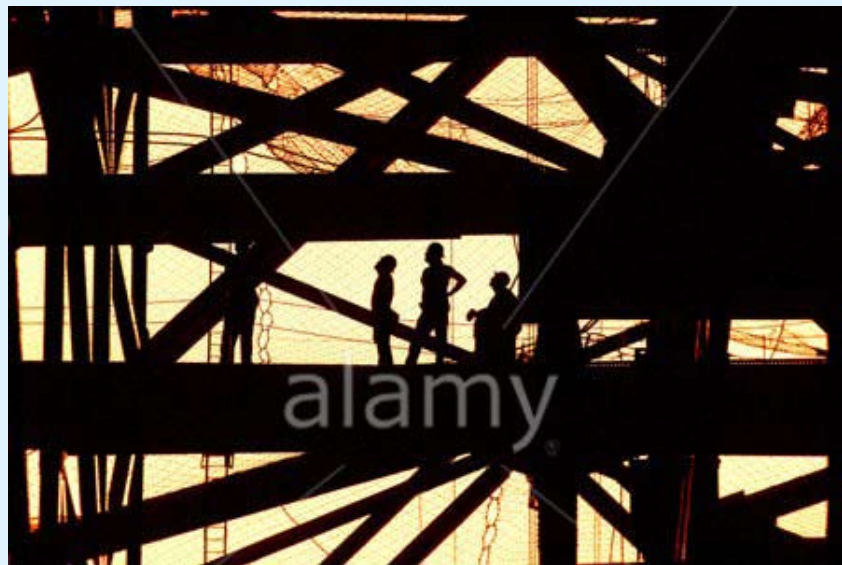


£4m scholarship scheme for budding scientists

By returning a gesture of goodwill, the Eliahou Dangoor Scholarships will provide welcome financial assistance to thousands of aspiring undergraduates keen to study science, technology, engineering or maths, and help them realise their ambitions



Naim Dangoor has felt a debt of gratitude to Britain for more than 70 years. An Iraqi Jew, now aged 95, he spent a happy period studying engineering at Queen Mary College, London in the 1930s. Then, three decades later, he fled to the UK to escape antisemitic persecution when the Ba'ath party, later headed by Saddam Hussein, came to power.

After the warm welcome he received both times, he vowed that if he was ever able to help a British university student he would. But he never expected to be in a position to help so much.

Thanks to a highly successful career in the property sector, he was able five years ago, to donate £1 million to offer scholarships worth £1,000 each for 1,000 of the UK's most talented first-year students.

Now, on his behalf, his son, David, has donated a further £3 million, again for first-year students, but this time aimed at encouraging young people to study STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths). Between 30 and 40 of these £1,000 scholarships will be available each

'Without the scholarship I would have been a lot less focused on my work'

year for the next three years from 38 participating universities – members of the 1994 Group and the Russell Group, which together represent the leading research-intensive universities.

With matched funding from the government, the scheme, named the Eliahou Dangoor Scholarships after Naim's father, will be worth £4 million and help thousands of students.

James Lightfoot, 22, who benefited from the previous scheme during his four-year biochemistry degree at the University of Bath, used it to fund flights to America for placements to carry out research into cancer. Without it, he says, he would have had to go further into debt – he already owed more

than £16,000 on graduation – or would have had to forfeit the chance to do a placement abroad and gain the life experience of living in a new country.

For Luke Keenan, 22, another beneficiary of the earlier scholarship scheme, it lifted some of the financial worries of his first year. His mother has health problems and his father is a full-time carer so neither was able to support him. "Without the scholarship, I would have been a lot more worried and less focused on my work," he says.

Both men have since gone on to do PhDs – Lightfoot in aerospace engineering at Bristol, Keenan in chemistry at Bath – and are passionate advocates of the value of studying science at university. For Lightfoot it offered the thrill of observing other people's research and designing experiments, as well as the opportunity to "make a name for yourself by finding out something important and special that no-one else has done before – to change the world".

Dangoor is himself testament to the value of a science degree – and the variety of career paths it offers. After graduating, he returned to Iraq to join the army and then set up a business empire. He spent the 1950s running the Coca-Cola franchise there with a Muslim business partner, but had to give it up on the orders of the Ba'ath party. As a refugee in the UK he started a business in property development, becoming a multimillionaire.

His new donation comes amid increasing concern about the low proportion of young people in the UK taking maths and sciences at A-level and progressing to degrees in related subjects. Between 1997 and 2008, A-level entries fell by 18% in maths, 11% in physics and 6% in chemistry, despite total entries for all subjects increasing by 12%.

Wendy Piatt, director general of the Russell Group, said: "We are still deeply concerned about the fall in the proportion of young people taking maths and sciences at A-level and progressing to degrees in STEM subjects. Although this year admissions offices are reporting a welcome increase in applications for science and engineering – these green shoots need nurturing."

Piatt says Russell Group universities were also concerned that some students were put off applying to them because of a lack of confidence or misunderstanding about the costs and financial support available. "The Eliahou Dangoor Scholarships will be a great new weapon in our armoury in the battle to ensure that students fulfil their potential and take the courses that are best for them," she explains.

Paul Marshall, executive director of the 1994 Group, says it is crucial that no student with the ability to go to university was unable to because of lack of funding.

He adds: "Through the generosity of Dr Naim Dangoor, the Eliahou Dangoor Scholarships will support a large number of talented students to study science, technology, maths, engineering and science education in a research-rich environment."



ARE YOU ELIGIBLE FOR A £1,000 AWARD?

The Eliahou Dangoor scholarships, worth £1,000 each, are aimed at first-year undergraduate students studying for degrees in approved maths, science and engineering subjects.

