nervously anticipating receiving his exam results in 2 weeks' time.

Arriving in the UK from Baghdad aged 14, accompanied by just his father, Mohamad concedes that he felt a very long way from home. As he details the exact date that they landed (24th August 2007), it is clear that he remembers it as if it were yesterday.

Armed with only very basic English and flung head-first into an alien and not always welcoming environment, Mohamad describes to me, very matter-of-factly, the far from ideal circumstances under which he commenced his schooling in the UK. He joined Hainault Forest High School in East London, midway through Year 9. When his sister joined her father and brother in England a year later, the family then settled in Willesden, North West London, and Mohamad transferred to Newman Catholic College in Brent.

Thrown straight into mock exams, his results were unsurprisingly pretty disastrous. Given a tough time at school for his strong accent, it as if it were yesterday.

When conversation turns to life in Iraq, his face clouds slightly, however he insists that he is happy to share his experiences. When war broke out in 2003, his school was regularly shut, and kidnappings were not uncommon. I ask about the differences between the Iraqi and the UK school system, and he explains that although the subjects on the curriculum in the UK are not too dissimilar from those in Iraq, the teaching style could not have been more disparate, with the focus in class in Iraq being on memorising large quantities of information rather than actually understanding it. Mohamad's commitment to Academic Support at IntoUniversity Brent soon led him to become involved in the other opportunities that IU has to offer. In Year 10, he was paired with an undergraduate mentor, an Economics and Finance student from the University of Oxford, and over the next couple of years took part in a Current Affairs Holiday FOCUS week and a 3-day Extending Horizons trip to York.

Asking what he felt he gained from these experiences, Mohamad says he doesn’t know where to start. Taking a moment to think, he reels off numerous ‘highlights’ and opportunities that ‘he wouldn’t normally have had’ from the last couple of years, including his visits to UCL and the University of York. He stresses how beneficial he found it to speak to students, learn about student life and look around the university campuses first-hand. He rounds off this list by emphasising his appreciation of the ‘motivation and encouragement’ that he has received from IU staff and volunteers over the years. He adds that this is something that he does not get from his parents. Despite his father being highly educated and a qualified Civil Engineer, Mohamad describes his parents as ‘old-fashioned’, and as having little involvement in his academic career.

When war broke out in 2003, his school was regularly shut, and kidnappings were not uncommon

Chatting to him today, if I hadn’t known otherwise, I would have thought he was London born and bred. Later, he modestly drops into conversation that in his GCSE English exam, less than 3 years after arriving in the UK, he achieved an A*.

It was through Newman Catholic College that Mohamad first learnt about IntoUniversity. He began attending Academic Support sessions twice a week at IntoUniversity Brent and, through his school, completed IntoUniversity’s Secondary FOCUS programme. Supported by the staff and volunteers at the centre, he focussed on improving his language skills, developing a strong relationship with Rachael, a Senior Education Worker. He describes her support through the frustrations and challenges of adapting to a new language and culture as ‘beyond amazing’. It was through Newman Catholic College that Mohamad first learnt about IntoUniversity. He began attending Academic Support sessions twice a week at IntoUniversity Brent and, through his school, completed IntoUniversity’s Secondary FOCUS programme. Supported by the staff and volunteers at the centre, he focused on improving his language skills, developing a strong relationship with Rachael, a Senior Education Worker. He describes her support through the frustrations and challenges of adapting to a new language and culture as ‘beyond amazing’.

Continued on page 2 >
This academic year, now in Year 13, Mohamad was paired with a corporate mentor, Bhavick, a BlackRock employee, whom he has met with 7 times since February. Mohamad describes Bhavick as ‘a brilliant guide, helping him with his application to university, with understanding student finance and offering him advice in the absence of close family. (Now that he has finished his A-levels, Mohamad is living alone: his younger sister moved back to Iraq after completing her GCSEs, and his father has also moved back now that Mohamad has finished school.) Mohamad affirms that he is looking forward to having Bhavick’s continued support next year, during his first year of university.

