

VARSITY

Guide to Careers 2023-24



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or otherwise without prior permission of the publisher.

Welcome to the latest edition of the Varsity Guide to Careers!

Like all our fellow Cambridge finalists, the world of grad schemes, internships, and starter jobs is looming closer and closer. Choosing a career can seem like an incredibly daunting prospect, but we often reach our paths in unique and unexpected ways.

As you flick through this guide and read the stories of alumni working in fields ranging from journalism to software engineering, remember that you don't need to have it all figured out.

If you find yourself behind the desk at your less-than-dream job or doing an unplanned Masters, keep in mind that these are only stepping stones to better things.

This Careers Guide will show you there's a wealth of opportunity waiting for you, with plenty of organisations eager to hire Cambridge's bright minds.

Whatever your aspirations, your time at university is likely to stand you in good stead. If you've managed to survive Cambridge so far, we're sure you'll find your way through the world beyond.

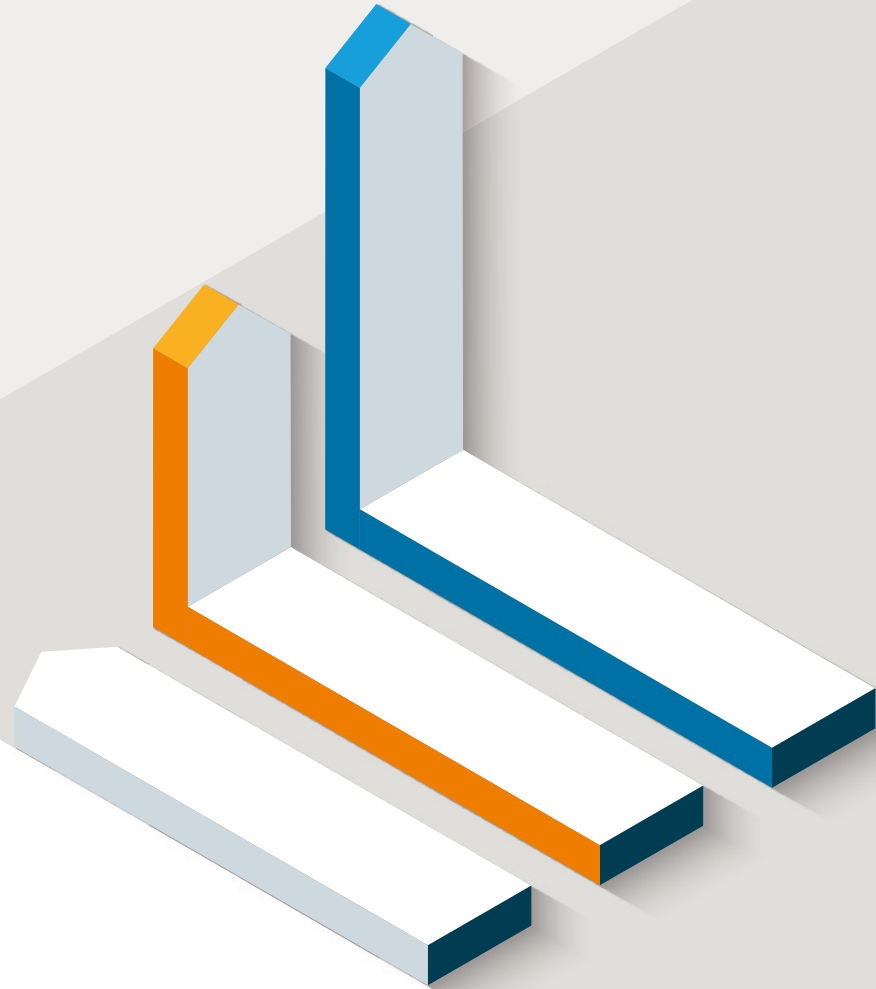
We hope this guide offers you some comfort as you look forward, and we wish you every success with your degrees and future endeavours.

Isabel & Taneesha



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Finding my way...

Elizabeth Haigh graduated from Homerton College in 2021 with a degree in MML.

Leaving Cambridge, I had one goal in mind: to be a journalist. Preferably, to be a political reporter at the Guardian. That was two years ago. Box ticked? Well, it's not as straightforward as that.

It's autumn two years after graduation, and I'm a senior news reporter at MailOnline. What?! I can practically hear your gasp from my tiny studio in north London. How does a working class, Guardian-reading, queer woman who edited Varsity and graduated with a degree in MML end up working for the Mail?

