



# Westminster Tutors Newsletter

Summer 2015

## Word from the Head

The academic year 2014-15 has been an exceptional one for Westminster Tutors. We started the year celebrating our 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary - no mean feat as colleges all around us merge into larger groups owned by corporate equity firms and lose much of their original character and identity. The reputation of Westminster Tutors has always been founded on its superb teachers. We continue to thrive on the myriad talents and scholarly interests of our teaching staff, all of whom have something special to offer - as indeed do our students - and this is what we hope to bring out in each one of them during their time with us. Our longevity is proof that small is not only beautiful but also sustainable, and long may it continue!

We have a tradition and an ethos of providing educational opportunity which we are rightly proud of. Our founder, Miss Freeston, read Chemistry at Oxford and was in the first year when women were actually awarded degrees, making her one of the earliest female graduates of Oxford University.



Westminster Tutors originally occupied Dickenson rooms in Artillery Row, Westminster

Miss Freeston set up Westminster Tutors in 1934 (in Westminster, hence our name) because she realised that schoolgirls had very little access to highly academic teachers, and this was in turn blocking their opportunities for furthering their studies at university.

My mother found herself in the same situation in 1960. Since my mother wanted to go to university (to the horror of her father, who offered her a substantial allowance if she would instead train as a secretary, but with the vigorous support of my grandmother), she moved to Westminster Tutors to study for her A levels, and went on to read History at St Andrews. Miss Freeston was still running Westminster Tutors at that time, and my mother recalls the dark higgledy piggledy

building, and her study piled high with dusty newspapers on piles of books, a cat ensconced atop the most comfortable pile of all. Miss Freeston was not greatly concerned by appearances, and during the winter months wore a blanket wrapped round her hips, held in place by a large safety pin. Alert and sharp, and very keen on the job, what she did care about was her students: she was an acute judge of character and gave well-judged university advice based on her expert knowledge. The teachers were also first-rate and while, like Miss Freeston, they displayed a few idiosyncrasies, all were absolutely committed to their teaching.

It is a strange quirk of fate that I have ended up as Principal of Westminster Tutors, and one my mother could never have imagined when she was a student of 17, and even less so when she was dealing with me as a recalcitrant A level student of 17! While I hope not to become quite as dusty nor as doughty as Miss Freeston in my top floor office at Old Brompton Road, I do see her spirit and commitment to enabling each and every student to flourish as being central to what we do at Westminster Tutors today.

## Ofsted “Outstanding”

Our second cause for celebration this year has been being awarded “Outstanding” in our Ofsted inspection in February 2015. Ofsted inspections have become ever more stringent, and from September 2015 all schools (even those inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate) will be inspected under a common framework of judgements to allow families to make clearer comparisons.

I am very proud to say we have been awarded the top grade “Outstanding” in all six judgements, which is a rare achievement, and I would like to suggest even more remarkable given this was our very first Ofsted inspection. No other independent sixth form college in London can claim this accolade so allow me to finish by briefly blowing our trumpet - TOOT TOOT! - before assuring you that we are determined to preserve what makes us so special, at the same time as continuing to pursue the very highest educational standards in a rapidly changing world.

We are happy and proud to be what we are today and we look forward to being 100 years old!

Virginia Maguire



## A Level Results – Adding Value at WT

Over the past three years - despite the removal of the January exam session and changes to A levels to make them more demanding - we have seen an upward trend in our A level retake students' grades, and as a consequence, an increasing number of them have been rewarded with places at top universities which they had previously missed out on.

### A Level Retake Grade Increases

**2012** - 26 points or 0.9 grades per subject per student

**2013** - 31 points or 1 grade per subject per student

**2014** - 37 points or 1.2 grades per subject per student

Apart from monitoring grade improvements for retake students, we not only compare our students' A level grades to national standards, which we far exceed each year, but also to our eight nearest competitors (ie other independent sixth form colleges in central London), just to make sure that we are continuing to lead the field!

