

CHALLENGE YOUR THINKING

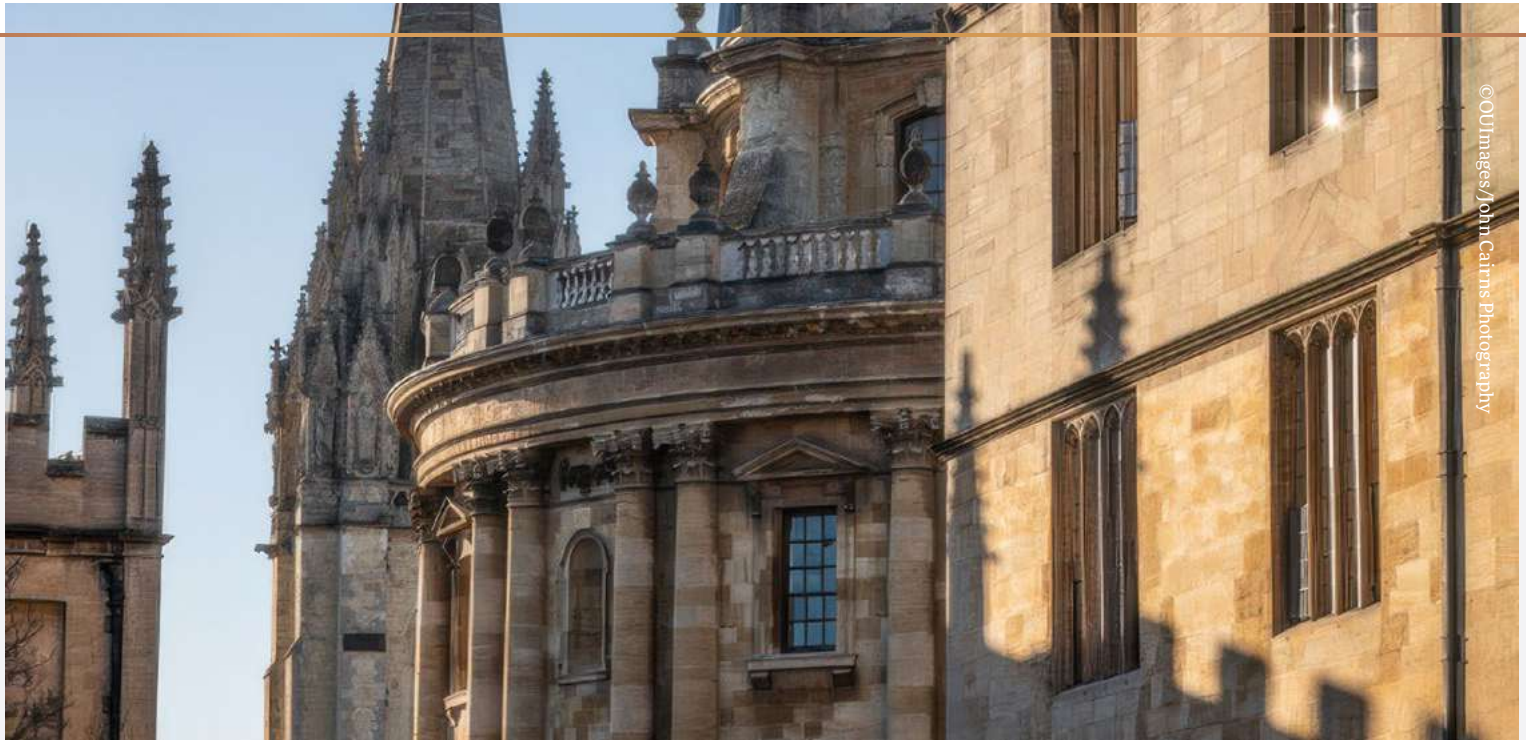
National Senior Stretch

2026

NURTURING BRILLANCE
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About



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National Senior Stretch



Join the thinkers! Step into a day of big ideas and lively debate.

