



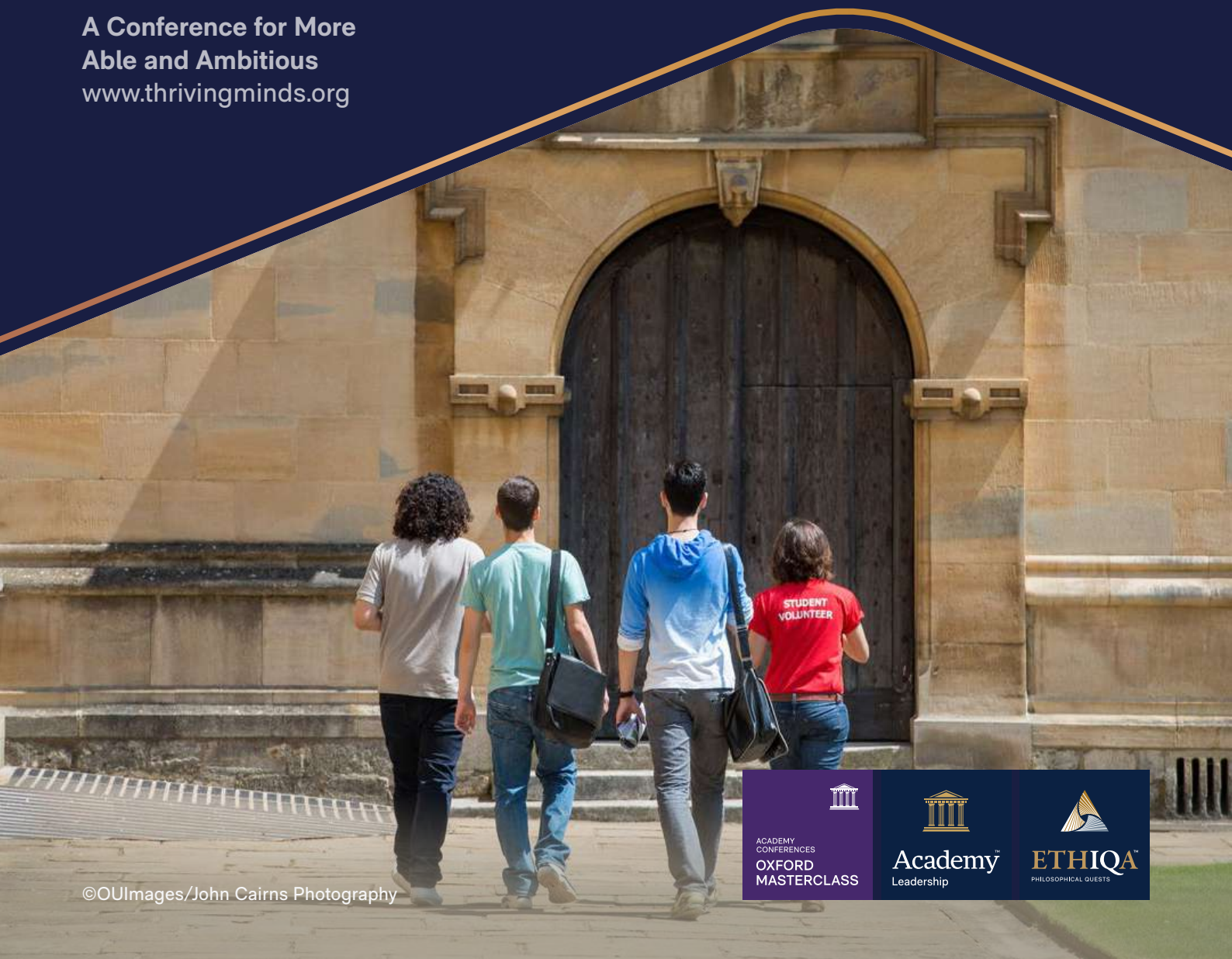
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LEARNING



Senior Stretch Day 2027

NURTURING BRILLIANCE
OXFORD · LONDON · LIVERPOOL

A Conference for More
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PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTS



Dates

Oxford

Tuesday 16th March
Town Hall

London

Wednesday 17th March
Bloomsbury Baptist Church

Liverpool

Wednesday 28th April
Merchant Taylors' School

For further
information,
[visit our
website](#)



Senior Thinkers Day 2027

Join the thinkers! Step into a day of deep thinking and lively debate.