Studying at Cambridge was a fun-filled, frustrating, fearsome four years that I am still unpacking. I loved it, yet felt constantly anxious and unfulfilled. I didn't fit in with my peers: I thought I was too left-wing, too poor, too working class - and didn't even have a southern accent. But the longer I spent there, the more the city, and its people, charmed me. I found my people and learned that I could be unapologetically me.

Yet as soon as I was comfortable, it was time for me to go. Leaving my college, Homerton, behind was hard - and leaving the friends I'd made along the way even harder. I moved straight from Cambridge to London - a world away from the grassy hills of Shropshire I knew. I began freelancing as an online news reporter with LBC, and was plunged straight in with a baptism of fire: covering the Taliban's takeover of Kabul.

I continued working there twice a week while studying my NCTJ with News Associates in Twickenham, an intensive six-month diploma which sets you up for the world of journalism like no other. After final exams I got a job at MyLondon. It was a good few months, but writing various versions of "Who is soap actor X?" and "The secret royal rule that Y broke" wasn't exactly the cutting-edge journalism I wanted to be doing.

But my plugging away eventually paid off. I got some good exclusives published, ones that made their way into the national papers. One morning I opened Twitter's familiar icon and saw I had a new message. It was an editor from MailOnline. They had seen some of the stories I had written and were offering to give me a call.

I knocked on my friend's door (side note from experience - think very, very carefully who you move in with after leaving Cambridge) and read out the message. We had a laugh about it, but I had the call nonetheless.

Six weeks later I arrived at MailOnline's offices for my first day.

Since then, I've covered wars in Ukraine and Israel, conducted harrowing interviews of victims of crime, uncovered scandals at women's refuges, been sent to report live from Buckingham Palace the day after Queen Elizabeth II died, brought ideas and exclusives which no-one else in my newsroom has thought of - the list could go on.

Most recently I've been promoted to a senior reporter after 18 months in the job. I'm 24, the youngest senior by five years, who has recently secured an agent for the book I'm writing. I'm in a long-term relationship, and have a great circle of people around me - although I'd be lying if I said money isn't constantly a worry.

The Liz graduating in summer 2021 would have scoffed if she was told how fortunate I now am. I don't work at the Guardian, but I have a great job that gives me the audience and opportunities to do the work I care about. It's been a rough ride; lonely with long hours, responsibilities and horrific stories to boot. I had no connections to give me a piggyback into the industry. Yet I value every step of the journey along the way.

The one piece of advice I cannot stress enough is get out of the Cambridge bubble. Once you are in the real world, no-one cares where you went to university. They don't care whether you went to a top private school, or where you spent your summer holidays. Whether you went to Eton with termly skiing breaks, or your family survived on a £12k-a-year income like mine. What they care about is whether you respect them, back yourself, and value people's contributions.

So whoever you are, whatever your background, throw yourself into life outside of university with as much enthusiasm as possible. Because if I managed to forge happiness for myself, so can you.

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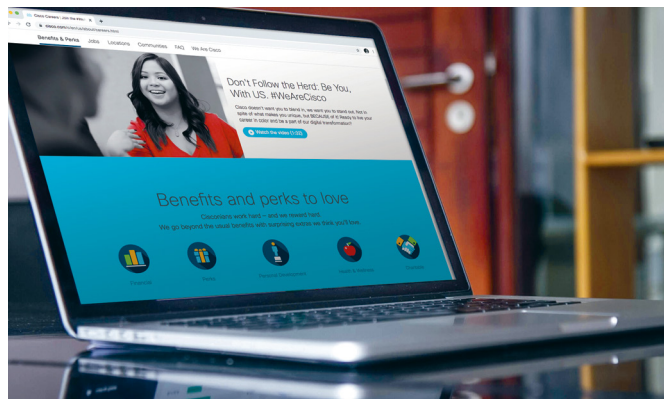
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James Whistance-Smith

Maths, & Computer Science,
Working for Cisco's Ensoft Software Engineering Team.

How did you start working for Ensoft/Cisco?

I reached the third year of my degree knowing that I wanted to do something that makes a difference within a small, vibrant setting that I would feel a part of.

I visited the careers fairs and collected the obligatory fliers and freebies but already knew the majority were of no interest. I knew Cisco as 'the' cutting edge networking company and was intrigued by the idea of Ensoft as a small team with its own culture and identity composed of highly motivated and like-minded folks.

