

Dear parents, carers and students



Welcome to this edition of the 6th Form Fortnightly Focus.

The end of the autumn term is nearly upon us, and with only a week remaining, staff and students alike are eagerly anticipating the start of the Christmas holidays. The last few months seem to have disappeared in a blur of activity, and it is almost as if Christmas has snuck up on us (the only thing giving it away being Mr Forster's proud display of his many Christmas jumpers). Our new cohort of Y12 students have settled into Sixth Form life, and are enjoying the challenges provided by their chosen subjects. The Y13 students are busy mapping out their next steps, and preparing for after they successfully complete their courses. For many, this means the completion of UCAS applications.



Part of my role involves the careful reading and checking of each individual application before it is submitted to UCAS, and eventually sent to a student's chosen universities. I must say, it has been a privilege and a pleasure to read each of the personal statements that have been sent so far. Our students write so passionately about the subjects they hope to study at university, and recount in detail the value of the relevant experience they have amassed so far. I have no doubt that their efforts have been appreciated even more keenly by those they have spent time working alongside. It has also been heartening to read the references provided by subject teachers, praising students for their hard work and commitment in lessons. However, the most rewarding aspect of the whole process is hearing from the students when they have received an offer, particularly when it is from their first choice of universities.

We made a conscious decision this year to encourage students to complete their UCAS applications long in advance of the January deadline, and the benefits of doing so have been clear to see. Many of our students have already received reduced offers in response to their early applications and carefully crafted personal statements. Although I cannot speak on behalf of the universities, it would make sense to assume that admissions teams would be looking to provide such incentives to students who are already demonstrating that they are conscientious and hardworking. None of this would have been possible without the dedication and support of the Sixth Form Tutor Team. Their hard work and experience has been invaluable throughout the UCAS process.

For any similarly conscientious Y12 students already considering going to university, I would offer the following advice:

- Volunteer. Use your enrichment time to build experience relevant to your chosen course.
- Make the most of your work experience opportunity in Y12. Start looking now, as the best placements tend to fill early.
- Begin visiting universities. The College has been fortunate enough to be awarded a sum of money by the trustees, which we are using to fund university visits. Sign up to these, and attend any other open days that might interest you.
- Boost your knowledge, read around your subject of interest, watch documentaries. Many universities will want to hear about what you have studied in addition to your taught lessons.
- Begin the UCAS application as soon as you can. In our experience this year, early submission has resulted in reduced grade requirements for many students.
- Write a fantastic personal statement (that incorporates all of the experience mentioned above). When predicted grades for many applicants tend to be so similar, a well written personal statement can really help you to stand out.

In the New Year we return to a series of mock examinations. Although I would recommend that everybody enjoys a well-deserved break over the next few weeks, I would also suggest that a little time be put aside for revision and preparation. With the removal of most AS qualifications, many Y13 students have yet to face the demands of full A Level examinations. Formerly, AS examinations would offer students an insight into their own performance. They might highlight particular strengths, or identify areas that needed to be improved upon. For some students, AS examinations would serve as a safety net moving into final exams, or as encouragement to work harder if results were not favourable. Now that they are gone, the May/June exams become the sole deciding factor for many students' grades, and therefore crucially important. With this in mind, I would encourage all students to view the January mocks with the importance they deserve, and make the most of a solid opportunity to test themselves in preparation for their final exams.

In the meantime, I would like to take the opportunity to wish you all a wonderful Christmas and a fantastic start to 2017.

Kind regards, Mr Jacob.



Christmas card design by Daisy Trewartha-Wyatt

The way you're revising may let you down in exams – and here's why

Tom Stafford - theguardian.com

Most people practise the wrong tasks, reveals a psychologist. Take your head out of those textbooks for a few minutes and read this advice

Even the most dedicated study plan can be undone by a failure to understand how human memory works. Only when you're aware of the trap set for us by overconfidence, can you most effectively deploy the study skills you already know about.

