



Westminster Tutors Newsletter

Summer 2017

Word from the Principal

Founded in 1934, Westminster Tutors bears its name due to the fact it was first located in Westminster, with our founder Miss Freeston occupying dusty premises so superbly described in our Good Schools Guide 2017 review, of which you will be able to read highlights on the following pages. As we find ourselves firmly and indisputably placed in the 21st century, even our august college is embracing the digital age and consigning many a dusty pile of paperwork to the shredder, along with many hundreds of now obsolete A level exam papers to recycling bags.

Increasingly we are keeping our students, families and alumni up-to-date by means of blogs, social media and digital mailshots and our annual newsletter is beginning to seem a little quaint. This being said, our newsletter still serves an important purpose as it functions as an annual report allowing us to comment on our performance to our families so that they are also able to evaluate and interrogate what we do.

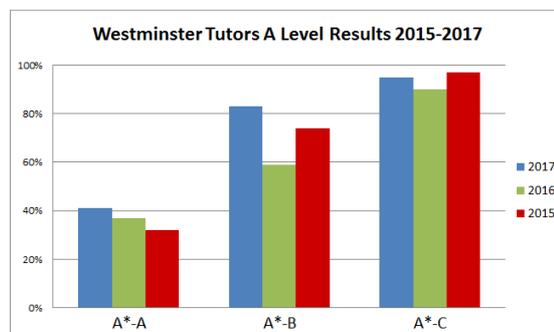
We have much to be proud of and I would venture we continue to be a truly 'Outstanding' college, as per our Ofsted inspection from 2015. However, we need not to rest on our laurels and are always questioning how we might improve further, as well as checking how we perform in relation to national standards and our competitors, the other independent sixth form colleges in central London. This is not simply a matter of keeping up with the Joneses but also a means of providing ourselves with benchmarks which continue to stretch and challenge us. There is no doubt that our quest for continued improvement in our learning community also leads to improvements in outcomes for our students, and that is our ultimate goal.

Returning to the topic of data, perhaps what has been most on everyone's mind is this year's A level results, which include the first cohort of students who have taken the new reformed A levels. Ostensibly with more demanding content, and with results based on final exams at the end of Year 13, there have been fears that there would be a sharp decline in students' A level grades this year. Despite the press whipping themselves into a lather in the week before A level results day, this has proved not to be the case, as the government has been keen to point out. In the end it seems grade

boundaries have been adjusted so that there is only a slight dip in the number of grades A*-A, and in terms of our own students' A level results they and we have been delighted.



Our A level results have year-on-year improved in an increasingly challenging environment. This year our highest ever number of students achieved grades A*-A, and at 41% their achievement is truly impressive in relation to the national percentage of 26% grades A*-A. In addition our students achieving grades A*-B increased to 83% and grades A*-C increased to 95%.



Turning to the national statistics, we can see that there has been a 4% drop in the top grades, but this is not as bad as students, parents - and at times even our teachers - had feared.

Reformed A level subjects 2017: 24.3% A*-A

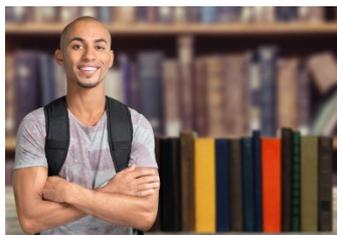
Outgoing modular A levels 2017: 30.6% A*-A

All A level subjects in 2017: 26.2% A*-A

2017 has been a great year for all at the college so please read on to find out more!

Virginia Maguire, Principal

Best Ever University Destinations



In terms of UCAS applications, it has almost become clichéd for us to be celebrating yet another year of uni destinations that show a dramatic improvement but so it is, much to the delight of our students and their families!

Since 2013 over half of our students have gone on to the UK's most prestigious Russell Group universities, which are 24 world class, research-intensive universities that are also committed to the highest standards of teaching and learning (see www.russellgroup.ac.uk/about).

