



Projects in
Central &
Eastern Europe

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HMC PROJECTS – HOW THE PROGRAMMES WORK

STUDENT QUALITY, PHILANTHROPY ON THE PART OF SCHOOLS AND ENGAGEMENT WITH FIFTEEN CENTRAL & EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES (ALL FORMER EAST BLOC) ARE AT THE HEART OF BOTH PROGRAMMES.

1. KEY DATES FOR BOTH PROGRAMMES

- October 2020 – the Director contacts Schools to seek offers of places on both programmes.
- December 2020 – Schools confirm offers of (a) place(s) by returning the Scholarship Offer Forms to the Director.
- January & February 2021 – selection interviews take place in the 15 countries.
- End of February 2021 – the Director contacts Schools with details of the full scholar(s) HMC Projects wishes to place at the School and/or with detailed information about the reduced fee process, whereby recommended students apply to the School.
- By the end of the Spring Term 2021 (end of March) – places on both programmes are confirmed.
- April 2021 onwards – Schools are in touch with their scholar(s).
- August/September 2021 – Scholars start at their new schools.

2. HMC PROJECTS – WHAT WE ARE (& WHAT WE ARE NOT!)

- HMC Projects is not an agency – with all that implies!
- HMCP is a small non-profit-making charity with two main purposes: i) to seek offers of scholarship places from schools; and ii) to identify talented 16/17 year-olds from non-affluent backgrounds in 15 former east bloc countries who take up those places for their Sixth Form studies.
- HMCP flies under the HMC flag, but it is supported by all school associations linked to ISC.
- HMCP is run by two retired people who work part-time – with the help of trustees and others. Much of the work is done *pro bono*.
- David Gibbs' very readable *The New Europeans, a History of HMC Projects*, published two years ago, has been made widely available to schools. It tells the story very well. A digital copy is available from the Director on request.
- The short article published in *Insight* some years ago gives a good introduction too.

3. BOTH PROGRAMMES

- This September, 80 new HMC Projects Scholars (26 boys and 54 girls) will start at some 41 schools (HMC, GSA, State Boarding and Society of Heads) across the UK and abroad – 49 Full Scholars and 31 Reduced Fee Scholars. They have come from 15 countries in all: Armenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine.
- They are the latest cohort of now almost 2000 students who have come as scholars since the programmes started in 1993.

4. OUR COUNTRY COORDINATORS – WHO THEY ARE & WHAT THEY DO

- They are not simply agents. These are people with whom HMC Projects has established good links over many years through school or university contacts, through the British Council and the Soros Foundation; some run language schools; one is a former HMCP scholar. In all cases they are very well informed about the UK and British boarding schools, about the sorts of HMCP scholars we are seeking and about what HMC Projects is trying to do with the programmes.
- They advertise the programmes, invite and process applications, pre-select through English Languages tests, organise the interview schedule and welcome and help host the interviewers. They provide support and advice to scholars before they start at their new schools.
- Our coordinators receive a small honorarium to cover costs, but their work is largely done *pro bono*. Their energy, idealism, experience – and many have extraordinary stories to tell of their younger days under Soviet rule – and sheer hard work are crucial in maintaining the numbers and quality of applicants and the competitiveness of the programmes.
- Their organisations: Gaudeamus LLC Armenia, Association PLUS Bosnia-Herzegovina, The Bulgarian Reading Association, The Forum for Freedom in Education Croatia, The Open Society Fund Czech Republic, The Tallinn University Language Centre Estonia, The Latvian Association of Teachers of English, Unique Learning Georgia, The Open Society Fund Slovakia, The National High School Debate League Moldova, London Bridge Montenegro, Asociatia Tine de Noi - Romania, Edu-Link Serbia, Edu-Link Macedonia, The Ukrainian-American Concordia University (Kiev) Ukraine.
- In five of the countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Moldova, Serbia, Slovakia) HMC Projects works in collaboration with ASSIST www.assist-inc.org (American Secondary Schools for International Students & Teachers).

5. THE FULL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME

- This remains very much our 'gold standard'. We are targeting very able 16/17 year-olds from non-affluent backgrounds. By 'non-affluent' we mean families whose combined **net** income does not exceed the equivalent of £30k *per annum*; and by 'very able' we mean students with a proven academic track record who in our judgment will excel in the Sixth Form.
- We take very careful steps to protect the integrity of the financial criteria. Parents complete a detailed finance and assets form as part of their son's/daughter's application. Our country coordinators can also provide very useful background information. In many cases parental income even of professional people is way below this threshold.
- Applicants complete a detailed application form, seek guided confidential references from their teachers, sit pre-interview tests and are then interviewed by experienced interviewers in groups of three.

