OXFORD AND THE MIDDLE EAST

2018–19
CONTENTS

The University of Oxford ...................... 3
Oxford and the Middle East ................. 8
The University of Oxford aims to advance learning by teaching and research for the benefit of society on a global scale.

Drawing strength from its distinctive, college-based structure and interdisciplinary culture, Oxford has consistently developed its capacity to generate and share knowledge. For hundreds of years the University has continued to make significant contributions to global society, culture and economics.

Oxford’s expertise encompasses science, health, society and culture. In each of these areas the University has made key contributions to the advancement of knowledge.

Research carried out by Oxford’s staff, students and alumni has made an enormous impact on the world over the centuries. Among the most distinctive elements of Oxford’s unique profile are the University’s success in spinning out companies that convert scientific research into high tech products and services; its global network of tropical medicine laboratories, which have been at the forefront of the fight against infectious disease for decades; and its close connections with British history, philosophy, religion and literature.

The impact of Oxford’s expertise in research and education is further enhanced by Oxford University Press, the world’s biggest English language academic press and English language teaching publisher.

In the coming decade the University will further expand the impact of its research and education to maintain Oxford’s position as one of the world’s most renowned centres of learning.

**Nobel Prizes**

Current and former Oxford staff and students had won a total of 51 Nobel Prizes by 2018, with multiple Oxford alumni and staff winning prizes in each of the six categories.

Notable Nobel laureates associated with the University include chemist Dorothy Hodgkin; economists Amartya Sen and Joseph Stiglitz; Howard Florey, a member of the team that discovered penicillin; authors VS Naipaul and TS Eliot; physicist Erwin Schrödinger; and Peace Prize recipient José Ramos-Horta.

Current and former Oxford staff and students have also won a total of 21 Fields Medals, Balzan Prizes, Rolf Schock Prizes and Abel Prizes.
The University of Oxford is the oldest university in the English-speaking world. The exact date of the University’s foundation is not known, but teaching was taking place in Oxford by 1096. The University developed rapidly after 1167, when King Henry II banned English students from attending the University of Paris.

Despite a popular legend that University College was founded by King Alfred the Great in 872, it is now accepted that Oxford’s three oldest existing colleges – University, Balliol and Merton – were founded between 1249 and 1264. Colleges continued to be founded in Oxford in the centuries that followed, with the most recent, Green Templeton College, being created in 2008 by the merger of Green and Templeton Colleges, both of which were themselves founded in the second half of the twentieth century.

By the late medieval period, Oxford had achieved eminence above every other seat of learning, winning the praises of popes, kings and sages. In 1355, Edward III paid tribute not only to the University itself, but also to the services to the country provided by Oxford graduates.

Since that time, the University has been at the heart of Britain’s scientific, cultural, religious and political development. Oxford hosted King Charles I’s counter-Parliament during the English Civil War, was the scene of famous debates about evolution, and educated half of Britain’s Prime Ministers. Over the centuries Oxford’s ancient teaching and research departments such as the Faculty of Divinity and Faculty of Classics have continually evolved, and have been joined by new centres for teaching and research such as the Blavatnik School of Government and the interdisciplinary Oxford Martin School. The University will continue to grow its teaching and research capabilities to meet society’s ever-evolving needs.

Emo of Friesland became the first international student at Oxford, when he travelled from Groningen (now in the Netherlands) to Oxford in around 1190. His time at the University marks the start of Oxford’s long history of internationalisation: alumnus Thomas Stephens was the first recorded Englishman to visit India in 1579, while the University began collecting Chinese publications in 1604.

Oxford played a leading role in training British civil servants for service abroad from the middle of the nineteenth century. In the 1960s these courses opened up to aspiring diplomatic leaders from around the world, transforming into the Diplomatic Studies Programme, also known as the Foreign Service Programme, which still exists today. The Programme now has more than 1,200 alumni and has contributed staff to more than 140 countries’ diplomatic services.
A PERSONAL APPROACH TO EDUCATION

Oxford’s approach to undergraduate teaching is based around the intensive Oxford tutorial: the heart of an undergraduate education at the University. The Oxford tutorial is a conversation, normally between two or three students and their tutor, who is an expert on the topic. Teaching in this way offers a level of personalised attention from academic experts that is rare even at other world-leading universities.