Since over 95% of our students progress on to university, we have tended to use placements at the Russell Group universities as a means of measuring our performance in terms of onward destinations, with 2016 being an exceptionally good year:

- ✓ In 2016, 56% of our applicants went to Russell Group universities
- ✓ In 2016, 83% of our applicants went to their first (or firm) choice university

In 2017, our students have done even better:

- ✓ 20% of our students had *unconditional offers* from Russell Group universities
- ✓ 70% of our students are confirmed at Russell Group/ US Ivy League universities
- ✓ 87% of our students have taken up places at their first choice university

And it's not just our uni destinations that are superb. Our students go on to study a very diverse range of highly respected degree courses which will impress on their CVs and enhance their career prospects. This year these include:

Zoology at Bristol
Geophysics at UCL
Philosophy & Theology at Durham
Sport and Exercise Science at Birmingham
Genetics and Molecular Cell Biology at Sheffield
History at the New College of Humanities
Computer Science at King's College
Management at Nottingham
English Literature at Leeds
Classics at UCL

2017 Good Schools Guide Review

This year the Good Schools Guide came to visit us as it was a while since our last review was written. The Good Schools Guide occupies a unique position as it is the only guide which chooses which schools or colleges to include (ie it is not possible to pay to be included!), and parents also love the spirited and informal tone of the reviews which give a lively image of what is on offer at the school in question.

Our full review can be found on the Good Schools Guide website www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk but here are a few highlights of what our review said about us:

Our teachers

"The school may be diminutive in terms of pupil numbers but in the quality of its staff it rates as a Titan. The teachers tend to be stars in their fields with a level of letters after their names that would make most of their profession blush..."

Our monitoring and results

"They efficiently combat the lure of Xbox and Netflix by constant communication with parents so that even potentially wayward students switch from sci-fi movies to science homework...The net result of this highly individual (in every sense) and carefully monitored approach is results that exceed those of their competitors in the tutorial field and are impressive by any measure..."

What our students and parents say

*"The students all praised the teaching and describe the tutors as being 'really on top of it' and one parent described it as 'brilliant across the board, all A*s'. Parents liked the 'old-fashioned, comprehensive reports that offer an accurate assessment with no false promises' and felt 'confident that we know where we are'..."*

"A parent told us that they had chosen the school over similar options because the alternatives felt like 'crammers and were run on military lines'... Last year 56 per cent went to Russell Group universities. Parents agree that they are 'on the money' about university choices and come up with good suggestions to add to their children's ideas."

About our founder, Miss Freeston

"Although it has the legal status of a school and has to abide by the same rules as its much larger competitors, the head is happy that there is not a 'schooly atmosphere'. This is hardly surprising

given the nature and appearance of its founder. Miss Freeston inhabited a smoke-filled den in Victoria, giving the distinct impression that there might be a bed hidden under either the piles of books launching an attack on the ceiling or the ancient, smelly dogs on the hairy sofa. You might have thought she was just a parody of a mid-20th century female academic, particularly as she always wore a mid-calf, much sat in tweed skirt and layers of doubtful moth-eaten cardigans. However, you would have been foolish to underestimate her ability to understand people as well as texts. The exterior may have presented the unmistakable combination of erudition and dottiness, but under the holey woollens was a sensitive, thoughtful woman with a formidable understanding of bright, if lost, teenage girls. It was for this reason as much as her belief in the value of education that she started Westminster Tutors in 1934.” [Westminster Tutors was originally founded by Miss Freeston to provide top flight academic tuition for girls, who at that time seldom had access to very academic tutors.]

About Westminster Tutors today

“The school has kept the same ethos and atmosphere despite its move to South Kensington and the current building is still more of a rabbit warren than a conventional educational space. It might not impress parents or students looking for a polished, modern environment and it is not for teenagers needing wide open spaces.”



“Students are shoehorned into tiny classrooms, reminiscent of the dormouse being stuffed into the teapot at the Mad Hatter’s Tea Party and there is definitely an element of the unusual in the workings of this place but there is also an academic wizard at play here. The headmistress may hanker after a swimming pool but the students lack for nothing in the level of teaching or encouragement in learning how to learn.”

Keeping up with the Joneses...

We outstrip national school performance indicators by a long measure but this is hardly surprising since our students are lucky enough to receive so much individual attention and to have such superbly qualified teachers. We are therefore always mindful of how we are performing in relation to our nearest competitors, ie the other independent sixth form colleges in central London.

Each year, we carefully scrutinise the official DfE Performance Tables which are released in the February of the following academic year, ie the 2016 Performance Tables were published in February 2017. Once again we were delighted to see that we are continuing to lead the field. Despite being academically non-selective, year on year our A level students on average attain a B grade.

