

HMC PROJECTS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

SCHOLARSHIPS TO SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM - 2010/2011

Information for Applicants.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the arrangements for the scholarships offered in the United Kingdom through HMC (Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference) Projects in Central and Eastern Europe. You will find further details of the nature and work of HMC Projects at this web address -<http://www.hmc.org.uk/projects>

The schools which award HMC scholarships are located throughout the UK, with four in Scotland, one in Wales and one on the Isle of Man. They are of various types. Some are schools mainly for boarding pupils (boys and girls who live at the school during the school terms). Other schools have both boarding pupils and day pupils. Scholarship students from Central and Eastern Europe are normally offered places as boarding pupils.

Many of the schools are coeducational but some take girls only and others take boys only. We try to fit students into the most suitable schools taking account of particular talents but, once the school has accepted the student proposed, it is not normally possible for a change to be made. All the schools within the scheme have been selected because they are regarded as entirely suitable and because they are seen to be likely to offer a very valuable experience to the students who are their guests.

Opportunity, Challenge, Commitment

You have already been enterprising in asking for details of the HMC Scholarships. Imagine now that you win a scholarship! What would it really involve? Will the benefits match all the uncertainty and upheaval? Should I accept the scholarship?

When you arrive in Britain next September, you will be met at the airport and taken to Cambridge for three days for a short Orientation Course. This is the one occasion in the year when all the students on the scheme gather in one place together with the members of the Working Group. Mr Robin Hildrew, our Student Counsellor, will explain his key role in helping students during their time in Britain. We explain also the ways in which the schools function and you will have the opportunity to ask your own questions. At the end of the course careful arrangements are made for you to travel on to your school. You will be fully informed as to how to make the journey and who will meet you on arrival.

Once you arrive at the school you will be in the care of the school staff at all times when the school is in session. The school provides not only tuition but also accommodation and food together with everything you may need, including medical care if appropriate. Each student normally lives in a large house with perhaps thirty or forty other students who are supervised by the housemaster or housemistress.

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The school year in Britain is usually divided into three terms, with holidays at Christmas, Easter and in the summer. In addition, most schools close for a half-term break in the middle of the term. The length of this break will vary from school to school – from a few days to a maximum of two weeks - and at these times a ‘Contact Person’ appointed by the school will assume responsibility for making suitable arrangements for you during the half-term break. This member of staff will contact your parents to ensure that they agree with these half-term arrangements. (Parents are occasionally able to nominate family friends or relatives to act as guardians but this is not usually feasible.)

At the end of the first term the school will ensure that you know the arrangements for travelling home and returning to Britain after the Christmas holiday. You will not remain in Britain during this holiday unless your school agrees to this and your parents have also given permission and have made the necessary arrangements.

Inevitably, some features of British schools will be very different from your school. For the year to be a success **you will need to be adaptable** and willing to accept your school’s arrangements. The most important differences are as follows:-

1. You will be living away from home. Many of you will have been on student outings or camps away from home, but with your friends and in the knowledge that life will soon be returning to normal. Coming to the UK, and realising that you will not be seeing your parents for two to four months, you may well feel homesick. The food will be different! Many students do miss their homes at first but quite quickly they make friends and enjoy having the company of other young people for much of the time. How do you think that **you** would cope?
2. Students live in boarding houses. The houses are of course either for boys only or else for girls only. Most students will share a room with another student and usually this will be the place where they not only sleep but do their work and keep their personal belongings, clothes, books and other items. Most schools will expect their boarders to take their share in certain communal responsibilities.
3. In your house there will probably be about thirty to forty other students, perhaps aged 13 to 18, perhaps all sixth formers. For young people who have always lived at home it takes some time to become accustomed to this situation. If you have no brothers and sisters you are used to making your own noise at home but not to having to put up with the noise created by others – let alone forty others!
4. In charge of your house, there will be a House Parent (Housemaster or Housemistress), assisted by a House Tutor and a House Matron. You will find that your House Parent will attach great importance to the RULES established for the House and will ask that you respect and obey them. A typical rule would be that students will be expected to be in their own rooms by 10.30 p.m. and will be required to be quiet after that time so that others may sleep. Another rule will be that students are not allowed to smoke. Students in boarding schools are not normally permitted to seek or obtain paid employment outside school.

