

Olympiad Teacher Voices

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

A couple of reasons – firstly, because it's a really good opportunity to give students some challenging questions. And they are really difficult questions that are not necessarily on the usual curriculum material – that's an excellent experience for the students in terms of their interests (showing some chemistry in some different contexts). But secondly, it helps prepare them for questions that crop up on exam papers and are a bit more left-field. So to support the work that they are doing for their exams as well. And thirdly, it gives those students who are particularly interested in chemistry a way of showing that they are committed to and interested in the subject – so that they can actually demonstrate that when they come to writing UCAS statements and things like that.

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

I think some of them are just really interested in chemistry and really want to do some more chemistry and to be exposed to different chemistry questions. And I think some of them do it to be able to demonstrate their interest – more UCAS-based reasons. Given the number of students we have studying chemistry, only a small number participate and quite a few of those are in Year 12, but we do have quite a few who do it in Year 13 as well and they're just doing it because they want to do some more chemistry.

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

It is the higher achieving students who are doing it – so getting them to really think about interesting problems, and they do definitely benefit from that.

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

Yes, we direct the students who are going to do the Olympiad to the past questions, but we also use some of the questions in the summer work that we do going from Year 11 to Year 12 and Year 12 to Year 13. They do an online quiz, and based on how they've done on the online quiz, they get different supplementary work to do. So, for those students who score the highest on that quiz, some of the questions that they then do include Olympiad questions. Things that are accessible to them – quite a lot of the questions are just about applying some logic and not necessarily any chemistry knowledge. They need to be comfortable manipulating numbers, looking at a maths problem and not freaking out – able to take a deep breath and say, 'I can probably work this out.'

How do you prepare for round 1?

I don't do anything special with the students. I say, 'If you're interested let me know, this is where you can find the past papers, I strongly recommend that you do some of them.' Then they can see if they're actually interested in doing it, and then prepare if they are.

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

For our Year 12 students certainly, the organic questions are pretty much totally inaccessible. So that's very challenging for them, but apart from that not particularly anything.

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

There's a certain amount of logistics involved in making sure the students are all available at a particular time. And making sure that they can benefit from feedback. The Year 13s are more likely to get a bronze, but the Year 12s might well not come away with anything, so it's quite useful for them to actually be able to see their papers and go through them so that as they go on to do more chemistry they can see how they might be able to tackle them. Make sure you've got a good system to give something back to those students who won't actually end up with any kind of award at the end.

I make it available to everyone, but say that it's aimed at students who are hoping to do really well and that they should do it if they're interested – and if they'd like to spend two hours doing some additional chemistry.

Anything else you'd like to say?

It provides a different context which is very good for them, and sparks other interests as well.

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://www.rsc.li/olympiad)