Even more pleasingly, increasing attention is paid to how much a college can ‘add value’. While the added value score is in itself an arbitrary number, it provides a national measure of how much students improve in relation to their relative starting points. We in turn use this added value score to benchmark ourselves against our local competitors and to monitor our performance in relation to them.

DfE Performance Tables 2016

School / College	Value Added Score	Average A level grade
Westminster Tutors	0.35	B-
DLD College London	0.26	B-
Ashbourne Independent College	0.21	B+
Mander Portman Woodward College	0.12	B
Lansdowne College	0.09	C
Collingham	0.08	B-
David Game College	-0.04	C+
Duff Miller College	-0.16	C+
Chelsea Independent College	-0.39	C

Focus on Teaching & Learning

While it is valuable for us to set ourselves stringent standards both in relation to our competitors and national measures, we also place a huge amount of importance on the feedback our students give us.

Each year, we ask every student to complete a set of subject-specific evaluations, which cover every aspect of both teaching and learning. We use this information to encourage the students to reflect on their own learning and also to inform our own decisions of what we would like to focus on in the drive to improve our teaching.

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

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

Student Subject Evaluations	2017
Clarity of lesson objectives	1.4
Pace of teaching	1.5
How well resources aid learning	1.6
How well activities aid learning	1.5
Quality of teacher feedback	1.4
Opportunities to apply learning	1.5
Opportunities for discussion	1.5
Usefulness of homework	1.4
Overall evaluation of teaching	1.3
Overall evaluation of learning	1.5
Overall average of evaluations	1.4

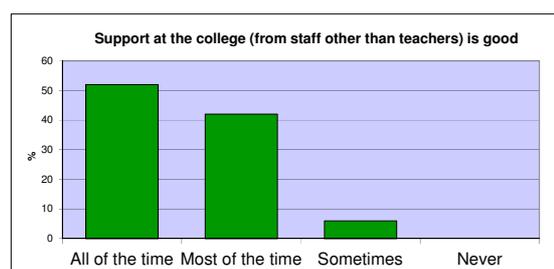
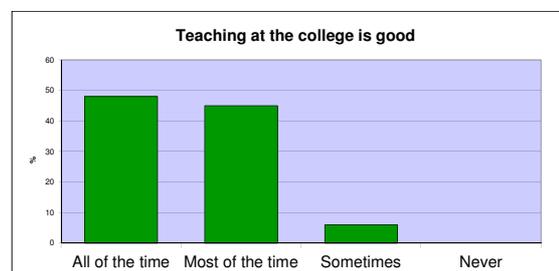
Overall, we were very pleased that this year's subject evaluations again placed us in the 'outstanding' bracket, and in the past year our main pedagogical focus has been on ensuring that the teachers' feedback is of the very highest standard so that our students know exactly what to do to improve the quality of their own work

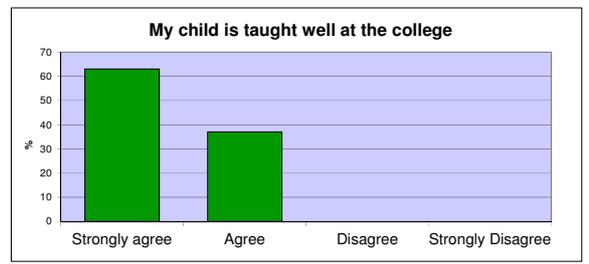
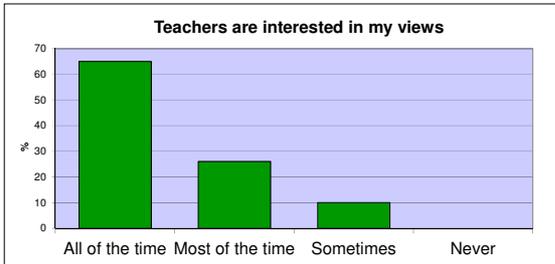
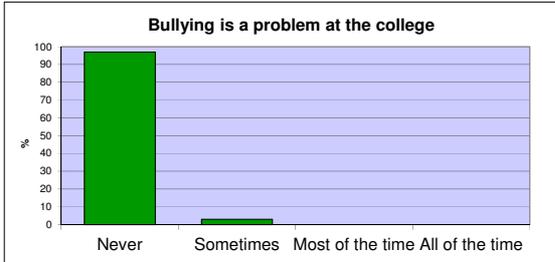
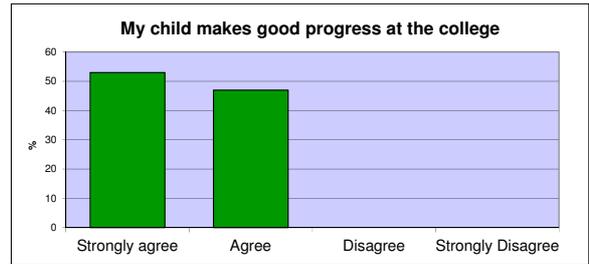
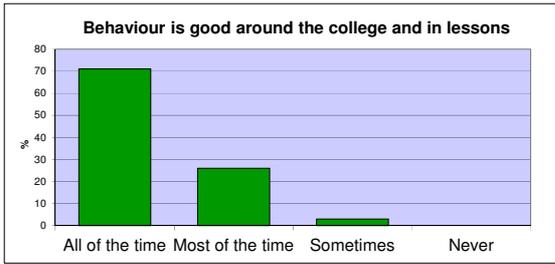
Looking ahead, we will be investing in more resources to aid teaching, and we suspect this score fell a little due to the changes in A level specifications, which also meant that teaching resources in some subjects were more limited. Our other key focus is to improve the clarity of lesson objectives even further: starting the lessons off on a firm footing is vital so that students are themselves