I went along to a presentation by a senior manager within the Ensoft team and chatted afterwards to recent graduate employees that seemed to have a real passion for both the work and the environment. It seemed to tick all my boxes and applying was a no-brainer.

What was the recruitment process like?

The application process couldn't have been easier, I simply submitted my CV and was contacted within a couple of days inviting me to the next interview day. The interview day consisted of a logic test followed by two interviews. I was back in the college common room within two hours and feeling optimistic but not wanting to get my hopes up. I received a job offer shortly after that.

Can you describe what you do for the company?

Primarily I'm a project and people manager and take great pride in trying to organize projects that give my team challenging and interesting work suited to their strengths and individual development. However, my role is still very technical with plenty of scope to get hands-on in software development as well as technical design and review work.

Beyond the core work I'm involved in various 'virtual teams' such as helping with technical and network support, organizing Cisco-Ensoft social activities (including a family weekend away in May 2019) and looking out for people's wellbeing as a mental health first aider, to name just a few...

What's it like working in Cisco's Ensoft team?

We enjoy the benefits of being part of a huge, progressive and forward-thinking company that additionally has a culture and dynamism of a small site.

As part of Cisco we have the opportunity to innovate and create software solutions targeted to the rapidly expanding needs of the world's biggest service providers and tech companies as well as enjoy the perks of working for a big company.

However, our identity as a small team with our own culture is a real positive. There are the small things like the office games (pool, table tennis, etc) and weekly breakfast, the daily self-organised sports clubs (football, climbing, running, etc) through to the organised social events such as rafting, the annual walking weekend or family summer BBQs.

Ultimately, it's a place where I find the work interesting and challenging, feel as though I'm realising satisfying career development with plenty of scope to go further and enjoy socialising with the people that I work with.

What kind of work can people expect to be doing in their first year?

We expect to get new graduates working on production code and contributing as part of a development team in under a month. This typically means being assigned a module of code to write and test. At the same time, the close team structure includes a mentor for new graduates, which means there is plenty of support.

Can you describe what you look for in an applicant?

We look for people who work hard and take pride in their work, and that should be backed up by a strong academic record. Some experience is useful, though not essential (we offer excellent training!). What we really want to see is an enthusiasm for software engineering - it's great to find recent graduates who have developed applications or run computer systems.

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BARBRI has maintained the trust of legal students for over 50 years, helping more than 1.4 million law students and lawyers succeed in legal exams across the globe. You can be next!

What is the SQE? The SQE is a centralised assessment introduced in 2021 that replaces the Legal Practice Course (LPC) as the main route to qualification as a solicitor in England & Wales. It means graduates from all backgrounds (not just law) can sit the qualifying exams and you don't need to secure a highly sought-after training contract anymore - you just need two years of Qualifying

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Find out more about [BARBRI and their courses here](#).

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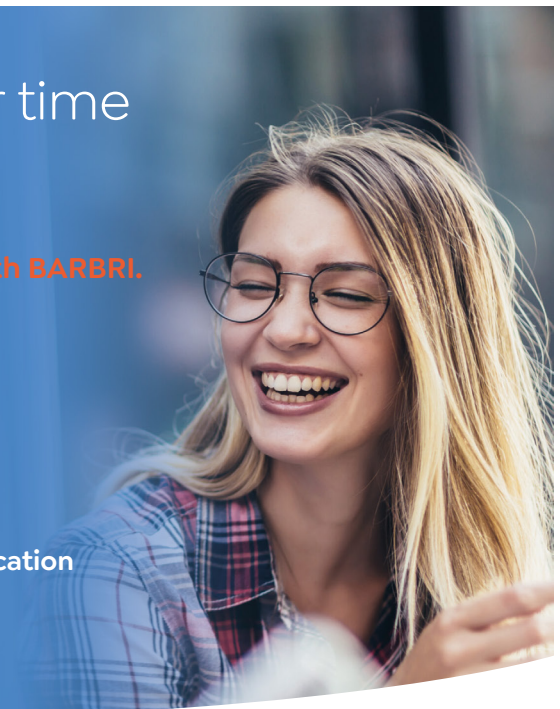
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Mastering the art of staying a student



Lotte Brundle graduated from Hughes Hall in 2022 with a degree in English.