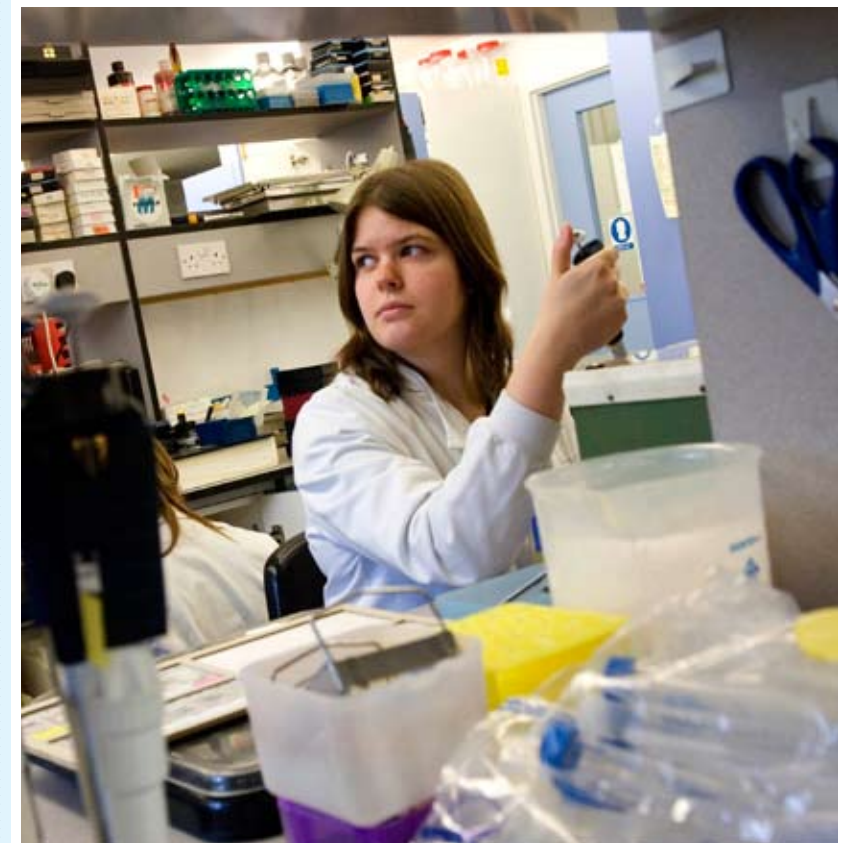
A few scholarships will also be available for students taking postgraduate certificates of education focusing on science or design and technology.

To be eligible to apply for the scholarships, students must be home, fee-paying students studying at one of 38 1994 Group or Russell Group institutions,

which together represent the major research-intensive UK universities. Part-time students are eligible to apply for half of the full scholarship.

It will be up to individual institutions to assess the applications and distribute the scholarships according to their own criteria. Most beneficiaries will be from underprivileged backgrounds. This could mean their parental income is low or that they are the first member of their family to go to university.

More details available at 1994group.ac.uk/dangoor and russellgroup.ac.uk/dangoor



Inspired by a love of science

On the day Hayley Lavender left to start her degree in molecular and cellular biology her father told her she would be back within a week. "He didn't think it was a good career path," she says.

He was wrong. Not only did she stay for the four years of her course at the University of Bath, graduating with a high 2.1, but she has remained in academia and is now a research assistant at the University of Oxford, working in the production of monoclonal antibodies. She is hoping to continue in academic research and eventually do a PhD.

She says the Dangoor scholarship, which she received at the beginning of the 2005 academic year, allowed her to buy all the recommended textbooks for her course. This,

she believes played a crucial part in her studies and her academic performance.

Now 23, Hayley cannot remember a time when she was not interested in science. She recalls being inspired at the age of six by a neighbour who had studied it at university and came back with tales of dissecting frogs and conducting experiments. Even though there was little history of science in the family – her mother works in a hotel and her father is a builder, she received encouragement from her school science teacher.

"I think science teaches valuable skills in everything else you do," she says. "You learn how to follow instructions, how to work with different people and how to solve problems."

On a voyage of discovery

There was nothing strategic about my choice of first degree: just about the only qualifying criterion for choosing astrophysics was that I was fascinated by it. "What on Earth's he going to do with that?" asked the neighbours, a question my parents answered with a shrug and a smile; a challenge I should thank them for never having put to me.

I didn't have a well-formed idea of what university was all about. Only the hope that it would be the start of a voyage of exploration whose final destination might be as wonderful as it was unknown. It didn't disappoint. The course was filled with exotic objects and ideas of a beauty indescribable in any spoken language; it was at the edge of the envelope, the bluest of all blue-sky thinking. And all of this they slotted neatly alongside the

real education; the one gleaned from our extracurricular lives. I have a lot to thank the department of physics and astronomy at University College London for. I'm not sure I was a natural student. Indeed they dragged me often kicking, sometimes screaming, through the three years, leaving me equipped at the end with a decent degree in science and an understanding that from there anything was possible.

Of my friends who studied science many went on to lucrative city jobs, others embarked upon successful media careers, some continued in their exploration of space, and a few collided particles at Cern. None of us, as far as I'm aware, was left wanting, either intellectually or financially. I went back to university to study medicine, something that had seemed remote as a possibility while I was at school. Later I'd

get a chance to work with Nasa. We all carried into our new lives approaches to problem solving and systems of thought that continue as assets today.

Anything that encourages people to pursue science as a field of study is to be welcomed. The Dangoor scholarships will, I hope, help prospective students make that most difficult leap of faith: to know that the pursuit of a fascination and a degree in science constitute a passport to a world without walls.

Kevin Fong is a doctor specialising in anaesthesia and intensive care medicine, an honorary senior lecturer in physiology at UCL, an occasional broadcaster and columnist, he works for the Science, Technology and Facilities Council's Futures Programme.

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