### Year-on-Year A Level Points Scores

	Westminster Tutors	Nearest 8 Competitors
<b>2012</b>	234.1	228
<b>2013</b>	240.6	230.5
<b>2014</b>	244.9	224.3

(C grade = 210 points, B grade = 240 points)

## Fundamental British Values

### Nick Dommett, Director of Studies

This academic year has seen a concerted focus on the teaching of 'Fundamental British Values' (FBVs) and the importance of democracy. Introduced by the Coalition government in the aftermath of the 'Trojan Horse' scandal last year, all schools are now required to demonstrate that they are actively promoting the values of free speech, religious tolerance, respecting the dignity of others, and respect for British institutions.

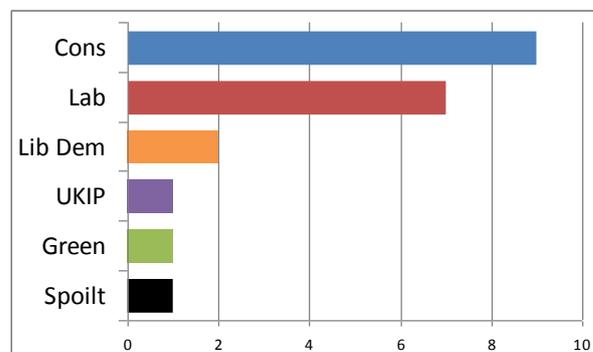


At Westminster Tutors this was achieved predominantly through the Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education (PSHCE) curriculum with a mix of teacher- and student- led presentations. Debate surrounding the current status of FBVs was vigorous and enlightening. Added into the mix, we were honoured to hear from Kamal Alam, Fellow for Middle East Defence Issues at The Institute for Statecraft, who challenged many of the student's preconceptions on the role of faith in the Syrian conflict, and a trip to UCL to hear a lecture on the role of Parliament in contemporary times.

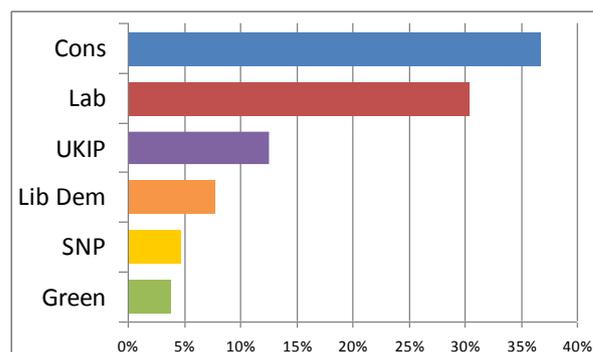
Of course the General Election this year provided a perfect case-study of these FBVs. Beyond our yearly Head Boy/ Girl elections, the college aims to engage students around vital elections. This year, hustings were held, with student-led presentations encompassing the full range of the political spectrum (Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrats, UKIP, Green and even SNP). While provoking intense discussion, the debate was held in a mostly cordial manner. As a prelude to what took place in the General Election, the Liberal Democrat representative was asked some tough questions over their role in the coalition.

Indeed, particularly prophetic were the results of our college poll which showed an uncanny relationship to the overall elections results. Perhaps in future years, pollsters should look to Westminster Tutors for their polling rather than opinion polls!

### Westminster Tutors Mock Election Results



### And how the UK voted....



## A Level Results and UCAS 2015

# UCAS

This year's A level results will be announced on **Thursday 13 August:** students can call or come into college to collect their results from 9am. The UCAS website will also go live in the morning and applicants can check the status of their offers in Track. It's a nervous time, but in the past two years over 50% of our students have taken up places at Russell Group universities, and a similar number are holding Russell Group offers this year, so fingers crossed!!!

On this all-important day and the following days, the whole team will be on hand to help students: from Maggie, our much beloved invigilator who has seen all of our students through their exam trials and tribulations; to Jason, our eminently capable Exams Officer; and Virginia, who will be able to sweep in and offer expert advice if any students do find themselves in trouble with their UCAS applications.

## Circuit Training with Russell

### Max Menaul, A level student

Circuit training with Russell is an interesting occasion for all. Once a week everyone bands together to bond over some intense physical activity.

There are several competitions involved with the sport sessions designed to test the students' endurance, including the 'how slow you can get changed' and the 'lamest excuse for skipping a session' tests. The circuit training isn't bad either.

The weekly sessions take place at the Chelsea Leisure Centre on the King's Road so we walk over from Westminster Tutors. Students often take part in the activities in pairs, but Russell is very aware and ensures the teams are often mixed up in order to include new students. As he always says, two is better than one, and I believe that those are words to live by in every aspect of life. Russell also motivates us through many of his signature catchphrases, such as when he yells, "I want to see a swimming pool of sweat in here!", which is great, if that's your cup of tea.