It seems ironic to be featured in the Varsity Careers Guide as a 24 year old who still hasn't got 'a real job' yet (much to my Dad's dismay), but truth be told, I love not having a proper job. I love being a student. I've had a go at a number of different career paths over the years. I flirted with the idea of being a professional dancer, until the cold hard realities of dance college put that idea to bed. Then I had a stab at working in hospitality full time. Again, this was not for me.

After completing my English degree at Hughes Hall last year I knew I wanted to train as a journalist, but the idea of doing a MA seemed both ludicrous and expensive. It is. I am doing one anyway.

Choosing to do a postgrad is very different than choosing to do an undergrad. It's less simple than choosing a three year course to follow and new place to live. The in's and out's become far more complicated.

For one, it gets much more specialised. My undergraduate degree was English Literature, a subject that was broad, expansive and unspecific. My masters degree is Magazine Journalism (fondly referred to by many as a 'dying art'). This, by definition is far more niche.

Couple this with the fact that the course is only nine months long, not three years means that it's less of a commitment living-wise. Many people commute, I have a friend who lives in Brighton with her partner who gets the train to London every day. Many have had to

find unusual ways to cope with the cost of living in the big city, another friend of mine lives on a house boat because it's more affordable. Those lucky enough (or unlucky, depending on how much you like London and/or your parents) to have parents that live in the city stay at home. Others, like me, live as a lodger in someone's house in the week and go back home for weekends. While this is something that many people have to deal with at undergrad this can, if one is lucky, feel somewhat offset by

the basic cohesion and unity of undergrad life. At postgrad, I've found this begins to fade away. You are no longer part of a group of people, living in the same place for three years, studying the same thing. Adult responsibilities, commitments and lines of duty start to set in. You are a student, but not in the same way.

But, being a postgrad also unlocks new potentialities. It's freer than the strict confines of undergrad, making it

easier to prioritise relationships, commitments and living situations that you hold dear. Yes, retraining, moving cities and embarking on something new is expensive and stressful, but it also brings with it so many new possibilities. The world can be competitive, challenging and difficult, but it can also be exciting, stimulating and brilliant. So, if you find something you'd love to do, amongst all this craziness, and if that thing happens to be a postgrad, then it's well worth pursuing. Life is already bad enough without constantly wondering 'What if?'. So don't wonder. Go and find out.



Finding my way...

Amy Batley graduated from Clare Hall in 2017 with an MPhil in Architecture and Urban Studies and will (hopefully!) graduate from Wolfson with a PhD in Architecture within the next year.

After finally submitting my PhD at the end of August, I've spent the last month hopping between interviews and conferences in a desperate bid to find the perfect job. As I refresh my emails throughout the day in hope of that crucial employment break, I have come to realise that the anxiety and despair of this job-hunt limbo isn't often discussed.

After studying in Higher Education for many years (in my case eleven!), Universities have promised us the world in terms of employment opportunities. In my experience, it is not so straightforward. Many entry-level jobs often now require, paradoxically, relevant workplace experience, while other employers will mark you as over-qualified or fail to appreciate the value of your transferable skills. This can result in months of self-esteem-crippling rejections which can make you question your life trajectory thus far.

Kudos if you walk out Senate House and into your dream job, but don't expect it to work out this way.

Fortunately, this limbo does need to feel as grim as depicted above. Embrace the uncertainty, take the part-time job in the café you used to study in, pull pints in the bar you used to celebrate exam results in, take that obscure holiday you've been putting off. Now is the time to do the things you might not have time to do later. In my case, the submission of my PhD was followed by much-needed week visiting a friend in Tuscany, followed by weeks of work as a member of staff in my Department library and at Cambridge's Covid-19 vaccine centre.

While my evenings since submitting the PhD have entailed writing job applications, my days have been filled with things I sacrificed during the final stages of the PhD; chatting to other students in my Department just for the sake of getting to know them better rather than about work, coffee shop trips without my laptop in hand, and learning transferable skills in temporary 9-5 jobs which your peer on the golden road to The City will never obtain.

My suggestion is thus, embrace the uncertainty of job application limbo. Don't bow to the pressure of accepting the first 'proper' job you are offered just because you are comparing yourself to your employed peers. Take time to figure out what you want, find something temporary to pay the bills in the meantime, and enjoy that lie-in while everyone else is rushing to work.

