

The Principal of Cherwell College, Oxford, **ANDY THOMPSON** outlines the numerous benefits of a planned Easter revision course, and gives some advice on how to choose a good one

Revise for success



These days, the national press likes to fill its education pages with stories of ever-improving exam results, implying that today's students have an easier time than ever before. The reality is that for students in their late teens, things now don't let up.

Once you've turned 15, every spring brings the looming promise of a first – in year 11 a first public exam (GCSEs), in year 12 a first experience of A-levels in the form of the five year old AS exam. (50 per cent of final marks at A-level), then the final A-level challenge, A2. At many universities now, termly tests await. All in all, the modern student needs to master the skills required for modules – learning has to be instantly converted into the best possible exam performance.

This year's AS students also need to be aware of change afoot for

university admissions. From 2007 universities will be able to ask for specific achievements in unit grades (most A-levels are made up of six units (modules) three at AS and three at A2 – the scheme is currently being piloted by top universities, including Oxbridge, Bristol, Nottingham, and Manchester) allowing them to differentiate top

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achieving candidates. Now, more than ever, it is important to achieve your very best results.

Exam worries

Parents with children approaching GCSEs and A levels will thus note the same old stresses that they remember – trepidation, the fear of failure, and the uncertainty of what the impact of

results might be on future university and career choice.

As exam time approaches and worries mount, the search for the best possible grades leads back to the same question – “what more can I do?” The answer for many young people over the last 20 years has been to attend a revision course during the Easter holidays – but, given the number that on the market, how do you choose?

Easter courses are very attractive, socially as well as educationally, offering the chance to meet other students facing the same problems and to share ideas in the intimacy of a small group – a major feature given the size of so many school sixth form groups these days. Many courses also offer the opportunity of individual tuition, which can be very helpful for a student who is struggling not only with subjects but also with general confidence.



Syllabus review

One of the two main ways an Easter course should help students is with syllabus (specification) review. Check that what you want to study will be included in the course. Arts and Humanities A-levels, in particular, offer many varied pathways to the eventual qualification – true of English literature, history, geography, and modern languages. Before booking, explore the content of courses very carefully. Is the course built to accommodate your needs or merely the parroted learning of the teacher looking after the group? A good course will offer a balance of revision, testing through mock exam, and those all-important discussion sessions.

Discussion is a great way of exploring difficult topics, readdressing issues from school with an experienced tutor used to handling different viewpoints and reconciling new approaches taken at revision, with the approach taken back at your school.

Exam technique

The second big way a course should help is with exam technique. Many

students approaching exams still don't know how best to revise, or, in some cases, how to revise at all. At my own college, Cherwell, we place emphasis on students developing a personal revision plan during their time with us.

As a college whose main method of teaching is individual tuition, we are used to offering personalized support even in a group situation. Prior mock exam results are often the starting point. Cherwell has worked

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throughout its 35-year history with students from schools in both the public and private sector to aid successful progress.

On top of student concerns, parents add a few of their own. Parents should be looking for a reputable course with an established record of success. Likewise, what is the nature of the institution offering the course? Are they only in business for Easter, offering no support beyond the moment? There is a limit to what can

be achieved on a one-week course – beware the transient feel-good factor. For parents also, a final report offering guidance on progress to exams is very helpful. All in all, the best courses will offer inspiring teaching that reinvigorates students, regardless of how well they are doing, on the drive towards the June exams and will help you plan ahead and offer further support beyond the week.

www.cherwell-college.co.uk

Effective Revision

This recent ISCO Careerscope publication provides a detailed and up-to-date guide to revision courses. The book includes a directory of the leading providers, plus international courses, details of website and published resources, an overview of leading revision theories and contact details of accrediting bodies and examination boards.

See page 26 for further details