Senior students will experience rigorous thinking in action. Students will learn to follow arguments carefully, test assumptions, and recognise when ideas stretch too far or fail to explain what matters.

This study day is not about memorising information. We work at the **conceptual level**, equipping students with intellectual tools: clarity, precision, and the confidence to think independently across disciplines.

Designed for highly able and curious students, the programme offers the kind of academic challenge and intellectual conversation more commonly associated with Oxford and Cambridge. We bring that experience to you - not as a lecture to sit through, but as a day of thinking to take part in.



What to expect

Keynote Speakers: Engage with renowned experts and visionaries who will share their insights on unlocking your potential.

Peer Networking: Connect with gifted students from diverse backgrounds, exchange ideas, and forge lifelong friendships.

Discussions: Participate in thought-provoking discussions on contemporary issues and global challenges.

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving: Explore new ideas and develop strategies for real-world challenges.

"It wasn't about getting the right answer — it was about learning to think clearly and follow the logic. Such a cool experience!"

Oxford & London Programme

Agony, Ecstasy, Mystics and Miracles

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.

Are we intelligent enough for the future? Will there still be a place for humans?

The world today’s students will inherit may be radically different from the one in which their parents and teachers grew up. Artificial intelligence is already changing how we learn, work, communicate and make decisions - and its influence is only beginning.

But if machines can increasingly provide answers, solve problems and even create, what will remain distinctively human?

Sir Anthony Seldon invites students to think about the future they are entering and the part they might play in shaping it. What happens to curiosity when answers are instantly available? What becomes of creativity, independence and judgement? Will AI make us more capable or gradually encourage us to surrender some of our own agency?

Drawing on his work in education, history and artificial intelligence, Anthony will challenge students to think beyond examination success to some much bigger questions: What kind of person do I want to become? What abilities will matter in the world ahead? And what does it mean to live a genuinely flourishing human life?

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

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.



**Renaissance Love:
Through the Bedroom
Keyhole with Machiavelli**

For centuries the name 'Machiavelli' has been a byword for cunning, ruthlessness, and political manipulation. Shakespeare cast him as a villain, and history remembers him as the man who advised rulers it is "better to be feared than loved." Yet Machiavelli was far more than a writer of political strategy. He was a diplomat, a comic playwright, a passionate correspondent, and - in his own day - as famous for his views on love and marriage as for his insights into power. To study Machiavelli is to confront a thinker who looked human nature in the eye, without illusion, and asked awkward questions we still struggle with today.

Through his letters, comedies, and the legal records of his time, we can peek "through the bedroom keyholes" of Renaissance Florence. What we find is both fascinating and unsettling: love, marriage, and gender were viewed in ways that challenge many of our modern assumptions.

This session will invite students to grapple with the philosophical puzzle: what do these Renaissance perspectives reveal about love and marriage today? Is Machiavelli's no-nonsense take on human behaviour a cynical dismissal of romance, or a clear-eyed recognition of human nature? And how far have our ideas about love, marriage, and gender really moved on?

By turns funny, sharp, and sometimes shocking, this inquiry opens up a world both distant and disarmingly familiar - a chance to test our own ideas against the provocative insights of the Renaissance.

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

Australia made the first move on student social media use. Others are following.

Is this something 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.



Liverpool Programme

Agony, Ecstasy, Mystics and Miracles

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.

The Psychology of Outstanding Achievement

Contrary to popular belief, outstanding achievement in everything and anything from maths to marathons, classics to clarinet, from footie to physics does not ultimately depend upon innate intelligence or ability.