aware of the progress (ie learning) that has taken place by the end of the lesson. Ultimately, we are always seeking to raise the students' evaluation of their own learning (this year rated 1.5) so that it is in line with their evaluation of the teaching (this year rated 1.3), and for this to occur they need to be even more fully engaged in the learning process.

Student Annual Evaluations: 2017

In addition to the above, we also ask our students to complete annual evaluations based upon standard Ofsted questions. Similar to previous years, we have scored highly with the vast majority of responses in the 'all of the time' category, which is equivalent to the Ofsted 'outstanding' score. Of particular note is the general happiness to come to the college, the standard of teaching and the fact that students feel that the feedback they get enables them to improve.

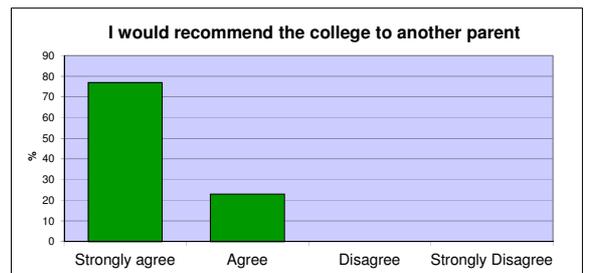
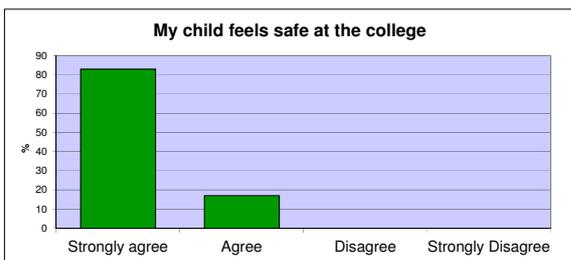
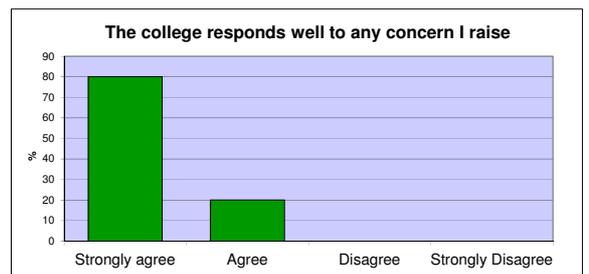
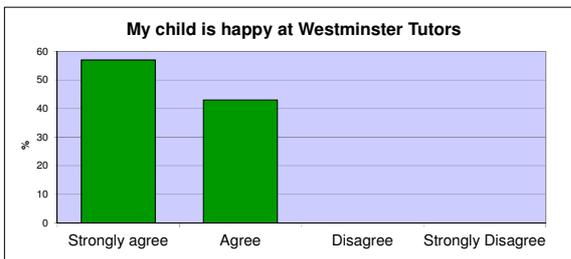
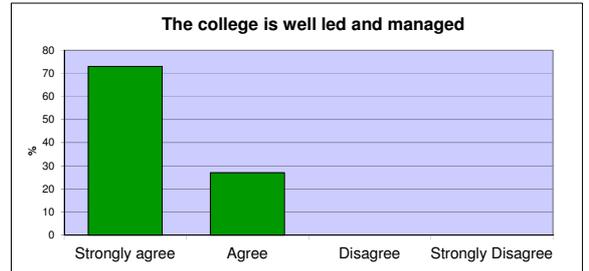