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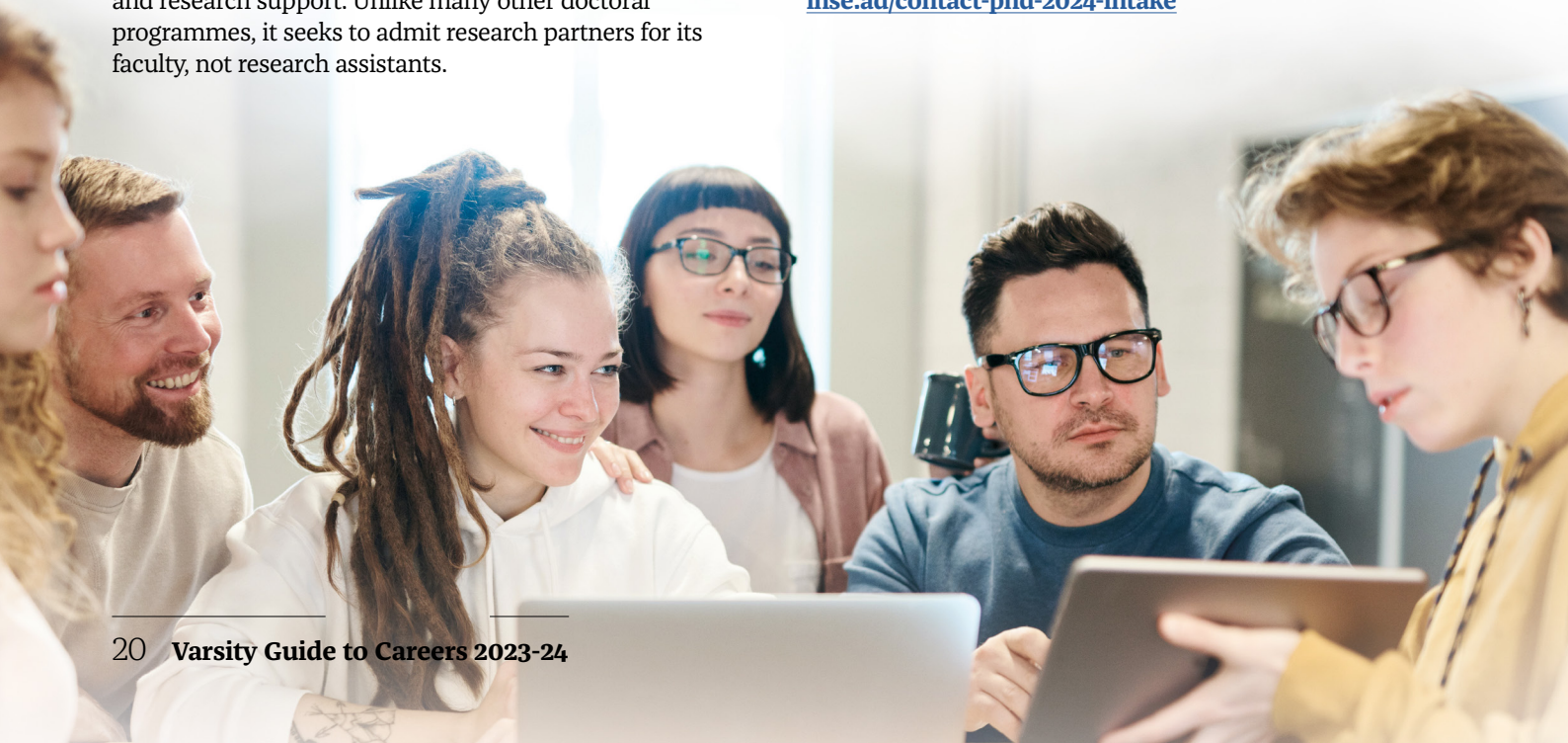
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Finding my way...

Tiffany Charnley graduated from St John's College in 2015 with a degree in English

It's a sunny September day in Cornwall and I have just finished performing the run of my 25th Cambridge theatrical production (The Pirates of Penzance at the Minack Theatre in case you were wondering). I hadn't given much thought to what life after Cambridge would be like as I was much more interested in learning lines and music for my next performance than applying for Grad Schemes. But when the realisation that I would now have to enter the "real world" dawned on me, I found that I didn't have the faintest idea of what I actually wanted to do. So, what's a recent English grad to do but get a random office job and continue filling all of their spare time with as much theatre as physically possible? - the year of the six operas is one I will not forget in a hurry!