In recognition of his achievements, in July 2013, Mohamad was one of just two students selected by INTO University to attend HRH the Duke of York’s ‘Backing Youth’ Reception at Buckingham Palace. Talking about this latest opportunity, he can’t stop grinning, and proudly shows me a photo of his personal invitation from HRH the Duke of York on his phone, which he is planning on framing.

Mohamad’s face lights up as we begin to talk about his future plans. He currently holds provisional offers from Manchester and Kingston universities to study for an MSc Pharmacy. Upon completion of his Master’s degree he hopes to take a year out and volunteer with INTOUniversity, to mentor and share his experiences with other students. After this, he plans to begin his career in the pharmaceutical industry, specialising in the development of new medicine. Passionate about technology, his long-term ambitions involve developing organ transplant technology.

The more you put into something, the more you get out of it.

As I thank him for his time and head back to Head Office, I realise that one thing he has said during our conversation has stuck with me with in particular: ‘the more you put in, the more you get out of’; with this attitude to life, I have no doubt that he will achieve all these future ambitions and more.

Two weeks later I caught up with Mohamad to find out how his results went. I was delighted to learn that he has achieved excellent grades in his A-levels, securing his place at Kingston University to read Pharmacy. He is very much looking forward to starting his course in a couple of weeks’ time, and to keeping in touch with the IU Brent team as he makes the transition to university life.

As I write this, I am preoccupied with tomorrow (2nd August), when I graduate from university. Over the last few weeks my Facebook page has been inundated with photos of peers, hatted and robed, happily stood between beaming parents, well-manicured piece of off-white paper firmly in hand. Finally, I can have some photos of my own (and the piece of paper too, of course).

After tomorrow, my main preoccupation will be – well, nothing. I have no real set plans, and when asked have been explaining with a well-rehearsed patter and smile that my plan is to ‘explore’ until I find something that ‘suits me, because after all there’s no point in rushing into something I don’t enjoy’. Essentially, I am trying as best as I can to avoid the phrase ‘gap year’, not that anybody is fooled. I’m certainly not.

My proud avoidance of the term ‘gap year’ (and its unfairly negative connotations) reflects on me rather badly. I am extremely fortunate to be able to take time out to think, to try new things, to consider postgraduate study and to work hard in order to finance it. I have, as the expression goes, the luxury of choice. And choice is a luxury. My 17-year-old self was extremely privileged to have to make difficult choices about what to study at university (English won out over Geography) or where. Raised by supportive – but not pushy – parents with experience of Higher Education, I was very fortunate that having to make these choices always seemed highly likely.

Coming into INTO University straight from my own undergraduate career (with only a night’s sleep in between) has made me acutely aware of how luxurious choice-heavy my life has so far been. Indeed, it is the luxury of choice that INTO University works so diligently and effectively to extend to those who need it most. Through none of their own doing, the charity’s beneficiaries experience upbringings where academic attainment may not be rewarded, and where educational progress may not be seen – as so many studies prove it to be – as an important economic and aspirational investment. Through INTO University’s involvement, students are given the skills and belief to pursue pathways to futures of their own choosing, rather than those ostensively laid before them by socio-economic conditions and expectations.

It has been so rewarding over my time here to see INTO University students indulging in this new luxury. The charity’s employees do not only provide a supportive, nurturing learning environment, but encourage an educational independence which the necessarily restrictive education system risks suppressing.

**Continued from page 1**

**IntoUniversity: the luxury of choice**

As I write this, I am preoccupied with tomorrow (2nd August), when I graduate from university. Over the last few weeks my Facebook page has been inundated with photos of peers, hatted and robed, happily stood between beaming parents, well-manicured piece of off-white paper firmly in hand. Finally, I can have some photos of my own (and the piece of paper too, of course).

After tomorrow, my main preoccupation will be – well, nothing. I have no real set plans, and when asked have been explaining with a well-rehearsed patter and smile that my plan is to ‘explore’ until I find something that ‘suits me, because after all there’s no point in rushing into something I don’t enjoy’. Essentially, I am trying as best as I can to avoid the phrase ‘gap year’, not that anybody is fooled. I’m certainly not.