As a psychologist who studies learning and memory, I know quite a few scientifically informed revision tips: space your practice out rather than cram it all together, practise retrieving information rather than recognising it, reorganise what you're trying to learn. Probably you've heard these before, maybe even from me.

But even the best advice can be useless if you don't realise why it works. Understanding one fundamental principle of human memory can help you avoid wasting time studying the wrong way.

This is it: we're drawn to ways of studying that feel good but are actually quite poor at helping us learn. This tendency can produce a fatal overconfidence when we study. Here are some crucial pieces of advice for anyone studying for an exam or trying to learn something new.

1. Test, don't recognise

The most common form of study is the one that gives "revision" its name – literally just looking at the thing you want to learn again. The problem with this is that we mistake our ability to recognise something for an ability to recall it.

Recognition and recall are different psychological processes. Recognition is a much easier task – all you have to do is look at something in your environment and generate the correct feeling of familiarity (like when you look at your revision notes and think "I'm sick of looking at these").

But in your exam you don't get marks for things being familiar, you get marks for recalling relevant information and using it to answer the question. Even powerful feelings of familiarity don't guarantee you can recall the information.

Prove this to yourself by picking your favourite song, one with lyrics you've heard a thousand times. Try singing the lyrics from start to finish and you quickly realise that even a loving familiarity doesn't mean you can recall the lyrics. If someone had asked, you might have said that of course you knew the lyrics. But you'd be using "knew" in the sense of recognised, not in the crucial sense of being able to recall them in full.

So, don't practise recognition in your revision – you need to practise retrieving from memory, not just generating an improved feeling of familiarity.

2. Space, don't cram

Another rock solid piece of revision advice is to space your practice out, rather than cramming it all together. If you organise five hours of study into one hour a day, you'll remember more than if you study for five hours on one day. Yet time and time again we don't do this – and the cause isn't just being disorganised.

Cramming all your study together feels good. You finish the study session, thinking "I know this". The problem is that although you're currently holding it all in mind, the memories are more fragile. Spacing your practice out doesn't feel as satisfying, but it results in memories that are more likely to be useful when exam day comes around.

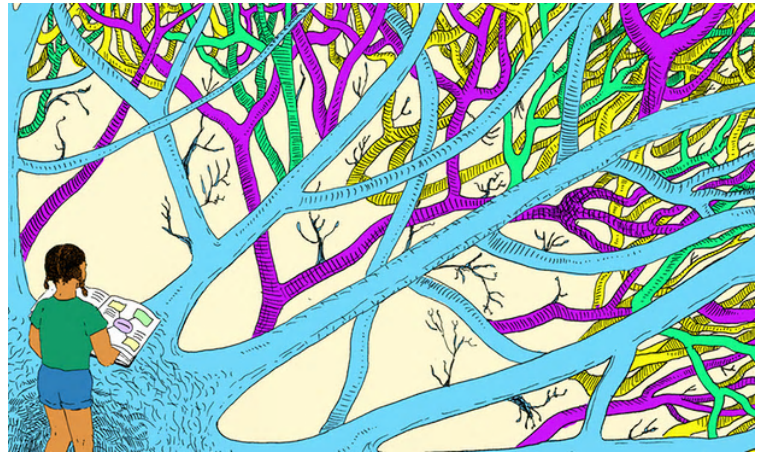


Illustration - Sophie Wolfson

3. Effort, not flow

A world-recognised expert in expertise, K Anders Ericsson, argues that nobody develops the highest levels of skill in anything without 10,000 hours of deliberate practice. What this means for revision is that when you're revising, you have to focus on the things you know least well, not the things you know best.

Unfortunately, it's far more satisfying to revise what we know, since this triggers a rewarding sense of familiarity, rather than focus on our weaknesses. Ericsson has gone so far as to suggest that deliberate practice is the opposite of the flow state, when practice is most enjoyable. Revision shouldn't be for reassuring yourself about what you know, it needs to be the deliberate effort to identify what you don't.