After a few months of umming and ahing, I started thinking about what was most important to me. I had been fortunate to receive the full Cambridge Bursary during my degree, allowing me to take full advantage of all Cambridge had to offer without worrying about money. So, with this in mind, I decided to get involved with College fundraising to help the next generation of students. I was able to combine my love for producing theatre with this aspiration to give back and I now produce events for alumni and donors - it's amazing fun and it's great to be able to contribute to securing gifts that can transform lives through scholarships and bursaries.

Over the last five years, my love of theatre and music has only continued to grow, and I fill as much time with them as possible. In 2022, a friend and I started up a new theatre company - Velocirapture Productions, specialising in making opera fun and accessible. We took Gilbert & Sullivan's hilarious Trial by Jury to the Edinburgh Fringe last year as Velocirapture's first show.

As well as directing the show, I also sang the soprano role. Despite being exhausting, this was one of the best experiences of my life! During the run, we received the wonderful news that we had been awarded the prestigious 'Bobby Award' from Broadway Baby, marking us as one of the best of the 3,334 shows being performed at the Edinburgh Fringe.

Although Cambridge opened so many doors and new experiences to me, it became apparent after graduation that access was still an issue for people from lower income backgrounds like myself. While some new grads are able to move back home to London and accept lower paid entry level arts jobs, this option was not available to me, and I simply didn't have the industry connections or insider knowledge that are so beneficial to a career in the arts. Although I have had to focus on financial security, I have still pursued opportunities in the arts (making my own where I could!) and I'm really pleased to have recently been invited for a Director Observership at the Royal Opera House later this year. As well as working to improve access to education in my day job, I'm also enthusiastic about improving access to the arts. Just this week, I've begun a weekend job as Concert Manager at Bach to Baby - a concert series for young children and their adults. These are both ventures I couldn't have imagined I'd be doing when I first left Cambridge and I'm so excited to see what might happen next!

Overall, life after graduating has been great (the odd stresses and covid aside). If someone were to ask me what I'll be doing in another five years when I've reached the ten years out of Cambridge milestone, the answer would again be "I haven't the faintest idea", which is in equal amounts brilliant and terrifying. But, whatever I'm doing, I know I'll be very happy as long as it includes my amazing friends and family, and maybe a bit of theatre too!





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Finding my way...

Isabel Sebode graduated from Sidney Sussex College in 2022 with a degree in English.