My proud avoidance of the term ‘gap year’ (and its unfairly negative connotations) reflects on me rather badly. I am extremely fortunate to be able to take time out to think, to try new things, to consider postgraduate study and to work hard in order to finance it. I have, as the expression goes, the luxury of choice. And choice is a luxury. My 17-year-old self was extremely privileged to have to make difficult choices about what to study at university (English won out over Geography) or where. Raised by supportive – but not pushy – parents with experience of Higher Education, I was very fortunate that having to make these choices always seemed highly likely.

Coming into INTO University straight from my own undergraduate career (with only a night’s sleep in between) has made me acutely aware of how luxurious choice-heavy my life has so far been. Indeed, it is the luxury of choice that INTO University works so diligently and effectively to extend to those who need it most. Through none of their own doing, the charity’s beneficiaries experience upbringings where academic attainment may not be rewarded, and where educational progress may not be seen – as so many studies prove it to be – as an important economic and aspirational investment. Through INTO University’s involvement, students are given the skills and belief to pursue pathways to futures of their own choosing, rather than those ostensively laid before them by socio-economic conditions and expectations.

It has been so rewarding over my time here to see INTO University students indulging in this new luxury. The charity’s employees do not only provide a supportive, nurturing learning environment, but encourage an educational independence which the necessarily restrictive education system risks suppressing.

**Into University’s involvement, students are given the skills and belief to pursue pathways to futures of their own choosing, rather than those ostensively laid before them by socio-economic conditions and expectations.**

**For example, a few weeks ago I accompanied the IU Hammersmith team on a visit to Year 12 students at Phoenix High School in White City to discuss university applications and personal statements as part of the charity’s Secondary FOCUS programme.**

**Following the workshop some students stayed behind to ask how to get to the Hammersmith centre for more help. They weren’t waiting for their hands to be held, nor were they expecting it. They chose to seek more advice. They felt empowered to take command of their prospects.**

**Such empowerment is too rare amongst young people – whatever level of education they’ve reached – and is a gift not just for UCAS, but for the long haul.**

This is just one small example of the long-term impact INTO University has. It would be possible to write at length about the economic benefits of increased degree productivity – The Prince’s Trust, LEA and millions- all already have. It would be possible to look at case studies of INTO University alumni from a social mobility perspective and be flooded with positive, moving examples. INTO University is a far greater good than its name suggests – of course, university access is a key goal, but one that, when achieved, ignites even brighter, bolder flames.

**They weren’t waiting for their hands to be held, nor were they expecting it. They chose to seek more advice. They felt empowered to take command of their prospects.**
Insight
Impact, updates and highlights from the network

IntoUniversity Student Survey 2013
This year we have further developed our monitoring of self-reported outcomes by opening our Student Survey out to a broader sample of students. This now provides a more in-depth evaluation of the impact of our different programmes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students participating in the Academic Support programme</th>
<th>76%</th>
<th>70%</th>
<th>75%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>reported that they were more likely to go to university</td>
<td>reported improved school grades</td>
<td>reported that they were working better at school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students participating in aspiration - raising FOCUS programmes</th>
<th>77%</th>
<th>37%</th>
<th>58%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>reported that they were more likely to go to university</td>
<td>reported improved school grades</td>
<td>reported that they were working better at school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on a sample of 2,236 students from all stands of the programme across IntoUniversity’s network of 12 centres in London, Nottingham and Bristol.

IntoUniversity: A Beacon of Best Practice in Impact Assessment
Impact assessment – identifying and measuring the long term difference you are making – has become a hot topic in the charity sector over the last five years.
Funders are increasingly keen to see robust evidence that planned outcomes are actually being achieved. The economic crisis and growing need for the services provided by charities means that Trustees and senior managers are acutely aware that they must spend each hard earned pound to maximum effect. Finally there is a growing body of evidence showing that assessing impact can help improve the quality of services delivered.
Yet it remains very difficult for charities to actually put in place the systems and processes required to assess their impact. My research into the State of Impact Reporting in the UK Charity Sector, conducted in partnership with Cass Business School and the Charity Finance Group, showed that good practice is the exception rather than the norm.