Student Evaluations response rate: 82%

Parent Annual Evaluations: 2017

Along with our students we ask our parents to fill in a similar evaluation so that we can seek their opinions too. Feedback is equally positive and clearly in the 'outstanding' range, perhaps most impressively nearly 80% strongly agree they would recommend the college and none disagree!

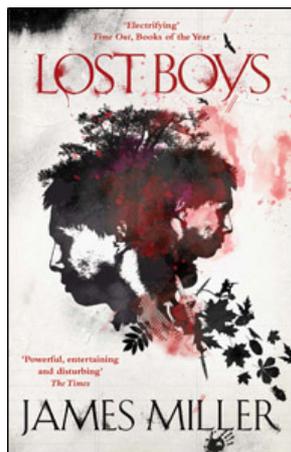


Parent Evaluations response rate: 86%

Tutors Past and Present

In the 1960s the distinguished novelists AS Byatt and Penelope Lively both taught at Westminster Tutors, with Byatt (in much the same vein as our Good Schools Guide reviewer) recalling how our founder 'the ferocious Miss Freeston created an atmosphere of eccentric precision' as the two novelists 'sat together in the small staff room on sagging sofas, amid a rich and pervasive smell of old upholstery and decaying dogs'.

Our reputation has always been built on the academic prowess of our fantastically talented tutors, and it is a fact that many of them go on to achieve at the very top in their fields. Most recently we were struck by the news that former teacher of English and History, Oliver Mears, had taken up the post of Director of Opera at the Royal Opera House in March 2017. Oliver always combined his teaching with his musical interests and to reach the pinnacle of the operatic field within the past decade is a testament to his copious talents.



Another teacher James Miller managed to complete his PhD at King's, as well as write his critically acclaimed first novel *Lost Boys* and teach English at Westminster Tutors all in the same year. James's third novel is being published shortly and he is now Senior Lecturer and director for the well-regarded Creative Writing MA at Kingston University.

Ben Miles, our former Head of Maths, completed his tripos in Natural Science at Cambridge and taught at Westminster Tutors for 5 years. He went on to become Software Engineer at the world-leading online science journal Nature, and has recently taken up a job as a Senior Engineer at Google's state of the art offices in London: this is no mean feat given Senior Engineers go through five different tiers of selection, with just 50 being appointed from an initial 100,000 applicants.

In addition, our group of three fellow Oxford graduates, who were affectionately known as 'the band' and taught at the college for five years whilst also working on their music and playing gigs as the Glitches, have recently released their debut album.... Watch this space and who knows what our current tutors and students will become?!



Student Awards and Commendations 2017

Every year we ask the teachers who they think have excelled over the year. Apart from for academic excellence, awards can go for being vital parts of the student body as well as to those students who have gone above and beyond what we expected. This year's winners were:

Asher Kahtan –

For exceptional work ethic, interest and commitment and for expressing boundless enthusiasm for his studies. Described by one of his teachers as 'a real breath of fresh air'.

Jamaal Chapman –

For hard work, good cheer in the face of adversity and his contribution to the community when volunteering at the children's homework club at our local library.

Imogen Hequet –

*For academic excellence and constantly driving to achieve the highest standards. Immy achieved A*A*AA in four A levels and, instead of taking up her place at a US Ivy League university, is now considering an application to Oxford.*

Victoria Kershaw –

Undertook the new A level in English Language and Literature due to her own interest in creative writing. Despite lack of exemplars and completing the full A level in just one year, Victoria achieved an A.*

Alex Bond –

For tenacity, perseverance and good humour when confronted by difficulties, and for ultimately securing the top A level grades which have enabled him to go on to study Business Economics.

Anna Colwell –

For her work as Head Girl, particularly for making sure that all were included in conversations and activities, and for distributing peace and harmony amongst the students at the college!

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