

In Focus

Spring 2016

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Dauntsey's

From the Head Master



All schools claim to provide an all-round education, but too often this claim is a euphemism for mediocrity. A wide range of extra-curricular activities and outstanding pastoral care are essentials for pupils to be happy and prosper, but the pursuit of academic excellence and a culture of academic ambition are most important of all. These affect the ethos, culture and discipline of a school and set expectations.

Nevertheless I often say to prospective parents that if it is league table performance and statistics that they are after, then they should steer away from Dauntsey's. A contradiction? No, I don't think so.

What you learn outside the classroom can have a profound effect – on your self-confidence, your ability to think round a problem and your willingness to persist when things aren't straightforward; this is all part of building resilience.

Pupils past and present put it better than I can when they talk about challenges such as the Devizes to Westminster canoe race teaching them how to push beyond their perceived capabilities, both physically and mentally.

The question is how to square this circle. The answer in our science department, for example, is to focus on practical experiment and creative thinking, rather than learning facts and theories by rote – an approach that brings science to life for a generation accustomed to relying on the easy answers they find on Google.

Our eco society, The Big Green Thing, brings together the adventurous and intellectual, using creativity, research, persistence and problem-solving not only to reduce the School's carbon footprint but also to campaign on issues of national and international significance.

It shows that academic rigour can feed interests outside the classroom – and vice versa. That, to my mind, is truly an all-round education.

Mark Lascelles

Embracing the challenge of new A levels

With a wide range of subjects to choose from, plus additional courses specially designed to develop the practical and personal skills prized by universities and employers, studying A levels at Dauntsey's has never been a better way to prepare for life beyond school. Jon Tyler, Deputy Head (Academic), takes you through the recent changes to the A level system and explains why they are helping to make our Sixth Form studies stronger than ever.

The A level system has undergone major changes – and the shake-up is affecting schools everywhere, both independent and state-funded.

The government has been keen to take the qualification back to basics, with more emphasis on final examinations and in-depth study, while universities have been consulted about course content.

Their goal is greater academic rigour. To achieve this, AS qualifications are being separated from A levels and will no longer count towards final results. At the same time, A levels are becoming two-year linear courses with one set of exams at the end.

With fewer AS exams taking up their study time (*see panel*), our students will be able to pursue their A level subjects in more depth, so learning is deeper and more coherent than before. We estimate that pupils will benefit from around six weeks of extra teaching time, which would otherwise have been spent preparing for exams.

This time can be used to help students to understand their material in more depth, as well as to stretch them by giving additional opportunities to explore their subjects.



While this means that some schools are having to reduce the number of course options from four subjects to three, for example, and even drop some less popular subjects altogether, we continue to provide a wide range of courses – 26 A levels are currently on offer, along with several additional qualifications.

Pupils, and their parents, will understandably be concerned at how these changes will affect outcomes – in particular exam results and university entry.

“We continue to provide a wide range of courses – 26 A levels are currently on offer.”

Elements of the reforms will certainly make courses more demanding, most notably because pupils will be judged on two years' material. Even so, our regular discussions with universities and employers indicate that they are not only interested in pupils' academic qualifications but also their broader character and what they can offer besides exam results. In fact, the media has often highlighted concerns in recent years that students are coming out of education without valuable soft skills.

This is one of our great strengths at Dauntsey's, where we offer many opportunities to develop life-enhancing skills in addition to a range of A levels. The development of life and leadership skills are embedded in everything we do.

LEARNING TO BECOME LEADERS OF THE FUTURE

As well as numerous extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities outside the timetable, Dauntsey's offers pupils the chance to take up several additional qualifications in the Sixth Form. They are the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ), which is the equivalent of half an A level and provides an opportunity to earn extra UCAS points; the International English Language Testing System (IELTS); and our new Leadership, Sport and Adventure (LSA) course.

We are particularly proud of the LSA, which gives students the chance to lead expeditions, plan sporting events and learn character-building skills that will not only help them to achieve their goals when they leave Dauntsey's but will continue to benefit them for the rest of their lives.