In the course of my research and through my current role as a charity consultant, I have been looking for charities to support in the Big Give. There were hundreds of charities on the website but having narrowed the options down to my particular interest – social mobility – I was immediately drawn to the Impact Report provided by IntoUniversity. In three short pages I could see evidence that IntoUniversity improved academic performance, the chances of getting to university and attitudes to learning. If IntoUniversity had been included in the sample of charities used for my research project they would have received one of the highest scores for the quality of their assessment. I made my donation and now often tell other charities to take a look at IntoUniversity as an example of best practice.
But what is it that makes IntoUniversity’s impact assessment so impressive?
• First and foremost is the way that from day one it has been part of the organisation’s DNA rather than a token analysis on the side. It was crucial that we could show – to ourselves and our supporters – that we were really having the transformative impact that we had planned and worked for.
• Secondly, IntoUniversity has a clear understanding of the problem that it is seeking to address (declining social mobility) and how its programme will address this problem (attending university has been proven to level the playing field between rich and poor).

We are really excited to have launched two more IntoUniversity Student Ambassador Schemes this academic year, meaning we now have Ambassador teams at Imperial College, Queen Mary, LSE and UCL.
The teams are working hard to recruit more student volunteers for our Academic Support and Mentoring programmes, and they will be organising lots of exciting events on campus for the students to attend.

Network news
IntoUniversity awarded Quality in Study Support: Established Status Award
In summer 2013, all IntoUniversity centres were awarded the Quality in Study Support: Established Status (QESS) Award. QESS is an assessed quality award given by Canterbury Christ Church University. The assessors described IntoUniversity’s programme as ‘comprehensive, innovative and outstanding’.
We are also pleased to have been shortlisted for the Children and Young People’s Charity Award in the Children & Young People Now Awards 2013.

Looking ahead
Over the 2013/2014 academic year we will be launching 3 new learning centres:
• IntoUniversity Walworth (in partnership with the University of Cambridge)
• IntoUniversity East Ham
• IntoUniversity Nottingham Central (our third centre in partnership with the University of Nottingham).

Nicola Robert
Nicola is co-founder of Robert + Skales, a management consultancy service which works with charities, corporates and other organisations to help maximise their effectiveness and demonstrate their impact. A chartered accountant specialising in Charity Accounting and Financial Management, Nicola’s career has spanned both the private and charity sectors. She recently co-authored the impact reporting in the UK Charity Sector publication, jointly produced by the Charity Finance Directors Group and Cass Business School, London.

For an impact geek like me it is music to the ears. But I think anyone with an interest in social mobility and the work of IntoUniversity would find it fascinating. So if you’ve not already read IntoUniversity’s 2013 Impact Report, take a look at it on their website: www.intouniversity.org/content/our-impact

Impact, updates and highlights from the network

Insight
Impact, updates and highlights from the network

IntoUniversity Student Survey 2013
This year we have further developed our monitoring of self-reported outcomes by opening our Student Survey out to a broader sample of students. This now provides a more in-depth evaluation of the impact of our different programmes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students participating in the Academic Support programme</th>
<th>76%</th>
<th>70%</th>
<th>75%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>reported that they were more likely to go to university</td>
<td>reported improved school grades</td>
<td>reported that they were working better at school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students participating in aspiration - raising FOCUS programmes</th>
<th>77%</th>
<th>37%</th>
<th>58%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>reported that they were more likely to go to university</td>
<td>reported improved school grades</td>
<td>reported that they were working better at school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on a sample of 2,236 students from all stands of the programme across IntoUniversity’s network of 12 centres in London, Nottingham and Bristol.