Tutorials are provided at Oxford’s colleges. Every student is a member of a college as well as the University. The colleges are academic communities, comprehensive in their provision of education yet focused in terms of scale. They also provide libraries, study spaces and lodgings for many students, and are the hub for social life.

At their tutorials students are encouraged to go beyond the facts they have learned, developing their own theories to challenge the assumptions of their classmates and even their tutor. The tutorial makes an undergraduate education at Oxford intensive and challenging; its spirit of free inquiry and discourse is an essential expression of Oxford’s culture and values. Tutorials are combined with learning through lectures, seminars and laboratory work.

WORLD-CLASS RESOURCES

Roughly half of Oxford’s students are postgraduates. Postgraduate students are also members of a college (with the exception of those on non-matriculated courses). Although their teaching and research activities take place in their department, they also benefit from their college’s resources and are able to draw upon the expertise of its interdisciplinary community, as well as the subject specialists in their department.

Education is bolstered by lectures from leading academics, some of the world’s largest libraries and best-equipped laboratories, and a rich term-time schedule of public lectures, debates and screenings. Oxford students are also able to draw on the collections of the University’s four museums, including the Ashmolean, the world’s first university museum and one of the most-visited sites in Britain.

Oxford’s postgraduate students are part of a world-renowned research community. The University’s research output was rated first out of all UK universities in the Research Excellence Framework 2014, and its medical and health teaching and research has been rated best in the world for six years running by Times Higher Education.

Around 50 percent of all Oxford’s postgraduate students receive full or partial funding to study at the University, including about 80 percent of doctoral students. Scholarships available to Oxford postgraduate applicants include the prestigious Clarendon Scholarships, awarded to the most promising research students, and the world-famous Rhodes Scholarships.
Chinese student numbers have increased more than tenfold in the last 20 years. Oxford welcomes its first Chinese visitor.

Oxford’s earliest existing college is founded. The University now has 44 colleges and halls.

The first Laudian Professor of Arabic is appointed. More than 70 faculty now study the Middle East.


Oxford admits 1st international student. Today almost 50% of students are from outside the UK.

Oxford alumnus Thomas Stephens visits India. The University now employs 170 Indian faculty.

Oxford has been a centre of learning, research and innovation for more than 900 years.
The University of Oxford

1749
The Radcliffe Camera is opened
The University now has 375 buildings, not including college buildings

1861
Foundation of Lady Margaret Hall and Somerville, Oxford’s first two women’s colleges
All undergraduate colleges now admit both men and women

1879
Abraham Lincoln is sworn into office on an Oxford University Press bible
1,700 American students now study at Oxford

1884
Publication of the first parts of the Oxford English Dictionary
Oxford University Press is the world’s biggest English-language academic press

1945
Howard Florey awarded Nobel Prize for the discovery of penicillin
In total, Oxford staff and students have received 51 Nobel Prizes

1968
Needle-free injection company PowderJect founded, one of Oxford’s early spinouts

1993
Oxford is ranked the best university in the world by the Times Higher Education World University Rankings
The University was also ranked top in 2018 and 2017, second in 2016 and third in 2015

2019
The University now has 375 buildings, not including college buildings
BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS IN A CHANGING REGION

Oxford has benefitted from its close links with the Middle East for centuries and is today one of the key western hubs for the study of the region, its history, culture and religion.

The University aspires to play an educational and research role in the ongoing development of the Middle East; we have launched new scholarships for students from the region, are constantly deepening our research into the Middle East, and provide bespoke consulting and training services that will allow institutions in the region to draw on our world-class expertise in education.

The 21st Century has seen the launch of new universities in several Middle Eastern countries. With these new institutions come new ways of thinking about learning and the role of research in society. In this fertile environment Oxford continues to seek new links and further opportunities for collaborative research into the new challenges development brings.

Oxford has long been a home for the most able minds in the world, and we hope we will continue to recruit the most excellent students and academics in the Middle East as undergraduates, postgraduates and researchers. We are very proud of the achievements of our alumni in the region and we hope that we will continue to cultivate more young minds who will contribute to the future of their countries.