Sports at WT is really good for staying healthy and



testing your limits, but more importantly it can be used as a great opportunity to develop very useful excuse-making skills and improves your perception, as one always has to keep an eye out for Russell when slacking off!

## Art for Art's Sake

### Anna Espinosa de los Monteros, A level student

When I first arrived at Westminster Tutors I was told that in place of Art History lessons in college I could visit the museums to look at the artwork in person. I was incredibly excited as having come from a school in the middle of Yorkshire and having lived abroad I had never had the chance to visit many of the London museums and galleries.



My first visit was to the National Gallery. It was wonderful to be able to see in person all the paintings I'd only seen on paper. All the small details that can't be seen in a reproduction, for example the transparent wings on the wasps above Mars's head in the painting 'Venus and Mars' by Botticelli, or the incredible detail in the 'Arnolfini Portrait' by Jan van Eyck, where you can almost feel the different textures due to the artist's accuracy. Even more amazing was to be able to see these paintings whilst my teacher, Dido, explained them to me.



Sandro Botticelli 'Venus and Mars' (1485), National Gallery

*As Anna says, the wasps above Mars's head are impossible to reproduce here. It is thought they are emblematic of the commissioning Vespucci family ('vespe' meaning wasps in Italian).*

Our next visit was to the Tate Modern to get an overview of modern art movements and we also managed to see the Sigmar Polke exhibition going on at the time. Lastly we visited the Victoria & Albert Museum where, amongst other things, we saw the plaster casts of the Gates of Paradise by Ghiberti, with their intricate relief panels, each portraying different accounts from the Bible. They may not have been the real Gates of Paradise (the original doors are in Florence) but these were a 10 minute walk from Westminster Tutors!

Overall the museum visits were an incredible opportunity to see the artwork and have it explained to me in detail. Especially with more modern art, it is sometimes quite hard to grasp everything that's going on, and my visits to the museums helped me to understand and appreciate the artworks so much more.

## A Level Reforms

As the election dust settles and former Education Secretary Michael Gove turns his attention to justice, schools are bracing themselves for the phased introduction of the reformed A levels.



The most significant reform to the A level system is that AS levels (taken in Year 12) will not form part of the full A level qualification (taken in Year 13), and are instead stand-alone qualifications. The new AS levels are designed to be studied over the autumn and spring terms of Year 12 and are generally comprised of two examined units which will be taken in May. The new full A levels are designed to be studied over two years and are generally comprised of three examined units.

The A level exams will be different from the AS level exams, and while the Year 13 A level exams will require a synoptic knowledge of the material covered in Year 12 (which means, in essence, that the stand-alone AS course is generally co-teachable with the full A level course), the A level exam questions will be more challenging.

### How are Schools Responding to the Reforms?

There is a considerable amount of inconsistency in how schools are responding to the changes – some are embracing ‘linearity’ and none of their students will sit AS exams, meaning their Year 12 students gain the summer term for further study and work straight through to the final A level exams. Other schools are opting for their students to continue to take AS exams even though they will not contribute to the final A level grades. Other schools are offering a mixture of A levels, Pre-U, or IB. Given the huge variety of curricular strategies, parents and students must feel a little daunted by the array of pathways that are on offer.

At Westminster Tutors, we have decided to adopt a typically flexible approach. Our general policy is tending towards offering both AS and A level exams while the reforms bed in, but if it seems advantageous for certain subjects or certain students to study straight through to A level, we will do this. Overall, though, it is our view that able and ambitious students will benefit from being able to show a good set of AS grades on their university applications, and weaker students who might struggle with the full A level course will also benefit from the opportunity to gain AS qualifications. Given the benefits for students at both ends of the academic spectrum, we think it is likely that an increasing number of students who are unable to take AS levels at their own schools will come to us to prepare for and sit the AS level exams.

In addition, since we always teach our AS students for part of the Easter break to ensure that they receive their full quota of teaching for the academic year in advance of their exams, the benefit of obtaining more teaching time during the summer term of Year 12 does not apply to us in quite the same way it would to other schools and colleges. Despite this, we have taken the strategic decision to increase our academic year by one week (essentially a 3% increase in teaching time) from September 2015 as this provides our students with some additional leeway given the added demands of the new A level courses, while students on the old syllabuses also inevitably benefit from the extra week.