Senior students will grapple with challenging questions about knowledge, rules, freedom, technology and human experience — exploring issues of truth, responsibility, and what it means to live well. More than just abstract theory, this is philosophy in action: learning to follow the logic, question assumptions, and test ideas that touch every part of human life.

This study day is not about memorising information. We work at the conceptual level to explore intellectual foundations and equip students with a deeper understanding. It's about taking an interdisciplinary approach to the fundamental ideas that underpin our understanding of the world, ourselves, and others. We bring to you the kind of intellectual stimulation previously only experienced by the students of Oxford and Cambridge.

We bring Oxbridge to you.

“The speakers were funny, engaging, and made complex ideas so clear. It wasn't just about learning — it was about thinking deeply, debating, and leaving with more questions than answers!”



Programme

Agony, Ecstasy, Mystics and Miracles

JULIE ARLISS

Designed for highly able and curious students, this session invites you into the “twilight zone” where science, ideas and human experience meet. Exploring moments of agony and ecstasy, mystical experiences and claims of miracles, it challenges you to **interrogate the limits of empirical methods** and to think carefully about what counts as evidence and explanation — in other words, to step into some serious epistemology, without losing sight of real human experience. This is not a talk you simply sit through, but a conversation you actively take part in, questioning, testing ideas and learning how different disciplines frame the same questions in different ways. If you enjoy thinking deeply, asking difficult questions and exploring the edges of what we think we know, this session will stretch you and may even leave you seeing things differently.

Oxbridge Question: When Are You Allowed to Break the Rules?

JULIE ARLISS

This session is built around a deceptively simple Oxbridge-style question: ***When, if ever, is it acceptable to break a rule?***

At interview level, the interesting question is not what you think, but how you reached it. This session is a fast-paced thinking workout built around the kind of questions used in Oxbridge interviews. From friendship and promises to everyday rules — from Plato to parking fines — students are invited to test rules, probe exceptions, and discover how quickly sensible answers become awkward. Like an elastic band, rules will stretch a little before they snap, and this session explores how to tell the difference between reasonable flexibility and something about to recoil. The focus is on lateral thinking, conceptual clarity and intellectual flexibility — learning to notice when an argument has been stretched past usefulness. Lively, discussion-led and deliberately demanding, the session shows why the ability to think flexibly is often more impressive than simply knowing a lot.

Music, the Brain and Healing

LIVE FROM OXFORD
WITH: DR. CHRIS O'NEILL

Why does music move us so powerfully? Why does a single song awaken a memory thought long lost, or transform our mood in an instant? Philosophers since Plato have debated the place of music in human life. Is it mere entertainment, or something closer to a form of knowledge, shaping the soul itself? This talk will ask: what does music reveal about who we are?

Drawing on research from evolutionary psychology, we will explore how music has helped our species survive, and how music has been used across history for healing and ritual. Neuroscience now reveals how music affects the brain — releasing dopamine highs, reawakening memory in Alzheimer’s patients, and helping stroke survivors learn to speak again. From its effects on disorders of memory, mood and movement, we’ll look at what modern research tells us about **the healing power of music today**.

Learn what the research says about music in our everyday life - how the music we choose can sharpen our focus, soothe our stress, and improve our mental health. What does that say about the hidden connections between emotion, reason, and our shared ancestral human culture? Are we, in some sense, made for music? This session will invite you to reflect on music not merely as a soundtrack to our lives, but as a philosophical puzzle: a scientific marvel, a profound source of meaning, and one of the most powerful forms of healing we possess.



Programme

Who's in Charge? Free Will: Fact, Feeling or Fiction

JULIE ARLISS

Designed for highly able and curious students, this session explores one of the most enduring and unsettling questions in human thought: whether our choices are genuinely free or shaped by forces beyond our control.