A CENTRE FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STUDY

At the heart of Oxford’s study of the region is the Middle East Centre at St Antony’s College, housed in the landmark Investcorp Building designed by Dame Zaha Hadid.

The Centre draws together expertise on the Arab World, Iran, Israel and Turkey from across the humanities and social sciences. It was founded in 1957 and rose to prominence under the directorship of famous historian Albert Hourani. The Centre has expanded significantly in recent years, adding new fellows thanks to the support of generous donors from the region.

It moved into the award-winning Investcorp Building in 2015. The new building houses the Middle East Centre Library, with the University’s primary collection of modern works on the region in European and Middle Eastern languages. Its 118-seat lecture theatre has allowed the Centre to expand its programme of seminars, lectures and debates, with many events open to the general public.

Professor Eugene Rogan is the current Director of the Centre. Professor Rogan teaches and researches the modern history of the Middle East and has published extensively on the topic. His 2009 book, The Arabs: A History, has been translated into ten languages and was named one of the best books of 2009 by The Economist, The Financial Times, and The Atlantic Monthly.

Other Centre fellows include Professor Philip Robins, an expert on Turkey; Dr Walter Armbrust, a social anthropologist who has written extensively on film and on modern Egypt; Dr Michael Willis, who specialises on comparative politics in the Maghreb, and Dr Laurent Mignon, who teaches Turkish language and literature.

Highlights of Oxford’s partnerships in the Middle East

- **Israel**: Collaboration with the Weizmann Institute of Science on the use of heart cells to restore muscle following a heart attack
- **Jordan**: Oxford archaeologists provided specialist input to UNESCO’s conservation plan for the Nabataean temple at Khirbet et-Tannur
- **Bahrain**: A long-term partnership with the University of Bahrain for low-energy water desalination research
- **Qatar**: Generous gifts from the Qatar Foundation fund chairs in Islamic Art and Architecture and Contemporary Islamic Studies
- **Saudi Arabia**: KACST-Oxford Petrochemical Research Centre exploring ways to make oil cleaner
The Investcorp Building in St Antony’s College
The Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, a Recognised Independent Centre of the University, now occupies a landmark new building in Marston Road. It was inaugurated by the Centre’s Patron, The Prince of Wales, in 2017. This unique building blends classical Islamic design features with the traditional British style of many of Oxford’s ancient colleges, forming an exciting new addition to Oxford’s renowned skyline. It includes an extensive library, auditorium and seminar rooms, dining hall, and accommodation for up to 40 students as well as offices for Centre Fellows. The stone buildings are surrounded by paved courtyards and gardens.

The Centre was first established in 1985 to encourage the scholarly study of Islam and the Islamic world and to provide a meeting place for the Western and Islamic worlds of learning and encourage multi-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary study. It was awarded the Royal Charter in 2012. The Centre offers scholarships and visiting fellowships and organises regular seminars, conferences, courses and other academic events open to all members of the University, as is its library. It also maintains a number of academic Fellowships for teaching and research, including Islamic Centre Lectureships in History, Theology, Anthropology, and Development Economics.

The Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies was founded in 1972 by Dr David Patterson, who became the Centre’s first President. The Centre is a Recognised Independent Centre of the University. Its mission is to remain in the international vanguard of Hebrew and Jewish Studies from antiquity to the contemporary world.

The Centre provides teaching for Jewish Studies students, as well as students of a range of other degrees that can include Hebrew or Jewish Studies elements.

It publishes research by its fellows and visiting scholars – of which it has hosted almost 600 over the past three decades – and provides a variety of public engagement activities including providing new resources and holding public lectures.

The Khalili Research Centre is the University’s centre for research and teaching about the art and material culture of the Islamic societies of the Middle East and of their non-Muslim members and neighbours. It is part of the Faculty of Oriental Studies.

The Centre’s current research includes work on inscriptions from pre-Islamic Arabia, the trade networks that connected Europe and the Islamic world in the 9th Century AD, and medieval trade in luxury goods between China, the Middle East and Europe. The Centre’s next major research project will investigate the multicultural society that existed in Sicily from the 11th to 13th Centuries.
STUDENT PROFILE: Sylvana Hassanieh, Lebanon

Course: DPhil in Clinical Medicine, University College

The Oxford Experience: I’ll never regret moving from Boston, where I took my Masters, to Oxford. I am very happy with college life: Oxford’s colleges give students a sense of belonging. Oxford itself is very rich culturally, with everything a student could want from theatre to orchestras, art and museums and much more.