- In approaching schools the Director is seeking firm offers of a place or places. Schools are asked to indicate whether their offer is for a girl or boy (or either) and then to be as prescriptive as they wish (about talents and interests, choice of academic programme and subjects, country of provenance etc. etc.). Some schools are very prescriptive – others are not.
- Come mid-February 2021 the Director has a list of offers from schools and a corresponding list of recommended full scholars. These he and his colleagues then match up (taking into careful account all school requests) and he asks the School to accept the recommended scholar(s).
- Schools are asked to confirm their acceptance of the recommended scholar promptly.
- Parents of applicants offered a full scholarship pay an administrative fee to HMC Projects of £1250.
- In cases of genuine financial hardship, HMC Projects is prepared, on request, to make a modest discretionary payment of a bursary to a scholar paid to the School for the scholar's use for essential purchases and expenses including travel.
- Our and the scholar's assumptions will be that the scholarship is intended to be for two years (i.e. both Years 12 and 13). Clearly (as with any student in the School) progress into Year 13 will be dependent on satisfactory performance and conduct, but we should not wish to place a scholar on the programme at a School, which intended all along to offer only one year.

6. THE REDUCED FEE PROGRAMME

- Students who perform very strongly in the selection process, but who cannot be offered a full scholarship have their names added to a list of reserves. They are very high-quality students. These candidates are then offered the chance to apply for a reduced fee scholarship along with the small number selected by interviewers whose **net** parental income exceeds £30k p.a. but is below £80k. (If parental income exceeds £80k, then they are ineligible for this programme.)
- Reduced fee scholars pay partial fees to the School: typically 15 – 25% of the fees. They do not pay an administrative fee to HMC Projects.
- In 2020 schools charged fees ranging between £6k and £10k p.a. I can say that offers from a school of say a 50% reduction will simply be out of reach of the students we are targeting.
- We need to stress that we are targeting students from non-affluent families for both programmes. Just because a scholar accepts a reduced fee place, that does not mean that therefore the family necessarily has much money. We know that in many cases the extended family is contributing towards the fees – just as happens with many UK families.
- The Director seeks initial expressions of interest in the programme and invites schools to indicate the number of places likely to be offered.
- The application process for the reduced fee programme is conducted rather like a mini-UCAS in that applicants are invited to apply to up to four schools. Schools are contacted in good time to confirm fee levels and number of places offered and are informed of the timescales by which offers need to be made and accepted. It is unhelpful – to put it mildly – if a school withdraws from the programme at a late stage or reneges on the offer of a place or places. That is simply not fair to students who apply in good faith.
- Parents of students offered a reduced fee scholarship pay no administrative fee to HMC Projects, but HMCP asks Schools to pay a one-off placement fee of £1250 per student.
- As with the full scholarship programme our and the scholars' assumptions will be that the scholarship is intended to be for both Years 12 and 13 – and on the same or at least a very similar financial basis.

7. CARE OF SCHOLARS – GUARDIANSHIP MATTERS & CARE OF STUDENTS WHEN THE SCHOOL IS CLOSED....

- I do not need to tell people in boarding schools that there is an increasing focus on and tightening of regulations regarding the care of young people, but I can also state from experience that schools continue to approach matters regarding the provision of a guardian in quite a variety of ways.
- For HMC Projects there is quite a conundrum here. If we are successful in identifying suitable scholars from non-affluent backgrounds (i.e. their parents earn less than the equivalent of £30k p.a. – and for many it is well below this figure) – and that is of course our prime aim – then these students (their parents) are in no position to pay the costs of guardianship arrangements normally required for overseas students.
- Most schools now require all international students to have a guardian (although some still make a distinction between EU and non-EU students). The appointment of a formal guardian is therefore primarily a matter for the family and the school. In practice, many scholars are able to find a UK-based family friend or relative to act as a guardian, but in cases where the use of a professional agency is required then the cost of such a service should normally be met by the school. HMC Projects is not in a position to contribute financially to a scholar's guardianship arrangement.

However HMCP can help in various ways:

- a) The HMCP Student Coordinator's main role is to act as a link between the students and HMCP and to offer pastoral support should this be required. She cannot act as a formal guardian, but she (and the Director) can offer advice and assistance to schools and parents to help fulfil their duty of care. We can tell you how other schools approach these matters.
 - b) For scholars who cannot return home during half-term and for whom remaining in school is not an option, HMCP may be able to organise a limited number of homestays during half terms and may also be able to provide a supervised residential break during the relatively short Spring Half Term. However, if COVID-19 is still prevalent in the UK with government measures in place to limit the spread of infection then it will not be possible for HMC Projects to provide any short-stay accommodation or supervised half-term breaks.
 - c) HMCP can offer financial assistance to students towards extra travel costs – on a discretionary basis where financial circumstances warrant it.
 - d) Exeat weekends. Practice at schools varies here, but HMCP can take no responsibility for the care of students during exeat weekends if the School closes for these weekends.
- So-called light touch (and therefore cheaper) guardianship arrangements may well be suitable for HMCP scholars and HMCP may be able to help to facilitate this.

It still remains a big – often an enormous – step for 16/17 year-olds from former east bloc countries to come to the UK. We want to keep human contact at the forefront of our operations and are therefore available in the background to offer support to the scholars particularly in their first few weeks.

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