All in all, our flexibility means that we can be much more adaptive to the A level reforms and we will continue to allow students to take courses which are most appropriate for their individual goals.

### Which A level Subjects are Changing and When?

Almost all our students entering the sixth form at the start of next year, and in following years, will find that they are studying on a combination of the old and new syllabus A levels, as the reformed A levels are being introduced over a three year period as shown below:

New A Level courses from:	Subjects
September 2015 Group 1	Art Biology Business Chemistry Economics English Language English Lang. and Lit. English Literature History Physics Psychology Sociology
September 2016 Group 2	Ancient Languages (Greek, Latin) Geography MFL (French, German, Spanish) Music Religious Studies
September 2017 Group 3 (The new specifications for Group 3 have not yet been finalised)	Ancient History Classical Civilisation Further Mathematics Geology History of Art Mathematics Philosophy Politics Statistics

## A Level Reforms: First and Last Exams

### Group 1 Subjects

Last current syllabus AS/A2 exams Summer 2016  
First stand-alone AS exams Summer 2016  
First stand-alone A level exams Summer 2017

### Group 2 Subjects

Last current syllabus AS/A2 exams Summer 2017  
First stand-alone AS exams Summer 2017  
First stand-alone A level exams Summer 2018

### Group 3 Subjects

Last current syllabus AS/A2 exams Summer 2018  
First stand alone AS exams Summer 2018  
First stand alone A level exams Summer 2019

## A Level Reforms: Impact on Retakes

All exams for the new AS and A levels must be taken in the summer exam session, which runs from May to June each year. If a student wishes to retake a subject, either all AS exam units, or all A level exam units, must be retaken in the same session. This is a big change from the current modular AS/A2 levels in which students are able to retake the specific units where they underperformed, but are also able to carry over the unit marks where they have obtained higher grades.

In addition, at present it appears that A level retakes will not be available for students who complete their A2 courses in the final year the old syllabus is being offered. This does seem unfair, and the exam boards may yet change their minds, but the implication for current Year 12 students who are completing Group 1 subjects (see column opposite) next summer is that they may have only one chance to take their A2 exams and that they must therefore strive to do as well as they possibly can in the one available exam sitting.

## A Level Reforms: Impact on UCAS Applications

As with schools, universities are also showing a great deal of inconsistency in terms of their responses to the A level reforms. For example, Cambridge has written to schools insisting on the importance of applicants presenting AS results as a part of the application process. Without AS level results universities will be obliged to base admissions judgements on GCSE grades, which many of them believe to be unfair and irrelevant. Oxford, in contrast, has said they will not consider AS level grades as part of a student's

application, even if s/he has taken the new AS exams. Oxford's position is that it is unfair and discriminatory to consider AS level grades when some students will be at schools



which have decided to drop AS exams and, while Cambridge has tended to rely on very high AS unit scores as part of its admissions process, Oxford has tended to use additional university admissions tests such as BMAT and LNAT to enable them to assess applications for highly competitive courses. In the absence of AS level grades, it is likely that more universities will follow Oxford and start to use admissions tests as part of their application process.

A final issue relates to international university applications: for US applications AS results are critical, both because the American academic year starts in August so A level results are announced too late to be considered, and because AS levels are at the same stage as 12<sup>th</sup> Grade in the US system. The same issue applies for other countries where high school finishes in Year 12 at the age of 17, with a degree course lasting for four years instead of the typical three years in England. Once again, therefore, the international outlook suggests that for the time being students are best advised to take AS exams so that certain university application routes are not precluded.

## Scrutinising Teaching and Learning at WT

We ask each and every one of our students to complete very thorough subject-specific evaluations, which cover every aspect of our teaching and the students' learning. The purpose of these evaluations is not only to maintain our high standards and ensure we address any weaknesses, but also to use additional open questions which make our students more mindful of their own learning. The information our students provide also enables our teachers to learn about how they might improve their teaching even further.