It is not reserved for sporty students – the LSA is primarily about developing leadership and self-management abilities and is open to everyone. There are two qualifications, both of which are designed to boost students' university applications and employability rather than generate any UCAS points.

Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) Level 2 Extended Award for Young Leaders

Students learn about, and gain experience in, areas such as leadership, mentoring and volunteering. This is done through a combination of classroom instruction and practical sessions outside the classroom, so giving them real-life leadership opportunities. The award is a nationally recognised qualification.

The Youth Sports Award (YSA)

This award aims to help pupils “develop their leadership, enhance their wellbeing and achieve in life.” Students who already do lots of sport will be able to assess what they have achieved, while those who are less actively involved will be challenged in other ways – for example, organising a sporting event or earning qualifications in areas such as coaching, officiating or first aid.

THE FUTURE OF AS QUALIFICATIONS

As AS papers are being decoupled from A levels and will no longer contribute to the final A level mark, their future is in doubt. Some universities, such as Cambridge, still believe they are the best predictor of future success but the majority are more ambivalent.

At Dauntsey's, pupils take at least three A levels, plus one other option – either a one-year AS course, or a year's EPQ or the new LSA course.

Big Green School



If anyone at Dauntsey's needed reminding that the world is a beautiful and precious place, the countryside around the School is more than enough of a prompt.



So perhaps it isn't surprising that the co-founder of Friends of the Earth, Richard Sandbrook, was an old Dauntseian, or that the school benefits from an award in his name that promotes sustainable development – or that our community aims to live by these principles.

From solar-heated showers to green roofs and biomass boilers, we are working towards becoming a carbon neutral school, with the pupils driving our efforts through The Big Green Thing (BGT) – a society set up to raise awareness of green issues.

Let the sun shine in

In 2008, the newly-founded BGT persuaded the School to invest in ten thermal solar panels to heat the swimming pool showers. It was the start of a move towards renewable energy that has seen photovoltaic panels installed on one of the boarding houses, the sports hall and swimming pool complex, as well as the Memorial Hall.

During daylight hours, when energy needs peak, these generate a maximum 138 kilowatts – and offset our electrical consumption.

Heat from waste

The BGT was once again the driving force behind the introduction, in 2010, of a biomass digester, which turns our food waste into powdered bio-fuel that can be fed into a biomass boiler. This, in turn, heats the sports hall and swimming pool complex, as well as one of the boarding houses. It will also contribute to heating the new Maths and Geography block when this is completed later this term.

“A Green Governor ensures that the pupils’ voice on environmental issues is heard loud and clear.”

It has been such a success that 2014 saw the installation of a second biomass boiler at The Manor, our junior boarding house which uses sustainable wood pellets to generate heat and hot water.

Going underground

Eight years ago, two Fourth Form pupils made an impassioned case for integrating eco-friendly values into the fabric of the school. The last slide of their presentation showed a building with its lowest storey sunk into the ground, a living roof and a ground source heat pump providing renewable energy.

The pupils may have moved on but their vision has now been realised in the new Pavilion, which opened in January. Heat and hot water are provided by a ground source heat pump that extracts heat energy from the ground via a series of 100-metre bore holes and the sedum roof ensures that the building blends into the landscape.

There is another lasting legacy of that pupil presentation. “A Green Governor was appointed after their presentation,” explains James O’Hanlon, Head of Careers, who also heads up the BGT. “This ensures that the pupils’ voice on environmental issues is heard loud and clear and their concerns are reflected in the School’s policies.”

Current members of the BGT are determined to keep up the good work of their predecessors by encouraging the school community to become more aware of their impact on the environment. The team share a common goal but bring a range of personal interests to the table, with climate-change campaigners, waste warriors and conservationists all represented.

Sixth Former Rosie Martin-Barton explains, “We all got involved in the organisation of our recent Big Green Day and came up with quite a broad mix of talks and activities. During the day, we covered topics including waste management, renewable energy, vulture conservation and corporate responsibility with outside speakers visiting from Malaby Biogas, the Hawk Conservancy and LUSH.

“Our next focus is on trying to reduce food waste in School and this term we will be launching a Lower School competition for recipes using left-overs, which will be judged by Hugh Fearnley Whittingstall.”

