



## Dear parents, carers and students

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



January is a prime month for an existential crisis. Christmas and the New Year are fading memories, it is dark, damp dismal and cold (Hail is currently tumbling down the chimney!).

In an assembly this week, I talked about how to remain resilient and positive, taking small steps to see the students through the month ahead. Simple lifestyle choices: physical exercise, drinking plenty of water, trying out mindfulness or controlled breathing, or simply turning off the handheld device, reading a book and getting an early night. I suggested Year 12 students should plan a trip to a university, especially those who are not sure higher education is for them. We still have a few places on the Cardiff and University of South Wales trip, one of a number of planned trips kindly funded by the trustees of the college.

The deadline for Year 13 UCAS applications has now passed and we are already receiving a stream of offers for our hardworking students. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr Jacob, Mrs Mabey and particularly the tutors who have supported the students through the whole process. We also have a careers fair coming up in February for students interested in taking up an apprenticeship.

The start of term has been hectic with mock exams and coursework deadlines, students may feel overawed by the exams ahead or just have a case of the January blues. I would ask them to focus on the end game, remain positive and to cherish their family and friends.

We have had a few changes to personnel, as you may be aware Mrs Stephens has been promoted to cover the absence of the Head of Year 10. This is well deserved and an excellent opportunity for her but unfortunately leaves the Sixth Form one tutor down. As a result we have had to collapse 13 STE and there are a handful of students going into each of the remaining 5 tutor groups. We also sadly say goodbye to Mrs Mortimore, our 6th Form student support officer who helped coach many students through their A-levels over the years. And lastly, Mr Jacob has stepped down from the role of co-Director to become my deputy due to the upcoming arrival of his first child, congratulations! Mr Jacob will continue to be a brilliant head of Year 13 and will continue to look after them during their last year at Tavistock College. *Tom Galli*

## Gallery Space



Will Dax

Ethan Turnock



Cerys Hancock



Eloise Scaysbrook



Lydia Marks



## Important information on University Fees

The upper limit for English universities will be increased from £9,000 to £9,250 per year, starting from autumn 2017.

The new regulations were uploaded to a government site on 15 December with no public statement being made by the Department for Education at the time, despite the increase being proposed in July. The DFE has stated that universities will only be able to increase fees if they "meet a strict quality bar".

As well as new students enrolling in 2017/18, current students may also be charged the higher fees, if universities choose to apply the increase across the board. The government now plans to increase fees annually, in line with inflation.

Students and parents attended talks by Student Finance England In november but further Information can be found on the Student Finance England, or UCAS website.

## Diary Dates

- **30th Jan - 3rd Feb** Health and Social Care work experience.
- **31st Jan** - Cardiff and University of South Wales trip
- **9th - 10th Feb** Sports Tour to America
- **23rd Feb** Careers Fair

# Student Perspective

## The Syrian Civil War

by Oscar Agnew

Though it flickers in and out of the news, the war for Syria rages on in the Middle East. It is a war that, though localised, has had a profound political effect on the rest of the planet and has all but divided the western world. The EU referendum came down to the migrant crisis, Donald Trump's election had a heavy immigration theme to it, and now the French elections loom – with the far-right Marianne le Pen in a strong position. The war is the last of the Arab Spring revolts, that sudden rash of Middle Eastern revolution that saw Egypt, Libya and Tunisia violently overthrow their leaders.

The Syrian civil war has displaced over 11 million people, and 600,000 civilians had been killed as of March 2016, but it began as a popular protest as part of the Arab Spring. Anti-Assad (Bashar al-Assad is the current Syrian president) protests began in March 2011 in the city of Deraa, in the south of the country, after the arrest and torture of a group of teenagers who painted revolutionary graffiti on their school wall. Government security forces opened fire on the demonstrators, killing a number of them, and more took to the streets. This unrest then triggered nationwide protests against Assad's government, followed by more attacks by security forces. The rebels banded together and the situation descended into open war between the poorly equipped rebels and the Russian-backed Syrian army.