Aspirations: After I finish my DPhil I want to continue my research, improving our understanding of cancer and helping develop new treatments.

PETROCHEMICAL RESEARCH PROMISES CLEAN FUTURE

The KACST-Oxford Petrochemical Research Centre is a joint research centre, created by the Department of Chemistry and the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST) – the Saudi Arabian national science agency and laboratories – to drive forward cutting edge petrochemical research.

The Centre is working in a number of areas vital to future petrochemical use, such as the development of materials that will allow the clean use of burning fuels. It is also hoped that the Centre will allow new petrochemical technologies to be adopted more widely and will develop the education and training by research of young scientists from Saudi Arabia, the UK and other countries. It is the only Centre designated a “Centre of Excellence in Petrochemical Research” by KACST outside the Middle East.

FACULTY POSTS FUNDED BY MIDDLE EAST DONORS

Oxford has been fortunate to benefit from the generosity of a number of Middle Eastern donors who have funded key faculty posts at the University.

Gifts from the Qatar Foundation created the IM Pei Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture and the His Highness Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani Chair in Contemporary Islamic Studies.

In 2016, Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain of Kuwait provided a gift that fully endowed the historic Laudian Chair in Arabic, one of Oxford’s oldest professorial chairs, which has been renamed the Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain Laudian Chair in Arabic in his honour.

Other important endowed posts include:
- The Khalid bin Abdullah Al Saud Professor of the Contemporary Arab World
- The King Mohamed VI Fellowship in Moroccan and Mediterranean Studies
- The Shaikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahayan Lectureship in Islamic Studies

Below: Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain, Oriental Institute
The Islamic Middle East
The Prince Sultan Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud Gallery
Generous donations from HRH Prince Sultan Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud of Saudi Arabia and Yousef Jameel have helped to create a new home for the extensive Islamic Art collection at the Ashmolean Museum.

The Islamic Middle East gallery displays artefacts made over a period of more than 1000 years in the heart of the Islamic world, where cities like Cairo, Istanbul and Isfahan were the focal points of political, commercial and cultural activities.

These gifts have also established an online resource for the museum’s Eastern Art departments’ collections, making the Ashmolean’s ancient and modern treasures accessible around the world, and aiding the international understanding of Middle Eastern art and culture.

As a whole, the Ashmolean’s Islamic collections comprise one of the greatest collections of works from Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia. They include ceramics, glass, metalwork and calligraphy, as well as architectural wood and tilework.

The Ashmolean is also noted for its extensive Egyptian collection, which dates back to the museum’s opening in 1683. The Egyptian collection includes ivory and stone carvings, hand-made pottery from ancient Pre-dynastic Egypt (5000 BCE – 3000 BCE) and the earliest monuments of Egyptian kingship from the temple of the falcon god at Hierakonpolis.

The Museum of the History of Science cares for the world’s finest collection of astronomical instruments from the Islamic World, from Toledo to Lahore, with the earliest astrolabe (a hugely complex type of instrument used to make astronomical measurements to aid in navigation) dating from the 9th century. The collection includes unique examples of this very rich tradition, such as the only complete spherical, and the only surviving geared astrolabe. The Museum works closely with its community partners to add a diverse range of narratives to the displays and to act as a platform for debate. All past exhibitions featuring this unique collection are available on the Museum website.

The University’s Pitt Rivers Museum has worked closely with Middle East partners, particularly in the UAE, to make its vast collection of Sir Wilfred Thesiger’s photographs of the region more available to audiences there through exhibitions, for instance at Jahili Fort, Al Ain, as well as online via the Museum’s website. Its collaborations include projects with the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority, UAE National Archives, and National Museum of Oman, among others. The Thesiger collection is one of the highlights of the University of Oxford’s Middle Eastern holdings, comprising 38,000 negatives and 71 albums relating to his famous travels across the Rub’ Al Khali (Empty Quarter) of the Arabian Peninsula in the 1940s, as well as long sojourns among the Marsh Arabs of Iraq in the 1950s, travels in Kurdish Iraq, and many other areas. The Museum has also recently acquired a major photographic collection from Saudi Arabia by the photographer Ilo Battigelli who worked in the oil industry there in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

One of Europe’s oldest libraries, the Bodleian Library has been acquiring Middle Eastern manuscripts since its inception – founder Sir Thomas Bodley was keen to encourage the acquisition of Arabic and Islamic writings.

