OC OF THE MONTH
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Octavia Hirst (SH 2007)

A LEVELS: English Literature, Maths and Physics
UNIVERSITY: Engineering at Durham University

1. Please tell us a little about yourself – where do you currently work, and how did you get into that?

I currently work for FutureLearn as a Senior Product Manager. FutureLearn is an online learning platform that helps education institutions such as Universities put their Courses and Degrees online. Our aim is to transform access to education, by making it possible for more people from more places to access the learning they need.   As a product manager, I work closely with a multidisciplinary team of software engineers, designers, data analysts and learning technologists to create a software product to enable this transformation. My role focuses on creatively facilitating good working practices between the business, the technologists and our User Experience team.   I 'own' a set of business priorities and have to work out the best way to meet those needs by organising and prioritising work. It is very rewarding, and particularly good for a generalist such as me who is good at both creative work and technological understanding. Good

communication is very important, everyone speaks about problems in different ways and I have to work out how to make sure we all understand each other.   People come to product from many different paths, I fell into it after trying to start my own business after Uni. Being a product manager is a bit like being a mini CEO of your product, so its a great fit.

2.   What are some of your proudest achievements since graduating?

I was named as Code First: Girls '25 under 25 ones to watch' in 2014, a great achievement. I launched my own business, teaching people to code, which was a fantastic experience and helped me to get to where I am today. Since then, I am happy to have had the opportunity to work for a diverse range of companies, building a skillset that means I can bring a lot to my current role. I always wanted to work in the transformation of the higher ed sector, so I feel like I'm exactly where I want to be!

3.   What advice would you give someone who is looking to follow a similar career path?

If you are creative, scientific, mathematical and a good communicator - become a Product Manager. It's one of the most rewarding jobs that exists. The role barely existed when I was at school and is now very prevalent both in start-ups and large corporates, so you can be in many types of companies and still get this experience. I think a big lesson from my trajectory is to do things that you love and pay a lot of attention to the roles that are developing around you. In this world, most of the jobs that you may end up doing probably are still being created.

4.   How has your experience at Highgate contributed to your life and successes since leaving school?

Highgate gave me a great grounding in many important skills, but the leadership skills I learnt as a Deputy Head Girl have probably been the most invaluable. Use school as a time to try things out and fail. It doesn't matter when you're at school.

5.   In three words, how would you describe Highgate?

Challenging, passionate, open.

6.   What's next?

I hope to continue doing what I'm doing for many years to come. I love the role and I love the aims of the business, so I hope that I can keep contributing to this mission for some time yet.