At home it is not usually necessary to make rules of this sort and they may well be more detailed and prescriptive than in your present school. Our experience is that these rules do not usually create difficulties for students, but we must emphasise that students need to be willing to accept them. They are made to enable everyone to fit in together and to make it as easy as possible to ensure that all the students are safe and happy. Schools do not, of course, allow the use of drugs.

If you do not think you could accept such rules, then the year would not be right for you, as such tensions can only cause unhappiness for you and for the school.

5. In most schools students wear a uniform during teaching hours and for special occasions. This is not normally anything to worry about. Typically it might be a grey suit for boys or a grey sweater and skirt for girls but schools will send full information about this to those who are selected for scholarships and there is no need for parents to spend much money on these items before your departure.
6. An important difference is that in British schools students usually take only four or perhaps five main subjects. In most schools they also take a subsidiary subject or a general studies course. For example, a student might take Mathematics, Physics, Biology and Chemistry as the main subjects with German as a subsidiary subject. Another combination might be German, History, French and Economics as the main subjects with Information Technology as a subsidiary subject. Students are normally able to choose their subjects from a range of fifteen to twenty different possibilities. The consequence of this arrangement is that students in Britain generally study a smaller number of subjects in greater depth than students in most other countries. In some ways this is a narrower approach but it does give opportunity for students to think more deeply about the subject rather than just to absorb some information. Of course students are speaking, listening, reading and writing in English all the time so that they will certainly be learning more English than anything else. There will be no need to worry about the arrangements for the academic programme. Schools will provide all the necessary information in due course.
7. Another important difference is that, whereas many European schools aim to provide only teaching in the academic subjects, British boarding schools offer also a wide range of other activities through which students can develop their talents and acquire new skills. They usually have high standards and excellent facilities in Music, Drama and Sport. In our experience, it is crucially important that you explore these opportunities for personal recreation and development. It is the easiest and quickest way of making friends with fellow students. Remember too that you will be in school during weekends, when there will be few classes to attend and many hours to fill. Students who **give** most to their boarding communities and to the sporting and cultural life of their schools **gain** most from all the opportunities that their schools offer them.

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In other words, there will be much more to life than simply working hard – although that is obviously important! You should also be able to enjoy yourselves and be happy in the company around you. That way, you will take home lasting friendships and an enduring reminder of your time in Britain.

8. **The Scholarship is for one year only.** You should have no expectation that you will be able to stay for a second year. The scholarship does not carry with it the opportunity to study at a British university. You should find out from local universities and from your own current school if certain studies or examinations will be necessary if you are to resume studies at home without disadvantage when you return. In general this has not been a problem for students in the past but a few students have needed an extra year on their return to their own schools. **Before applying, and certainly before accepting, make sure that you have researched this fully and that you know where your own interests lie.**

We like to think that we are good at selecting the right scholars! We do our best to choose students who, in addition to being very good in their academic studies, are sociable, adaptable, interested and interesting and, above all, ready to give of themselves to their new communities. But you will know yourselves better than anyone else does! In that sense, you are the most important judge of where your best interests will lie.

In this letter, I have tried to draw attention to some of the human realities involved in an HMC Projects scholarship. A few students apply for the scholarship because they see it as a great honour and a prize to be won, but without reflecting on the personal challenges that will face them. **Accepting an HMC scholarship is a commitment, not least because it means that someone else will not have that opportunity. When you arrive next September, we will expect, and you should be sure, that you will honour your scholarship by completing a full year of academic studies in your new school.**

You owe it to yourself, but also to your competitors, to be honest with yourself. You will be moving out of your own 'comfort zone'. If you know that you would find it personally very difficult to adjust to all the differences that I have mentioned, including especially that of living away from home, then you should not proceed.

Hundreds of scholars have received HMC Projects scholarships and for the vast majority it has been a wonderfully positive, fulfilling and enjoyable experience. This is because they have met the opportunities and the challenges with enthusiasm and commitment.

I hope that this letter has been helpful for you. Please read it carefully, along with the complementary document, 'Information for the Parents of Applicants 2010-11'.

With best wishes,

Patrick Tobin,
Administrator HMC Projects,
September 2009