More recently, the war has taken a dangerous religious turn – with Sunni Muslims on the rebel side fighting Assad's "Alawite" Shia sect. To make matters even worse, the fundamentalist terrorist group calling themselves the Islamic State have also joined the war on their own side, adding to the chaos. A UN inquiry found evidence that all factions in the conflict were guilty of a number of war crimes, including torture and rape. IS have also been accused by the UN of having a "campaign of terror", It has inflicted severe punishments on those who refuse to accept Sharia law, including hundreds of public executions and amputations. It has also carried out mass killings of rival armed groups, members of the Syrian army and religious minorities,

and beheaded hostages, including several Westerners.

In August 2013, the war took a sickening turn when the Syrian government launched a Sarin gas attack on a Damascus suburb. Sarin is an especially nasty chemical, forcing the victim's nerves to go haywire before an excruciating death. The Syrian government, however, agreed to stop using chemical weaponry. Unfortunately, gas and other chemical weapons are still deployed by both sides of the conflict, showing the government has likely lied about their chemical stockpiles. Obama stepped back from his "red line" policy, which stated that chemical weapons warranted US involvement, and now gas attacks appear to warrant little more than stern warnings and wagging fingers.

Due to president-elect Donald Trump's apparent pro-Russia stance, US direct involvement with the war is likely but it isn't clear whether or not anything good can actually come of it. In December 2015, the UK controversially voted to begin air strikes on Islamic State and began targeted attacks within a matter of hours. The RAF uses laser-guided "Brimstone" missiles that are much more accurate than simple carpet-bombing. This keeps civilian casualties at a minimum but some MPs, including the Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, argued that they would cause avoidable civilian deaths.

Recently, the Russian and Turkish governments have negotiated a number of unsuccessful ceasefires – showing that though peace is a far-off achievement it is still possible. Later this month Kazakhstan will host representatives of the Syrian government and of the Rebels in an effort to negotiate a ceasefire for the delivery of humanitarian aid to war-torn parts of Syria. Turkey and Russia say the Kazakhstani talks aim to supplement the UN's efforts, not replace them. They want to involve other regional governments like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan. The Americans are absent from the new process, but Moscow has said it hopes to bring Donald Trump's administration on board once he takes office in a few days.

## Sport Reports

### Level 3 Netball Scholars v Bodmin College

The Level 3 Netball Scholars made a strong return after the Christmas break with a 20-7 win against Bodmin College on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> January. There was early shooting success in the first quarter from Tilly Cole (GS) and Gemma Arundel (GA) which was aided by a dynamic WA and C pairing of Jasmine Ewings and Sophie Phillips. Bodmin were on the heels of Tavistock but an ambitious play from Laura Meredith (WD) winning the majority of 50/50 balls allowed for a high turnover rate. The second quarter proved to be even more dominated by Tavistock with a consistently high shot percentage from Amber Cox.

The third and fourth quarters had determined play from Darcey Hepworth, Abbie Wilkinson, Lauren Abel, Alice Kodritsch and Becky Banks to finish the match on a third consecutive win against Bodmin College.

*Match report by Sophie Horn*



### Under 18s football squad results

National Shield - Tavistock 1 Liskeard 4  
National Cup - Tavistock 0 Liskeard 0 (2-4 on penalties)  
Tavistock 0 Saltash 2  
Mount Kelly 1 Tavistock 3  
Tavistock 6 Launceston 2.



### PE enrichment programme

On Wednesdays Year 12 and 13 have had the opportunity to access different PE pathways. These focus on developing skills and being physically active in different practical environments. This includes team competitive situations, where students can participate in team activities, and a health and recreational pathway, focusing on using the fitness suite to design personal exercise programmes, yoga, pilates and other individual activities.

## Close your eyes and breathe:

Article from the Observer Education section

More than 4,000 teachers are now qualified in meditation exercises to combat pupil stress.

It's Wednesday morning and the children from year 5 at St John the Baptist primary school in Brighton are chatting noisily at their desks. A bell chimes and the chatter stops. Thirty children close their eyes and place a hand across their chest, breathing in and out slowly. It's as if they've been hypnotised.

"If your mind wanders away, let's notice where it goes," says Kerstin Andlaw, in a soothing voice. "Then bring your attention back to your breathing."

The pupils are practising mindfulness, a way of making them stop, relax and "be". Classes like this used to be the preserve of independent schools, but this year more state than private schools have signed up to mindfulness classes, both at secondary and primary level. According to the Mindfulness in Schools Project, there are 1,350 teachers being trained in the technique this year, double the number taught last year and up from 90 in 2011. Nationally, more than 4,000 teachers are now qualified.