IntoUniversity: A Beacon of Best Practice in Impact Assessment
Impact assessment – identifying and measuring the long term difference you are making – has become a hot topic in the charity sector over the last five years.
Funders are increasingly keen to see robust evidence that planned outcomes are actually being achieved. The economic crisis and growing need for the services provided by charities means that Trustees and senior managers are acutely aware that they must spend each hard earned pound to maximum effect. Finally there is a growing body of evidence showing that assessing impact can help improve the quality of services delivered.
Yet it remains very difficult for charities to actually put in place the systems and processes required to assess their impact. My research into the State of Impact Reporting in the UK Charity Sector, conducted in partnership with Cass Business School and the Charity Finance Group, showed that good practice is the exception rather than the norm.

In the course of my research and through my current role as a charity consultant, I have been looking for charities to support in the Big Give. There were hundreds of charities on the website but having narrowed the options down to my particular interest – social mobility – I was immediately drawn to the Impact Report provided by IntoUniversity. In three short pages I could see evidence that IntoUniversity improved academic performance, the chances of getting to university and attitudes to learning. If IntoUniversity had been included in the sample of charities used for my research project they would have received one of the highest scores for the quality of their assessment. I made my donation and now often tell other charities to take a look at IntoUniversity as an example of best practice.
But what is it that makes IntoUniversity’s impact assessment so impressive?
• First and foremost is the way that from day one it has been part of the organisation’s DNA rather than a token analysis on the side. It was crucial that we could show – to ourselves and our supporters – that we were really having the transformative impact that we had planned and worked for.
• Secondly, IntoUniversity has a clear understanding of the problem that it is seeking to address (declining social mobility) and how its programme will address this problem (attending university has been proven to level the playing field between rich and poor).

We are really excited to have launched two more IntoUniversity Student Ambassador Schemes this academic year, meaning we now have Ambassador teams at Imperial College, Queen Mary, LSE and UCL.
The teams are working hard to recruit more student volunteers for our Academic Support and Mentoring programmes, and they will be organising lots of exciting events on campus for the students to attend.

Network news
IntoUniversity awarded Quality in Study Support: Established Status Award
In summer 2013, all IntoUniversity centres were awarded the Quality in Study Support: Established Status (QESS) Award. QESS is an assessed quality award given by Canterbury Christ Church University. The assessors described IntoUniversity’s programme as ‘comprehensive, innovative and outstanding’.
We are also pleased to have been shortlisted for the Children and Young People’s Charity Award in the Children & Young People Now Awards 2013.

Looking ahead
Over the 2013/2014 academic year we will be launching 3 new learning centres:
• IntoUniversity Walworth (in partnership with the University of Cambridge)
• IntoUniversity East Ham
• IntoUniversity Nottingham Central (our third centre in partnership with the University of Nottingham).

Nicola Robert
Nicola is co-founder of Robert + Skales, a management consultancy service which works with charities, corporates and other organisations to help maximise their effectiveness and demonstrate their impact. A chartered accountant specialising in Charity Accounting and Financial Management, Nicola’s career has spanned both the private and charity sectors. She recently co-authored the impact reporting in the UK Charity Sector publication, jointly produced by the Charity Finance Directors Group and Cass Business School, London.

For an impact geek like me it is music to the ears. But I think anyone with an interest in social mobility and the work of IntoUniversity would find it fascinating. So if you’ve not already read IntoUniversity’s 2013 Impact Report, take a look at it on their website: www.intouniversity.org/content/our-impact
Spotlight

John Stone is the founder and Chairman of Lombard International, the market-leading pan-European life assurance company. In February 2012 he decided to retire in order to focus his time and energies more sharply on his charitable foundation, the Stone Family Foundation. The Foundation began funding IntoUniversity in 2011, and currently supports our Hammersmith and Haringey North centres.

Please can you tell us about your educational background and early career? I'm not a great exemplar for a university education myself! I left school at the age of 16 in 1959, after taking what were then known as O-Levels, and began work straightaway as a clerk at Norwich Union, near my home. As my career developed I discovered a flair for sales and marketing, and by the 1980s was the chief executive of Target Group. Following the sale of this business, I founded Lombard International in 1991.