4. Practise output, not input

The same common principle holds for what we practise as well as how we practise it. Any effective study plan needs to include answering questions with the information you've revised, but often we're tempted to leave that out in favour of focusing on learning the information in the first place.

While it may feel good to get completely familiar with the material before practising writing answers, it omits from our study practice the exact skill we are marked on. You wouldn't practise for a tennis match by never playing tennis, and you shouldn't study for an exam by never testing yourself on writing full answers in exam conditions. For any test, we need to rehearse exactly the thing we'll be required to do.

None of these revision tips are rocket science. But the realisation that we all share a tendency to put in the least effort when we study, and rely on feelings of familiarity, which aren't a good guide to learning, can help transform how you use them.

The answer to questions like "how much should I space my study?" or "when should I stop learning and start testing?" is probably "before you feel comfortable". When you're fully comfortable with the material, your time could be better spent learning it in a different way.

Depressing as it sounds, it could help to know that if you always enjoy revising, you're probably doing it wrong. It's meant to be hard.

Tom Stafford is a lecturer in psychology and cognitive science at the University of Sheffield.

Student Perspective

An Newsicle on Brexit

by Molly Bolding

"Britain cannot have its cake and eat it...we're not on Facebook where there's 'it's complicated' status" – Luxembourg's Prime Minister Xavier Bettel

"My policy on cake is pro-having it and pro-eating it" - British Foreign Minister Boris Johnson

If it is at all possible to just put aside the events of the last few weeks in our neighbour across the pond and look back at the British political sphere, we are reminded of what has been by far the most dramatic event of the year – the outcome of the Brexit vote. The labyrinth of truths and mendacity, facts and falsities, damned lies and statistics that were conjured up by both sides of the debate only serve to muddy the waters further on what the right decision actually is – regardless, the 52% have spoken and in the latest statement from the Supreme Court on Thursday it's President claimed they will not "overturn the result of the EU referendum" (www.bbc.co.uk/news). However - and here's where it starts to get confusing, if it wasn't already - the problem is now who has the right to make the decision to leave. The Conservative government under David Cameron chose to have the referendum - therefore it was assumed that it would be the responsibility of that same government or the following one to trigger Article 50, which is the piece of legislation that starts the potentially 10 year long leaving process, in the supposedly unlikely event of Britain 'Voting Leave'. The logic of the case that leading government lawyer James Eadie QC put to the Supreme Court appears relatively sound: the act of signing the Treaty of Lisbon and joining the EU is one that concerns international relations, not domestic policy, therefore the leaders of the UK now in office are the ones who can make the decision. In spite of this, various campaign groups have pointed out that this may represent the result of the vote and thus the direct voice of the population but that actually bypasses the democratic representatives of the people - the Members of Parliament in the House of Commons. MPs are elected to speak on behalf of their constituencies on political matters and to disregard this is to rend apart "the only glue" holding the UK's unwritten constitution as one, to borrow the words of the court lawyer for Wales Richard Gordon QC. Therefore the Commons should vote on the issue, to decide once and for all if Britain is to leave the EU. Irrespective of whether there will be a Parliamentary vote or not, it feels almost inevitable that Britain is on a trajectory out into the Atlantic, away from our European neighbours. What is more upsetting even than that is the damage this is already doing to people both at home and abroad, in terms of rising hate crime figures and anti-refugee sentiment; the message that is being transmitted about what people are prepared to believe and act on; and this terrifyingly real demonstration of the sway of populist politics around the world. Many treated the Brexit vote with a mix of trepidation and derision - in fact, a substantial number of voters used this as an opportunity for protest. Due to the wide-ranging socioeconomic issues affecting millions of this country's citizens, to shake both of these broken political systems to their cores and to finally feel some validation for their participation in the process was the objective of many ordinary people: an argument fielded time and time again was "the EU means we are externally governed by a group of people we don't elect who create laws that we don't think work for us". This point of view is completely understandable, especially if you are in a position where you feel completely disenfranchised and have nothing left to lose, and is one that was exploited by the Leave Campaign and it's various offshoots.