"Where did your mind go?" asks Andlaw. Angel was thinking about her mum going into hospital that day for an operation. Jose is looking forward to his sister's birthday party at the weekend. Daniel's mind is on lunch.

"Were you able to let those thoughts go and come back to your breath?" asks the teacher. They all nod confidently.

A class involves breathing exercises, discussions about meditation and simple stretching movements. "It's a practice to help the children self-regulate, to calm down or to help them lift themselves up if they're feeling low," Andlaw says. In America, some tough high schools now get pupils to do meditation rather than detention. There's been a big drop-off in playground aggression, plus a rise in grades, but Richard Burnett, co-founder of the UK project, is wary of the US model, especially where mindfulness is used to "correct" bad behaviour as opposed to being a practice in and of itself. "If you pitch it like that you're feeding into precisely the achievement-based culture that's putting such huge pressure on children," he says.

Yet few doubt that stress is a major mental health concern in today's hyper-connected world, and children – teenagers especially – are vulnerable. Does that make mindfulness in schools more relevant? Dr Richard Graham, a consultant psychiatrist at the Nightingale hospital in London, thinks it does. He has seen a rise this year in the number of teenagers requiring treatment for technology addiction, especially for gaming apps.

"Young people are living in a very distracting world, where the fear of missing out has become the norm. They're struggling with multitasking," he says.

Graham believes mindfulness has a valuable place in schools because at its core is the promotion of wellbeing and self-support.

The mindfulness industry hopes the findings of a new research project by the Oxford Mindfulness Centre will silence any detractors. It will assess the mental health benefits of mindfulness among 6,000 children over the next six years.

"It won't definitively prove that mindfulness is a silver bullet for kids' anxiety. But it will tell us what is working, and what isn't," says Burnett. The UK government has one eye on the research too. At present, if schools want mindfulness in the curriculum they have to fund it.

The problem with this, says Jamie Bristow, director of the Mindfulness Initiative, a research and policy organisation, is that the poorest schools tend to get excluded. "Those schools struggling most with behavioural issues and high levels of stress and absenteeism are the ones that would most benefit from this, but they are the least likely to do it because they haven't got the money."

Carmel Hughes, headteacher at St John the Baptist, introduced mindfulness after hearing positive stories from other heads. Her school is far from well off, but Hughes believes the £1,600 for a 16-week course is money well spent.

"The children look forward to it because it's different. It's a class where they're encouraged to think for themselves," she says.

At the end of their 15-minute class, the year 5 kids go back to chatting away at their desks while their teacher sets up the next lesson. I take the opportunity to ask Reece, aged nine, what he thinks about mindfulness. He considers for a moment, and then leans forward confidentially. "I like the mindful breathing," he whispers. "It helps me go back to sleep if I have a bad dream."

## Meet the Tutor

Mrs L Mabey



So this is the 11th year of my career admin-ing in the Sixth Form Office and it has flown by. Largely because the pace of change in a school is non-stop. It certainly doesn't feel like any admin job I've had before because there is always something going on. From Y11 interviews to Learn 2 Live to 'Octafest', no 2 days are the same. Being office rather than classroom based, I'm probably the easiest person to get hold of in the sixth form team. The direct line to the office is 614231 ex 239 so if you need to speak to any one of the team then that number is a good place to start. Please don't hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions or issues, we'll be happy to help.

I love working with this age group, from the day students have their sixth form interview, to the day they leave, it's a privilege to watch them evolve into articulate, friendly, fully functional young adults before our eyes. My favourite part of the job is seeing what they go on to do after sixth form. Some of these students have been planning and working towards their chosen future careers for years: the future medics who have been volunteering in residential homes or the future PE teachers who have been coaching sports clubs; and for the most part all very modest about their efforts. It's amazing how many of our students are actively involved in their local communities; they have more drive in their little fingers than I had in my whole body at their age. It's always a pleasure when ex-students call by to let us know what they are up to. We've had lots of visits recently whilst students have been home from university. It's great to talk to them and hear about their exciting ventures. I hope lots of your sons and daughters will be popping back to see us in 2 years' time!