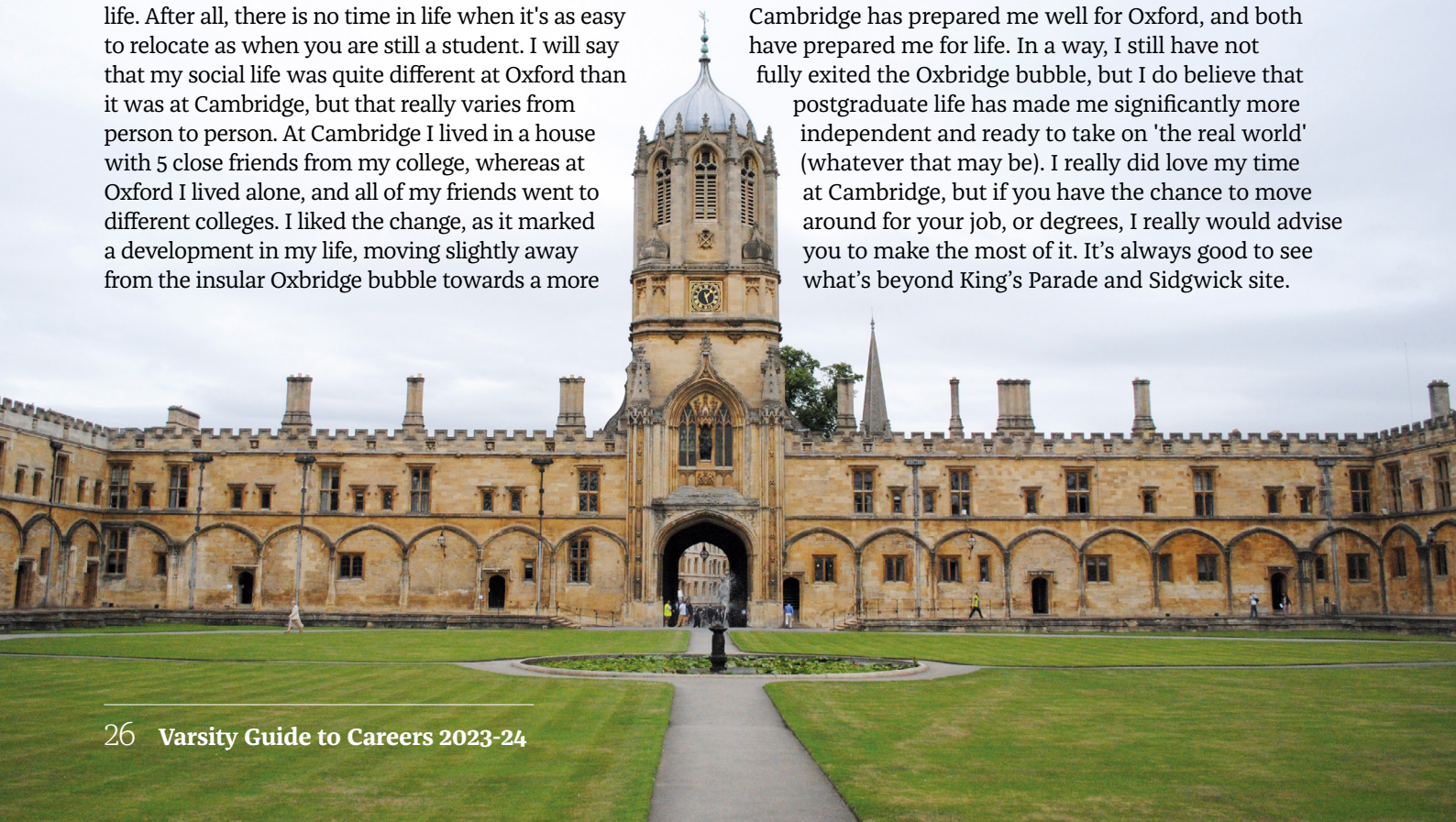
I matriculated Cambridge in 2019, studying English, with a special focus on early modern literature. The three years were an unforgettable experience, albeit tainted by Covid, which nonetheless inspired me to continue with my academic journey at Oxford. A controversial choice for some, but a great choice for me. Moving to Oxford from Cambridge was less overwhelming than many might expect. If anything, I felt like my three years of living and studying in the collegiate system greatly smoothed out my transition and gave me the skills to tackle this new challenge.

Another unexpected perk of making the Cambridge-to-Oxford-switch was that some of my friends, from Cambridge and London, were also relocating. The world really is a small place, so I managed to find myself surrounded by many people I had already known, or even lived with, at Cambridge. Being able to comfortably move to a different city and experience a new Faculty, whilst feeling confident due to my time at Cambridge was invaluable and allowed me to quickly integrate myself into Oxford life. After all, there is no time in life when it's as easy to relocate as when you are still a student. I will say that my social life was quite different at Oxford than it was at Cambridge, but that really varies from person to person. At Cambridge I lived in a house with 5 close friends from my college, whereas at Oxford I lived alone, and all of my friends went to different colleges. I liked the change, as it marked a development in my life, moving slightly away from the insular Oxbridge bubble towards a more

varied social life, which allowed me to explore so many new things. At graduate level, ages become more varied, and many of my friends were many years older than me. I also felt quite at home with my mostly international friends, something I missed at Cambridge.

My journey in Oxford didn't end with me graduating my MSt in English (1550-1700). Instead, I decided to exploit the collegiate system even more, this time for its job opportunities. Moving just over the road from my college (Teddy Hall) to Univ. - I now work in Development - i.e. Alumni and Donor Relations. The job has been a great introduction into the way we create and maintain professional relationships, as well as into the world of business and management, which as a humanities graduate I had previously stayed away from. My long-distance relationship and the flexibility of actually being able to enjoy the free time that comes with weekends has also given me way more time to travel, which I have started to make the most of.

Cambridge has prepared me well for Oxford, and both have prepared me for life. In a way, I still have not fully exited the Oxbridge bubble, but I do believe that postgraduate life has made me significantly more independent and ready to take on 'the real world' (whatever that may be). I really did love my time at Cambridge, but if you have the chance to move around for your job, or degrees, I really would advise you to make the most of it. It's always good to see what's beyond King's Parade and Sidgwick site.



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