Students are asked to rate their teaching and learning according to the scale, which form a parallel with the four Ofsted grades:

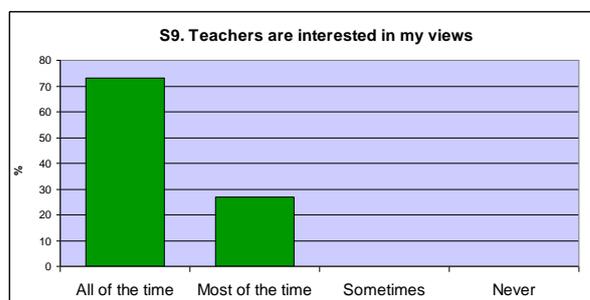
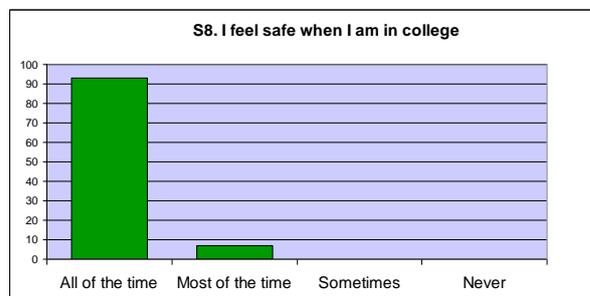
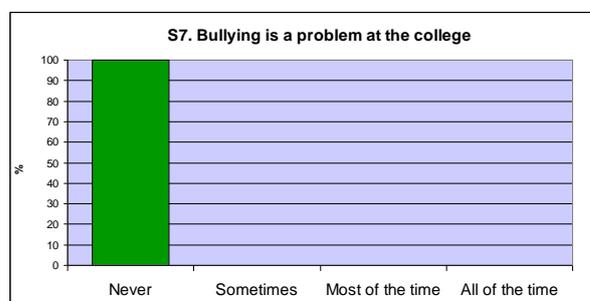
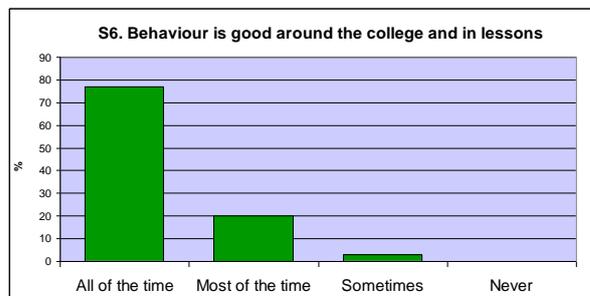
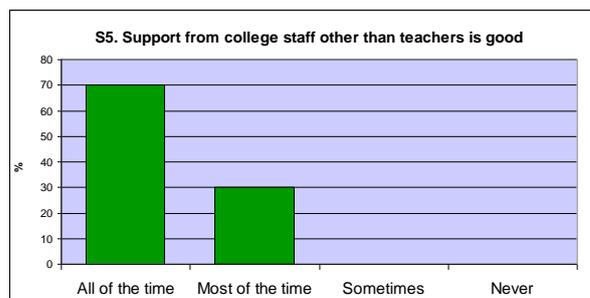
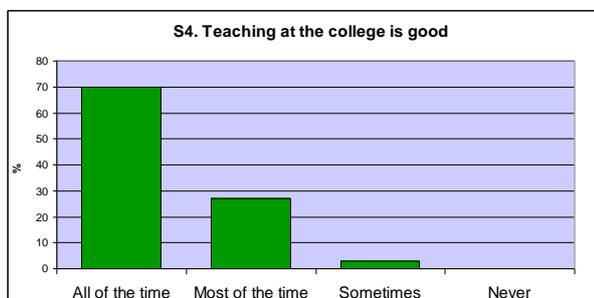
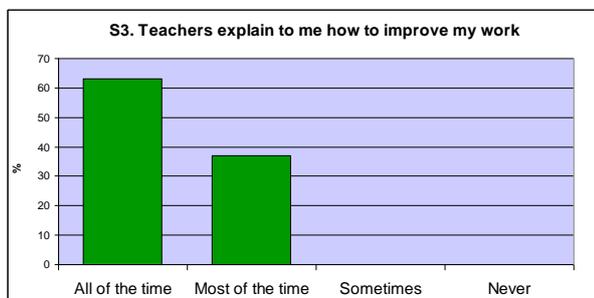
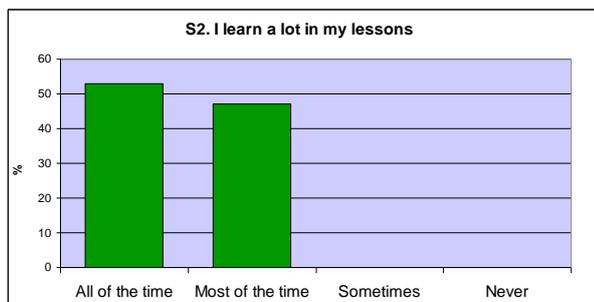
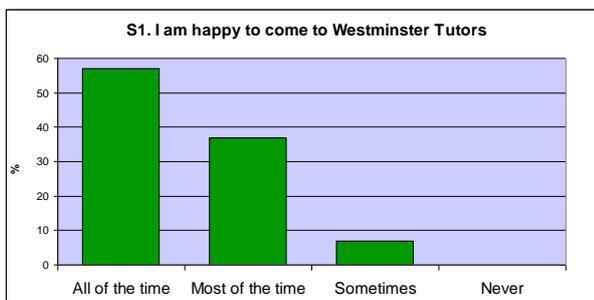
- 1 = excellent
- 2 = good
- 3 = adequate
- 4 = needs significant improvement

