

Dear Hertford Alumni,

### **The Tanner Scheme project**

I'm writing to you as someone who was admitted to Hertford through the so-called 'Tanner Scheme' to request your help in writing its history.

As I'm sure you know, between the early 1960s and mid 1980s, Hertford admitted to the college undergraduates from state schools who would probably not have applied to Oxford without the scheme for admission devised by Neil Tanner, physics tutor. The scheme is remembered with affection and respect by 'Tanner Scholars' who came to Hertford in this manner. Continuing controversies over Oxford's admissions' procedures and outcomes has led to renewed interest in the scheme both for what it achieved in its own time and what lessons it might offer Oxford now. A Hertford alumnus has offered to support research into the history of the scheme, and I have been asked to undertake this project between January and June 2019.

The college archive contains considerable information on the situation in the early 1960s, in Oxford and also nationally, which led Neil Tanner to conceive of a new method by which to bring talented state-school students to Hertford and to deflect criticism from other colleges which lacked his vision and commitment to open and fair access to the university. But in addition to written sources, it would be enormously helpful to hear from Tanner Scholars themselves about their background and their experience at the college. For that reason, I am enclosing with this letter a questionnaire which I hope you will feel able to answer and return. In some cases, I will follow up receipt of your answers with an interview which will be conducted in 2019.

I hope to publish a report on the scheme which will not only be of interest to historians of higher education and of Oxford itself, but which may prompt reflection on how Hertford, the other colleges, and the university as a whole can harness the ideas and spirit that lay behind the Tanner scheme. Whether or not we can influence policy and procedures in Oxford today, it will be good to have an account of this well-known (though little understood) piece of educational innovation. I am hopeful that in the summer of 2019 we may be able to hold a colloquium in Hertford to consider the results of the study and their implications.

For the present I would simply be grateful if you would return your questionnaires to the college (email [tanner.archives@hertford.ox.ac.uk](mailto:tanner.archives@hertford.ox.ac.uk) or mail to Development Office, Hertford College, Catte Street, Oxford, OX1 3BW). We hope to have the majority of responses by October 2018 and I will commence work on them when the project begins in January.

The questionnaire gives you the choice of allowing the project to have access to your personal files, held in the college archive. Without your permission we guarantee that we will not access this information. The information you provide will be treated in the strictest confidence and will be deposited in the college archive and kept permanently as part of college history. In any published work or public discussion, we shall ensure that individuals are anonymised.

Finally, you may wish to know a little about me. I was a university lecturer in the History Faculty in Oxford for 29 years, for 24 of them as a fellow of St. Peter's College. I was the college's tutor for admissions between 1992-6, and ended as Vice-Master. I have published on modern British and American history, including work on the history of higher education, and was the editor of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* for 10 years, 2004-14. I'm delighted to be asked to conduct this project. Do contact me if you have any questions.

With good wishes,



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