What made you take the decision to leave your role at Lombard and focus on your philanthropic interests? I set up Lombard, which combines specialist insurance with wealth management on an international scale, and ran it for 20 years before retiring in 2011. Having made more money than we could ever spend, and still having plenty of energy, I decided to use the business skills I had acquired to help other people. My late wife, Vanessa, and I set up the Stone Family Foundation shortly after the sale of the business, and it has now been running for over 7 years.

The Stone Family Foundation funds innovative, sustainable and entrepreneurial approaches to tackling major social problems across the UK and around the world. What are the key initiatives that the Foundation currently supports? The majority of the grant-making of around £5m a year goes into water and sanitation projects in developing countries, mainly in Africa and South East Asia. More recently we have begun to support charities in the UK working in the fields of disadvantaged young people and of mental health.

How did the Foundation initially decide what direction it was going to take? Please could you explain how you have targeted your philanthropy? We approached targeting with an open mind, really using the same techniques I've always used in the day job: to see where each pound invested could create maximum benefit. Usually people give to causes they feel passionate about. Vanessa and I decided to approach the exercise more rationally. We started with a clean sheet of paper and began talking to New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) who specialise in advising philanthropists.

With NPC’s advice we realised that we could make a bigger impact in developing nations, and then considered areas of need, narrowing them down to water and sanitation, microfinance and girls’ education. From this list we created an initial portfolio of ten charities, split between the areas, and Vanessa and I went out to visit them. After that first set of three-year grants, we have concentrated on water and sanitation projects.

Our grants to UK charities working with disadvantaged young people and in mental health came a couple of years later: wanting to involve our children in the foundation, we consulted them, again alongside NPC, on areas of interest to them, coming up with mental health and young people living in disadvantage – the part of the portfolio that grants to IntoUniversity.

What do you see as the most pressing social issue in the UK today? Part of the reason that we diversified the portfolio into the disadvantaged youth sector was the shock of the London riots in the summer of 2011. It became very clear very quickly – despite the fact that opportunism was motivating some of the rioters – that there was an entire section of the population which felt disenfranchised and lacking in hope for the future.

What do you see as the key to tackling this problem? At the Stone Family Foundation we are concerned with inequality and lack of opportunity wherever we come across it, whether overseas or at home. We’re not so idealistic as to think anything we can do will change this in a major way, but in the UK we target our donations to charities such as IntoUniversity, which are helping to level the playing field.

You have become known for applying commercial principles to your charitable giving. Please could you tell us a bit more about this approach? The word ‘sustainable’ is over-used, but this is the principle we operate on, particularly in the developing world: giving an organisation the seed funding to eventually become sustainable in its own right. We use the word ‘investment’ as much as we do ‘grant’ for this reason, and have co-funded projects with venture philanthropists such as Impetus – PEF.

What advice would you give someone looking to become a social entrepreneur? My best advice is to take advice! The input from advisers such as Coutts and NPC has been invaluable – why re-invent the wheel? I’m constantly surprised to meet seasoned investors and other professionals who almost start from scratch when thinking about philanthropy, and fail to apply the business acumen they’ve spent years building in their day jobs to the charitable investments that they begin to make. And that acumen is often useful to the charity alongside the financial donation – I really enjoy my role as mentor to some of the people we’ve supported over the years.

How do you see the Stone Family Foundation’s work progressing in the years to come? As you’ve pointed out, we very much think of the Foundation like a business. As you do with a business, we’ve built the foundations, tested the approaches and now have a coherent strategy. Although we’re always considering new ideas – at the moment about social investment, for example – we intend to stick with what we do, constantly working to improve our giving and its impact. The more knowledge you have, the bigger bang you’ll get from each buck.

We would love to hear your feedback about aspire. To get in touch or to find out more about IntoUniversity please visit our website www.intouniversity.org, drop Emma an email at emma.sacchi@intouniversity.org or call us on 020 7243 0242.

You can also follow us on
@IntoUniversity
www.facebook.com/IntoUniversity

Registered Charity No. 1118525 Company Registration No. 6019150