BGT members are also keen to explore ways to campaign beyond the School gates.

“We wrote to our local MP Claire Perry during the 2015 Paris Climate conference,” says Moira Connor from the Upper Sixth.

“Many of us had attended the Mercers’ Lecture given by James Turner, head of communications at Greenpeace International, who talked about using direct action to bring about change and in particular encouraged us to write letters to our MP. And yes, we did get a reply from Claire Perry.”

It is also worth noting that at the Copenhagen Climate Conference in 2009 it was an Old Dauntseian (the then President of the Maldives, Mohammed Nasheed) who was most vocal in urging governments to work together to limit the impact of climate change.

Meanwhile, Fifth Formers Eliot Johnson, Charlie Hinton and others also took direct action. Eliot spoke in assembly and gathered a group together to attend the Climate Change March in London.

“Climate change is the battle of our generation and demonstrating alongside 50,000 others in London was one expression of our duty as a community of young people to do our part in creating a world where its environments, societies and economies are sustainable going into the future,” he says.





Race of a lifetime

At Dauntsey's, we like a challenge – and there cannot be a much greater test of courage, endurance and perseverance than the Devizes to Westminster canoe race, which Dauntsians have now been entering for more than 40 years. It is certainly not for the faint-hearted.

Breaking the ice to get started, being chased by angry swans, regular dunkings in a freezing canal, blisters on your blisters... these are just a few of the difficulties that participants have to overcome in both pre-race training and the event itself. In return, previous DW paddlers come away with lifelong friendships and memories of an experience like no other.

"It taught me a lot about what I can do and how far I can push myself mentally," says Archie Campbell, who has completed the race twice.

Helen Hagelthorn adds, "It's a very bonding experience, paddling that distance with someone.

"I have strong memories of tanking down the Henley mile with waves pelting over the front of the canoe. It was exhilarating and terrifying in equal measure."

Exhilarating and terrifying sums up most paddlers' feelings, along with an overwhelming sense of achievement – which explains why they not only look back on the



experience fondly but also want to repeat it. For some, it becomes a family tradition, with sons and daughters and brothers and sisters paddling the 125-mile course along the Kennet and Avon canal to Reading and then the Thames to central London.

"It's certainly something I would love to do

again," says Ellie Hewlett. "My dad did it when he was 17 and my brother did it a couple of years after me.

"The whole experience was incredible, extremely tough but worth it for the feeling coming under the bridge at Westminster. I still think of it every time I cross that bridge."

Open to students in the Lower Sixth, the DW takes place over Easter weekend, with the paddlers camping overnight at Newbury, Marlow and Teddington before catching the outgoing tide for the final 17-mile run to Westminster on Easter Monday.

Training begins in January, often in bitter weather, with the teams of two having just one term to learn how to handle their delicate, lightweight kayaks. Inevitably, capsizing is a fairly frequent occurrence as the teams get to know each other and their craft and build up the distance covered in a session.

"When we started training, the canal was frozen and we'd regularly fall in – I must have been tougher then," recalls Ariane Blake. "If the ice was too thick, we would run the route carrying our boats. I don't know which was worse!"

"It taught me a lot about what I can do and how far I can push myself mentally."

Archie Campbell

Successful completion of the race also depends on a well-organised support team, usually made up of parents and friends, who provide food and drink at pre-appointed points on the route, as well as constant moral support throughout the DW journey.

Many other well-wishers show their support by turning out on the bank or tow-path and cheering on the teams as they pass.

"One memory in particular is being completely exhausted halfway through the race, so we sang *In the Jungle*, from *The Lion King*, really loudly to lift our spirits and people on the bank joined in for the rest of the song," says Rosie Nutland. "Another fond memory is the moment we finally saw the London Eye ahead of us. For the next couple of hundred metres we sprinted as fast as we could. We went under the finishing line feeling absolutely amazing."

Ben Boutcher-West sums up the elation experienced by the paddlers at the end of the race.

"Going under Westminster Bridge is something I will never forget. It's one of many opportunities Dauntsey's gave me and for that I will always be grateful," he says.



