

# Olympiad Teacher Voices

**Alexandra Smith**

Head of Chemistry

King Edward VI School

## **Why do you, as a teacher, like to take part in Olympiad round 1?**

I work at a school that is boy's grammar school up to Year 11, with a mixed sixth form, so the students that are taking chemistry tend to be quite high ability anyway. The Olympiad is a good way for us to inspire interest from our sixth formers in areas of chemistry outside of the direct specification that we teach for A-level. Especially as we have some students who are, I think, very keen to extend their knowledge and understanding beyond A-level. The Olympiad is a nice way for them to apply chemistry they might know something about, but outside of the specification.

## **Why do your students want to take part in the Olympiad?**

Some of them do it because they can write about it on their UCAS reference (unfortunately!). Some of them do it to challenge themselves because they are quite competitive with each other, but also just for themselves, to see what they can do. I think they enjoy doing it for that. It's mainly done by Year 12, but interestingly some of them will come back and do it again in Year 13 as well, to see if they can improve on what they got in Year 12. I think they are generally quite competitive.

## **What do your students get out of taking part in the Olympiad?**

I think it's mixed. For some of them, it gives them a bit of confidence if they do well, that they actually do know more than they thought. Or the opposite is true as well – it benefits me because they think that they are very, very bright and they know everything already and then actually they find out that they don't, and then maybe do some more work.

I think for some of them it shows them the links. The students that we tend to find that do the best are the ones that do physics and maths as well, and they see how the physical sciences link together through the questions on the Olympiad, which is good. Because a lot of them are only in Year 12 when they do it, they come across concepts that they haven't learnt about yet and I think that for some of them that piques their interest.

## **Do you use Olympiad past paper questions in any of your preparation or classes?**

I have occasionally used them, if I've seen something and thought it would be quite useful. I make them available for the students to look at independently before doing the Olympiad, but I don't use it as a go-to resource for my lessons. Occasionally I've used them as extension activities and things, but really only if it happens to have caught my eye at the same time that I was planning.

## **Is there anything else that you do with them to prepare them for round 1?**

Nope! It's down to them!

## **What do your students find most challenging and how do you overcome this?**

I think, for some of them, that if they don't do physics and maths, especially if they're in Year 12, then they struggle with the maths content. Our students who do well tend to be the ones doing physical science A-levels. And sometimes the organic notation, not so much now because we teach skeletal formula at A-level, but previously, some of them wouldn't necessarily recognise it if I hadn't shown them it or if they hadn't done some research before.

## **What advice would you give a school that was thinking of taking part in Olympiad round 1 for the first time?**

Just do it - we just do it! Sometimes finding a time is tricky – we have quite a big sixth form – so you do have to think a little bit about when you're going to do it.

We don't put any limits on who does it – I mean I might suggest to a few of them that they might want to do this, but we tend to let everybody do it. Even the ones I think probably won't do very well on it, I let them do it. So that they can see and have a go. But we just do it, we do it every year and it's something that our sixth formers know happens and so if they haven't heard anything about it they'll be asking me, 'When's the Olympiad?'

I think that they have to not be afraid of doing it. It isn't an elite thing, and they can do quite well on it, even with very little input.

## **Anything else you'd like to say?**

They do enjoy doing it, and it is worthwhile. We'll continue to do it.

The Chemistry Olympiad is the leading chemistry competition for students in the UK. To find out more about this opportunity to challenge your chemistry students visit [rsc.li/olympiad](https://rsc.li/olympiad)

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