Today the Bodleian has one of the most important collections of Islamic manuscripts in Europe, containing more than 5,000 documents. It includes many rare Arabic, Persian and Turkish items including literary classics, philosophical tracts, medical texts and mathematics books.

In 2002 the Bodleian acquired an illustrated manuscript of a hitherto unknown Arabic cosmographical treatise, known as the Book of Curiosities. The Book, which contains an incredible early world map, is regarded as a key text for the history of science, especially astronomy and cartography.

The Library also has one of Europe’s largest collections of historic Hebrew books and manuscripts, including 2,000 manuscripts and thousands of early printed Hebrew books. The collection includes the famous Kennicott Bible, one of the most important examples of medieval illuminated Hebrew Bibles.
Students and staff from the Middle East

Almost 200 students from the Middle East currently study at Oxford. Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia and the UAE are the countries that send most students from the region to Oxford. Our Middle Eastern students study at all levels and across the University’s medicine, science, humanities and social science divisions; the majority are postgraduates.

Oxford also employs close to 100 staff from the region, the majority of whom are researchers.

Scholarship opportunities

Graduate students from the Middle East who are starting new graduate courses at Oxford can receive funding from a wide range of scholarships. These include scholarships open to applicants from all countries (such as the Clarendon Fund, which makes over 130 new awards each year), and scholarships for specific courses and regions (such as the Oxford-Weidenfeld and Hoffmann Scholarships and Leadership Programme, which include most Middle Eastern countries).

Oxford also offers scholarships focussed on particular countries in the Middle East. Examples include the Said Foundation Oxford Scholarships covering Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria; the Oxford-Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Graduate Scholarships focused on the United Arab Emirates; and the Oxford-Reuben Foundation Graduate Scholarships focused on Israel.

The renowned Rhodes Scholarship now accepts students from Israel, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. The Rhodes Trust hopes to make further Scholarships available in the region in the future.

Oxford alumni help shape the region

There are more than 1,500 Oxford alumni based in Middle Eastern countries and registered with the University. The University’s graduates have gone on to impressive careers across a range of fields in the Middle East. Some of our best-known graduates include:

Government leaders such as HH Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, the UAE’s Minister for Culture, Youth, and Social Development and former Minister for Higher Education and Scientific Research; HH Haitham bin Tariq Al Said, Oman’s Minister for Heritage and Culture; and Prince Faisal bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, governor of Saudi Arabia’s Madinah Province.

Academics and civil society leaders, such as Rashid Khalidi, the Palestinian-born Edward Said Professor of Arab Studies at Columbia University, and Farah Al-Daghistani, Executive Director of the Jordan Hashemite Fund for Human Development.

Senior business executives, such as Mohamed El-Erian, CEO of PIMCO, one of the world’s largest bond funds; and Mark Beer OBE, Chief Executive of the Dubai International Financial Centre’s Dispute Resolution Authority and Chair of the Oxford and Cambridge Society UAE.

ACADEMIC PROFILE:

Dr Taha Yasseri

Dr Yasseri is Senior Research Fellow in Computational Social Science at the Oxford Internet Institute, a Turing Fellow at the Alan Turing Institute for Data Science, which Oxford helped found in 2015, and a Research Fellow in Humanities and Social Sciences at Oxford’s Wolfson College.

He graduated from the Department of Physics at the Sharif University of Technology, Tehran, Iran, in 2005, where he also obtained his MSc in 2006, working on localisation in scale free complex networks. In 2007, he moved to the Institute of Theoretical Physics at the University of Göttingen, Germany, where he completed his PhD in Complex Systems Physics in 2010. Prior to coming to Oxford, he spent two years as a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics. Dr Yasseri is an expert in human dynamics, social networks and collective behaviour. His recent research has included work on the connections between social media and elections, and online hate speech.