### Student Subject-Specific Evaluations 2015

Clarity of lesson objectives	1.1
Pace of teaching	1.3
How well resources aid learning	1.3
How well activities aid learning	1.3
Quality of teacher feedback	1.2
Opportunities to apply learning	1.2
Opportunities for discussion	1.3
Usefulness of homework	1.2
Overall evaluation of teaching	1.2
Overall evaluation of learning	1.3
<b>Overall average of evaluations</b>	<b>1.2</b>

## What Our Students Say: 2015 Evaluations

Our students also complete annual general evaluations using standard Ofsted questions so that we have a national benchmark for assessing our performance. This year, as in previous years, we are consistently hitting the ‘outstanding’ level in our students’ evaluations. They have told us that they are a happy bunch who not only appreciate their teachers and the support of other staff, but also that they love the safe, friendly atmosphere of the college.



And some general comments:

*“I think the teaching is very good, and WT has a very friendly and welcoming environment.”*

*“It has helped me massively so thanks!”*

*“A very nice environment to work in and to be part of with a lot of help offered by all my teachers!”*

*“I loved my time here!”*

## Have Your Say! Parent View

We will shortly be sending out our annual evaluations to parents and families: please do take two minutes to respond to our online survey as we really do listen carefully to what you say.



Interested parents and families can also either view our existing public evaluations on the Ofsted Parent View website ([www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk)), or please do register to put your comments into the public domain and add another review.

## GCSE Reforms for Maths and English

Along with certain A levels, English and Mathematics GCSEs are also being reformed with the new courses commencing in September 2015, and other reformed GCSEs being phased in over the following two years. The new Maths and English GCSEs will be graded from 1 to 9, with 1 being the top grade. They are more challenging and are based on final exams at the end of Year 11, with less coursework for English. Our policy is to adopt a flexible approach choosing between the reformed GCSEs and IGCSEs according to what is in the student's best interests.

## The Importance of Work Experience

Our students are well aware of the importance of work experience for certain UCAS applications: notably in medicine, dentistry and the allied health professions, but also in the fields of engineering, law, business and the creative industries. In Year 12, Virginia provides individual advice and guidance to each student on gaining appropriate work experience in preparation for writing a strong UCAS personal statement which is supported by incisive and specific insights into the work experience s/he has gained.

In addition, as part of PSHCE we focus on writing CVs, at the same time checking on the work experience students have gained or may need to obtain to help make their CV stand out from the crowd. This year (in the absence of uniforms or a rigid dress code) we also had a 'dress up day' when both staff and students were asked to come in dressed in their most professional attire, as well as asking students to interview each other using some of the classic interview questions that often throw people off ('So tell me about yourself...'), and to complete typical in-tray tasks. The in-tray tasks made the students significantly more aware of the importance of accuracy in spelling and mathematical calculations in the workplace where the consequences of careless

errors can be dire. Bosses, unlike teachers, are not very sympathetic to the argument 'But I almost got it right'!