Despite this, is it not fair to ask - has anything actually changed? We are now governed by a group of people we didn't elect - 'reluctant-Remainer' Theresa May and her cohort including the ultimate slap-in-the-face, Boris Johnson as Foreign Secretary - who make laws that don't seem set to change anything for the greater good anytime soon. The only difference is we will no longer have to abide by the occasionally random legislation of the European Union - that was actually forcing the UK government to implement a majority of beneficial policies anyway. Among the many resented examples, like the dictation of the parabola of bananas that fixated a certain blond Etonian Prime Ministerial candidate, were regulations that lowered data roaming charges; enforced crucial safety guidelines on everything from children's toys to dangerous heating equipment; protected the right to confidentiality in cyberspace; preserved the biodiversity of British waters; and guaranteed progress towards less reliance on fossil fuels for power generation. For all it's many, many faults, the EU was and still is probably doing us more good than harm - in spite of populist belief.

In the words of comedian Trevor Noah, let's try and avoid "descending into a scone-less post-apocalyptic hellscape" in the mean time and as we crawl slowly towards separation from our friends across the English Channel, it's fair to say it's not exactly going swimmingly.

...and as a final word of warning: for the love of all things sacred, like stuffed crust pizza or downloadable Netflix shows, let's all remind Donald John '#TwitterSaidSo' Trump that Nigel Farage would NOT be a good American ambassador - and nobody wants to see him try it.

Gallery Space



Josephine Evans



Anya Ansty



Aishling Heneghan



Charity Skydive

Sixth form student Thomas Halton has announced plans to do a skydive as a charitable fundraising event.

Tom, aged 17, will undergo the 15000 foot dive on the 28th of May next year to raise money for the 'Keep Me Close' appeal, a campaign concerning the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Derriford Hospital, which aims to provide accommodation for mothers of premature babies to ensure they are able to retain contact during the difficult postnatal care period. The ward provides care of this kind for babies from all over the South West and is the only ward of it's type this side of Bristol.

The charity is close to Tom's heart, particularly as his mother was formerly a midwife on the ward. Upon his devotion to the campaign, Tom states "I want to save a future generation and I'm passionate because I have a need to help the vulnerable"

Tom's personal goal is to raise £450 for the cause, a goal which you can help him reach or hopefully exceed by donating at the website below, or by sparing any change in the donation bucket situated in the octagon. <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/Thomas-Halton>



Meet the Tutor

Mr L Byron

It's never easy to talk about yourself, so I've decided to start by giving you a potted history of my life (in under 50 words):

1969: Born in Essex. 1989: Study art at Cardiff University, meet future wife. 1995: Move to Leicester (teacher training). 1996: Move to Devon to start teaching. 1997: Get married. 1998: First child born. 2001: Second child born. 2007: Start work at Tavistock College. 2016: Buy a dog (called Roo).

I teach Art and Photography at the college. When I was a student studying photography it was all film, darkrooms and chemicals – none of this fancy digital stuff. Now of course photography technology has moved on leaps and bounds. Still it keeps me on my toes and it means teaching photography is an ever changing and exciting subject to be in.

I love being a sixth form tutor. It's great to be there at the end of the student's time here and help them on their way to exciting futures. It is always sad to see familiar faces leave, but always gratifying to know they're setting off on a new chapter of their lives.



Plymouth University Visit



Year 12 and 13 geographers were invited on a bespoke day to the geography faculty, having a workshop, a lecture, a tour of the campus and geography facilities.

Dr Richard Yarwood, took time after the lecture to talk to the students with advice on their applications to universities. He commented "It was good also to talk to your students and was impressed that they had also come to the Mark Blacksell talks". Highlighting how universities look beyond grades to the students passion and commitment to the subject too.

Diary Dates

- **16th Dec** - Christmas Jumper Day
- **4th Jan** - College opens for students
- **5th Jan** - year 13 mock exams (AS mock exams)
- **26th Jan** - open mic night
- **31st Jan** - Cardiff University trip

Tavistock COLLEGE