Drawing on ideas from neuroscience, genetics, psychology and the humanities, it introduces students to key ways of thinking about the problem, including physical determinism, genetic influence and compatibilist accounts of free will. Students are challenged to examine evidence, question assumptions and think carefully about what it would really mean to say that someone "could have done otherwise".

This is a highly interactive session, with students actively debating, testing arguments and thinking alongside experts, as they explore what free will means for moral responsibility, punishment and how we understand ourselves.

Debate: What Should We Do About Students and Social Media?

Australia has made the first move on student social media use. Others may follow.

Is this leadership we should applaud—or a policy that misunderstands young people altogether? Students are invited to test serious ideas, challenge assumptions, and ask whether social media is best addressed through open education and trust, or through outright prohibition.

This debate is open-minded, intellectually rigorous, and unafraid of disagreement or inconvenient conclusions.

Brisbane

Sydney

Melbourne

Perth



Adelaide

Christchurch

Auckland



Speakers



Julie Arliss

Julie Arliss is an outstanding Gifted Educator, nurturing brilliance through a holistic approach. At the heart of Julie Arliss' philosophy lies a deep commitment to unlocking the unique potential within every gifted student. She believes that gifted education is not just about cultivating academic excellence but also fostering holistic development, instilling a love for lifelong learning, and nurturing the well-being of each student. Thriving Minds provides talented students with the tools necessary to cultivate critical thinking, analyse complex problems, and innovate. This philosophy encourages students to question the status quo, explore new ideas, and develop solutions to real-world challenges. In placing great value on mentorship and guidance students benefit from the wisdom and expertise of educators who not only teach but also inspire and support them on their educational journey. Through steadfast commitment to this philosophy, numerous more able and ambitious students have not only achieved academic excellence but have also grown into compassionate, innovative and socially conscious individuals. Julie Arliss' legacy extends far beyond the conference platform, influencing the lives of students who carry these values with them throughout their lives.

For almost three decades Julie has collaborated with some of the greatest living thinkers delivering outstanding programmes for more able students across the UK and Australasia.



Dr. Christopher O'Neill

Dr O'Neill is a fellow of Harris Manchester College, University of Oxford and is a polymathic thinker. He is a psychologist, registered psychotherapist and trained counsellor. He initiated the large-scale MYRIAD research project in Oxford University investigating resilience and well-being in young people. He has forty years' experience of working with students and staff in schools and is an exceptional educator.



“Philosophy Day was such an inspiring experience! The sessions really challenged how we think about the world and pushed us to question things we usually take for granted.”

“I loved how we explored controversial topics in a way that made us follow the logic before forming opinions.”

Connect with us on social media to stay updated and interact with fellow attendees.



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Bookings and Admin



Additional Detail



Booking Process: All bookings must be made by schools, not by individual participants. To secure your place, please fill in the booking form and select your preferred venue. You will have the option to pay online (recommended) or request an invoice. We understand that school administrative processes can take time, so to avoid missing out, you are welcome to pencil in your numbers by contacting Tony at headoffice@academy-ltd.com. Our events fill quickly, so we recommend reserving your spots as early as possible

Payment Information: The cost is \$55 per student, with one free staff place provided for every group of 12 students

EARLY BIRD REGISTRATION

For bookings and payments made before May 1st 2026 the cost is \$45. Registration includes access to all conference sessions and networking

Event Timings: Please note that event timings and content may vary slightly. Full details will be provided closer to the date of the event.

We look forward to welcoming your students to this inspiring event! This event promises to be an extraordinary experience that will ignite curiosity, challenge assumptions, and inspire a lifelong love of learning. Register today and prepare to think deeply and unlock your full potential!

“The speakers made complex ideas so easy to understand. Philosophy Day gave me a new way of thinking about big questions.”

“I particularly liked how we explored controversial topics. The day pushed me to think critically and justify my opinions.”



**BOOKINGS AND PAYMENTS ARE
COMPLETED ONLINE AT:
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