There are a number of important factors leading to outstanding achievement which, unlike your genetic profile, are entirely under your control. This session will examine the hard evidence of what really produces a life of outstanding achievement. A fascinating interactive examination of what really makes a difference.

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The Power of Placebos: Hypnosis, Belief and the Psychology of Expectation

Can a sugar pill really make you feel better? Can someone be hypnotised into seeing something that isn't there? And can simply expecting something to happen change what you actually experience?

Dr Chris O'Neill takes us inside the wonderfully strange world of placebos, hypnosis and expectation effects. Through surprising experiments, demonstrations and psychological puzzles, discover just how easily the brain can be fooled — and how our beliefs can change what we feel, see and experience.

Why does this matter? Because we make decisions every day on the basis of what we see, feel and believe. Understanding how expectation can influence experience helps us become better at questioning evidence, spotting our own assumptions and thinking critically about the claims other people make.

Prepare to question just how much you can trust your own mind.

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

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Bookings and admin

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 Elizabeth at headoffice@academy-ltd.com.

Our events fill quickly, so we recommend reserving your spots as early as possible.

Payment Information

The cost is £38.50 per student, with one free staff place provided for every group of 12 students

Registration includes access to all conference sessions and networking. Connect with us on social media to stay updated and interact with fellow attendees.

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!

Senior Stretch 2027 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!

How to book

Bookings are completed online at thrivingminds.org/conferences/uk-senior-stretch-2027 where you have the choice to pay online or request an invoice.

Full terms and conditions may be found here: thrivingminds.org/legal/terms-of-use

Please inform us of access requirements. Academy Learning reserves the right to make alterations to the programme.



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Speakers



Julie Arliss Julie Arliss is an experienced educator, educational entrepreneur and specialist in developing intellectual excellence in young people. She is the founder of Academy Learning and Thriving Minds, whose academic enrichment programmes have challenged and inspired thousands of students and teachers across the UK, Australia and New Zealand. A Farmington Scholar at Harris Manchester College, University of Oxford, Julie has worked on major educational initiatives associated with Oxford's Ian Ramsey Centre, including international projects supporting philosophical and theological enquiry.

With extensive experience as a teacher, examiner and curriculum specialist, Julie is particularly interested in how young people develop the capacity to think independently, question assumptions and engage confidently with complex ideas. Her programmes bring together leading academics, ambitious students and intellectually demanding questions in an environment that makes serious thinking both accessible and enjoyable.



Dr Christopher O'Neill is a psychologist, registered psychotherapist, trained counsellor and highly experienced educator whose work brings together psychology, neuroscience, philosophy and the science of human behaviour. A Fellow of Harris Manchester College, University of Oxford, Chris initiated the major MYRIAD research project at Oxford, investigating resilience and wellbeing among young people. He has over 40 years' experience working with students, teachers and schools, exploring how people learn, develop and achieve their potential.

Known for his lively, thought-provoking and highly interactive presentations, Chris challenges students to question familiar assumptions about intelligence, achievement, perception and the workings of the human mind. Drawing on psychological research, surprising experiments and practical demonstrations, he makes complex ideas accessible without sacrificing intellectual rigour.



Sir Anthony Seldon is one of Britain's best-known educationalists, historians and writers – and a leading voice in the debate about how artificial intelligence will change education and our lives. He has spent much of his career thinking about a question that matters enormously to young people: what should education actually prepare us for?

A former head of Wellington College and Epsom College, Anthony has written or edited more than 50 books, including studies of recent British Prime Ministers and The Fourth Education Revolution, which explores whether artificial intelligence will ultimately liberate us or diminish us. His work on AI asks not simply what machines will be capable of, but what happens to human curiosity, creativity, independence, relationships and judgement as machines become more capable.

Anthony challenges young people to think beyond grades, qualifications and conventional definitions of intelligence. What will make you valuable in a world in which machines may know more than you do? Who will make the decisions about the person you become? And what kind of future do you actually want to help create?

What students say

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

"I've never enjoyed thinking this much! It was fun, challenging, and totally changed how I see the world."

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



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