



## Meet Alumni, Alec Byhurst

Thank you to former student Alec Byhurst for answering our questions about his time at The Hundred of Hoo Academy, and his career since.

- **When did you attend the academy?**

September 2006 – July 2013

- **What did you like best about being there?**

First and foremost I would have to say my group of friends were the best thing, we're all still in touch and I definitely consider them friends for life. Although we only see each other once or twice a year, when we meet up it's like being back at school again, we often reminisce about some of our funnier memories!

Secondly, I would say that I loved the broad variety of opportunities and experience you get at school. At the time you don't realise how lucky you are, but there isn't another time in your life when you can have a day that goes from conducting science experiments, to reading poetry, playing rugby (or in my case attempting to) all the way to some woodworking.

- **Any favourite memories?**

Many great memories so I'll highlight a few:

- I fondly remember fabricating a BBQ in DT with Mr Squires (a brilliant teacher), I often think of this and it spurs me on to create my own workshop at home.
- The school has always had a great reputation for performing arts and while I possessed zero talent in this category, I always really enjoyed watching my peers perform shows and music on awards night. I remember a friend of mine performing 'Play that Funky Music' during an awards night, which was awesome!
- We were very lucky to be visited by Sir Ian McKellen during my time at school, I remember his talk very well.
- Lots of fun science experiments, one that sticks out would be firing an air rifle pellet into a pendulum to calculate its velocity in A-Level Physics!

- **Any clubs/activities that you participated in?**

I don't remember being a part of any particular club, however I was lucky enough to be made head boy during my time at the school. As a part of this role I became involved in the organisation of several school and charity events, looking back on it, I wish I had made more out of that opportunity! One great memory was our end of year Sixth Form BBQ which our social team did a fantastic job of organising, the inflatable assault course was brilliant!

- **Favourite subjects?**

I'm an engineer, so the answer will seem extremely boring to most, but it was definitely Maths and Sciences (particularly Physics). I also really enjoyed my time in the Design and Technology area of the school.

- **Any staff you particularly remember?**

Definitely, to name a few (in no particular order):

1. Mr Tuffin, who taught me Biology throughout my GCSE and A-Levels. He was the one Teacher I can think of who struck the perfect balance of discipline, humour and enthusiasm; which is why he was universally respected by all the students in my class. From my memory, Liverpool FC and The Simpsons are probably the only two things that I would rank above Biology in terms of his passions!
2. Mr McManus, who taught me Physics throughout my GCSE's and A-Levels. He was a brilliant teacher, who really helped us grasp some of the more difficult concepts in physics with lots of practical learning. He encouraged lots of side projects applied to areas we were passionate about, I remember a few Formula One related ones that I enjoyed. Ultimately this application of science to the real world is what Engineering is all about, which definitely confirmed it as the career choice for me. I can't finish this off without mentioning his passion for the 1976 Vauxhall Viva he proudly drove to school in every day, a car that he had owned since graduating from University!
3. Mr Vyse taught me science during Year 10 before he quickly climbed up the ranks, becoming headteacher during my time at Sixth Form. I had the pleasure of working with him for a few events during my time as Head Boy, he commanded respect and was a very engaging speaker. He knew the name of every pupil in the school and when he was talking to anyone, it was clear that he was giving 100% of his energy and engagement to that person. That is a quality that I have seen repeated amongst the best leaders in my career and one that I equally aspire to possess.

- **Where you went after leaving?**

I completed a summer of work as a labourer with Sullivans Builders, saving for my first year of University, it was a fantastic summer and one that I won't forget.

In late September 2013, I moved to Oxford to begin my studies at Oxford Brookes University, Oxford is a wonderful City and a place I always enjoy returning to.

- **What you studied after leaving?**

I studied for an Integrated Masters in Motorsport Engineering, working in F1 had been my goal for a long time, and this looked to provide me with the highest chances of achieving that. The integrated masters consisted of 4 years at University with an additional year in the middle as an industrial placement. I very proudly graduated with a First Class Degree, achieving the top grades in my year.

- **Career journey since?**

My Undergraduate year in industry was spent at a Xtrac LTD, whom in the Motorsport industry are world renowned as leaders in Transmission Technology. I worked with some of the best engineers I have come across there and I would say that the skills and knowledge I gained throughout that year were equal in magnitude to the entire 4 years of my academic studies at University.

I returned to Xtrac as a Graduate Design Engineer for a year, but ultimately the call of F1 was too loud and I was very fortunate to land a job at Mercedes AMG Petronas F1 team as a Graduate Aerodynamic Design Engineer where I've been for 19 Months now. Formula one is everything I had hoped for, the level of passion, intelligence and drive that every member of the team possesses is incredibly motivational. Being a part of two World Championships during has been incredible, there aren't many jobs in the world that showcase your work across the world to millions every other weekend so it's pretty special.

- **Any advice that you'd give to the 18-year-old you?**

Lots of advice! Part of becoming an engineer is learning to become very self-critical, we are very hard on ourselves and will always spot the negatives. I look back on my 18 year old self and think of many ways that I should have changed my approach and behaviours.

In my final years at University I became extremely competitive, I looked at the top people in my year and made sure I was doing more than them in as many areas as possible, this has now turned me into a self-confessed workaholic. I wish that I had my current work ethic during my A-Levels, I didn't work nearly as hard enough as I should have done. There are lots of new distractions thrown into your life when you reach 16/17/18 years old and it's difficult to get the right balance between enjoying those and working hard.

Looking back, I consider the 18 year old me to have been quite arrogant, with the perception that I 'knew it all'. It took some time, but I realised that I in fact didn't know much back then and still don't now! I've settled for a very different approach to the 18 year old me, in which I grasp the opportunity to learn as much as possible from every situation that arises in life. I don't turn up and pretend to know what I'm talking about, I do the opposite and tone down any knowledge that I have as this often helps you to learn from whoever is teaching you. One thing I've learnt is that the majority of people with big egos aren't that smart, the people I respect the most are often those that say the least, those are the people you should probe if you really want to learn.

Finally, upon going to University a lesson that became immediately clear to the naïve 18 year old me was that I had been completely unaware of the class system that existed in the UK and the advantage that privately educated students had. You realise that the pressure and competitiveness of their educational environment has prepared them for University far more than the state system, moreover the exposure to extracurricular activities and knowledge makes them far more likely to come across as confident and personable in a wide range of conversational topics. Their affluent background means they won't have to work in part time job while at University like I did, handing further advantages. For me, this motivated me significantly and ultimately drove me to work much harder than they did. I would recommend that the 18 year old me should have spent the time educating himself on a broad range of subjects outside of the academic ones, developing my own opinions on these matters and taking the opportunity to learn how to debate with those who share a different point of view.