Milly Sampson and Abbie Mitchell were set to break a school kayaking record in this year's Devizes to Westminster race – until Storm Katie intervened on the final day and the last stage was called off.

They relished the experience anyway.

"I love the spirit of adventure and it's such a personal achievement. It's so rewarding," says Milly.

Abbie adds, "I was expecting to be really miserable but I can't remember a time when I wasn't happy. We just loved it."

Both have siblings who have completed the course and encouraged the pair to have a go.

"I was part of the support groups for my sister and brother. I saw the challenge and couldn't wait to do it myself," says Milly.

Abbie has a similar story. "I'd watched my brother and it was really inspirational. You think, 'Actually, I'd really love to do it and get that feeling of pride.' It is such an incredible feeling," she says.

Since training began in January, Milly and Abbie have learnt a lot about themselves and formed a lasting friendship.

Milly says, "It was so hard but you've just got to think you can do it and keep going. At points it was so tough and all we wanted to do was get out and lie on the ground.

But we knew we had to keep going. Abbie and I were both stronger than we thought and we achieved more than we thought we could."

Abbie agrees. "You think 'I'm not going to be able to cope with it'. But we did. I have it in me, even when I've no energy left, to find that last bit to keep pushing."

Milly points out, "You get through something like that with teamwork. You have to be with someone you can rely on and have fun with. We had to sit in the boat for 18 hours over three days. That's a long time to be with the same person and Abbie and I never argued."

Abbie chips in, "We've definitely formed a bond that I don't think you could make in any other way. There are friends, best friends, family but we have a completely different friendship now. It's such a character-building experience and one you couldn't get doing anything else."

They both want to paddle the course again.

"I would love to do it again," says Milly.

"100 per cent," says Abbie.

A closer look at... Science

When you can type any question into a search engine and get thousands of links within seconds, the ability to think through a problem and come up with your own solution is becoming a rare and valuable skill. This is why studying science is vital to the Google Generation, according to Head of Science Andrew Crossley.



"Science is exciting," he says. "It's about being inquisitive and developing thinking skills rather than just learning hard facts.

"If we are only here to deliver facts, then we have been superseded by Google. Our job is to encourage pupils to observe and question the world around them.

"We start with an observation or hypothesis and ask them to link facts and information from their practical work together to form their own conclusions.

"We are developing creative thinkers."

Theory has its place, particularly at A level, but the science department firmly believes that the route to independent thinking lies in practical work. This is an approach backed by recent reports pointing to the importance of



"Science isn't dry – it's exciting when you begin to understand how the world around you works."

Zeb, Second Form

practical tasks both in gaining an understanding of concepts and in furthering development of the skills needed in the real world.

"Practical work brings science to life, particularly open-ended, investigative practical work that the pupils plan and develop themselves, rather than simply following a worksheet," Andrew says.

"Lower School pupils do a practical in almost every lesson and the Upper School probably has a practical every other lesson. It's key to developing those thinking skills, observing, trying to work out what's going on and modelling ideas. We find it invaluable."

To stimulate students' interest further, the department shares the latest news via *Science in the News* boards and invites speakers such as university professors and healthcare professionals, who provide insights into subjects ranging from astrophysics to the skills needed for a medical, veterinary or dental degree.

The approach clearly works. While some schools can struggle to engage girls, in particular, to

"Practicals provide vital lesson enrichment and give us the opportunity to investigate and put knowledge into action."

Emily, Sixth Form

study sciences, take-up at Dauntsey's is strong across the board.

At GCSE last year, boys and girls performed evenly, with 85 per cent of boys gaining top grades and 88 per cent of girls achieving an A or A*.

Up to 60 per cent of pupils take at least one science at A level and around 30 per cent take multiple courses. There is little in the way of gender imbalance.

More than a third – 38 per cent in 2015 – of Sixth Form students go on to study Science, Technology, Engineering or Maths (STEM subjects) at university, many of them in the Russell group.

"We are dealing with able pupils to start with," Andrew explains. "And we have well-qualified subject-specialists who are excellent at relaying their excitement and enthusiasm to the pupils.

"The strategies and techniques we employ, as well as the emphasis on thinking skills and independent learning, really make a difference."



Dauntsey's

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