Despite what we do already, there is increasing evidence that even greater emphasis should be placed on students gaining appropriate and adequate work experience and this is something we will be focusing on more. A recent survey of employers by graduate recruitment agency Universum found that leading employers place most importance on work experience, with 58% stating this was the most important attribute in graduate applicants; while only 16% said that a good degree from a prestigious university (for example the Russell Group in the UK or the Ivy League in the US) was important. However, the survey also found that Russell Group graduates still had the competitive edge when seeking employment as a much higher number of them had taken part in internship programmes. Interestingly, the survey also found that Russell Group applicants tended to look for more challenging work, which suggests they may have geared up by actively seeking out internships, while graduates from other universities tended to favour job security.

Considering the issues for our students as they near the end of their schooling, another recent study by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills has found that the number of students aged 16-17 doing a Saturday job has more than halved since 1996, down to just 20% of all students. Part of the problem is that students feel compelled to focus on getting the grades in their A levels, but the other issue is that there is so much competition for work that it is increasingly difficult for young people to get the job, thus producing a Catch-22 situation as employers are favouring applicants who already have work experience. While we would not advocate students gaining part-time work at the expense of their studies, there is much to be said for gaining some experience to help pave the way for internships and full-time work in the future, not to mention learning the real value of money, and perhaps also learning that it is worth having a degree to secure more interesting work opportunities in the future.



*Parents and families – can you help?!  
Please let us know if you would be willing  
to offer work experience to students  
interested in careers similar to your own.*

## Teacher Feature: Tom Lees

Unusual but striking characteristics predominate amongst our Maths and Physics teachers: the first of these is that a large number of them have been called either Ben or Tom, and the second of these is a serious interest in music, whether that be playing in a band, being a singer-songwriter, or in the case of our Maths teacher Tom Lees, being a composer for musicals as well as an accomplished pianist.



Composer and Maths teacher Tom Lees (front)

Tom read Maths at Bath University before going on to complete an MA in Musical Theatre at Goldsmith's. Tom joined us on completion of his MA, and has been teaching Maths for us with great success for the past three years. Strains of piano playing are often heard filtering through from the big Maths room, and we discovered this year that we were actually listening to the music Tom had composed for his excellent musical 'Apartment 40C'. Apart from teaching a full timetable and showing a huge amount of devotion to his students, somehow or other, Tom had also found the time to establish an independent theatre company named the London Theatre Workshop and to compose and play the piano for 'Apartment 40C' on a nightly basis.



Staff and students attended the first run of 'Apartment 40C' in December, prompting fellow Maths/Physics teacher Tom Hyatt (also a musician) to offer the following review: "Good enough to warrant spending time with Tom Lees outside of Westminster Tutors. The macaroni cheese in the theatre was adequate."

Other reviewers have been even more generous and 'Apartment 40C' has been nominated for various awards.... Tom Lees is definitely a name to watch, though he plans to continue combining music with Maths at Westminster Tutors for a little while yet!

## Student Commendations 2015

Apart from asking our students to evaluate us, we also ask our teachers to name the students who they feel have excelled over the year. Since we expect academic excellence to be rewarded by top A level grades and a place at the student's chosen university (A level results and university destinations will be published in our next newsletter), we instead gave prizes to the students who had gone that little bit further than our expectations and who were therefore particularly worthy of a special mention. And the winners this year were....



### Bea Straker ~

for academic initiative and taking such an independent approach to her studies and revision, indicating that she will do extremely well at university.

### Henry Dummett ~

for adopting a mature and enquiring approach to his studies, and for managing a heavy workload by focused independent study.

### Max Menaul ~

commended by his teachers for commitment and work ethic throughout the year, with significant progress being made in all of his A level subjects.

### Winston Holland ~

commended for showing initiative and for helping younger students with their studies.

Other special mentions go to:

### Saiful Zamal ~

who was awarded a scholarship on the basis of academic promise in Maths, and who truly relished the challenge of stretching his ability even further.

### Anna Colwell ~

a GCSE student whose greatest strengths are in the arts and languages, but who also interrogated the science underlying her Biology to gain a perfect understanding.

### Dominic Jones ~

for sporting prowess, particularly the legendary - indeed superhuman - effort of holding the 'plank' during circuit training for 5 minutes!



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