

# Sixth Form Handbook



# Introduction

Welcome!

I hope you will find the Bury Grammar School Boys Sixth Form to have a friendly and adult environment in which you are encouraged to develop a sense of independence and to take responsibility for your studies. The next two years are potentially the most exciting and rewarding of your time at Bury Grammar School Boys, and the purpose of this Handbook is to explain how Sixth Form life differs from that in the Lower and Middle School. We know that you will want to make the most of your opportunities, so that you might secure the greatest possible benefit from your time in the Sixth Form. Some very important decisions about Higher Education and careers lie ahead, and the options open to you will be determined in large part by your approach to Sixth Form work and life. One of our fundamental aims is to help you decide what you want to do after A Levels and then work with you to secure the necessary qualifications and experience needed for your chosen objective. The Sixth Form, however, is more than just a finishing school for university. It offers you a chance to start developing the study skills, personal qualities and time management that you will need in later life. It provides opportunities for you to develop leadership, further extra-curricular and sporting interests, or to develop new ones through the extensive sports and enrichment programme. Above all, the Sixth Form is about helping you realise your potential.

It is important to set longer-term objectives and to view the whole of your time in the Sixth Form as a preparation for your future beyond Bury Grammar School Boys. You will be offered all kinds of exciting challenges and opportunities, and you are advised to approach these very positively from the outset. Academic study is, of course, the main reason why you will be staying at School beyond the statutory minimum leaving age. The successful transition from GCSE requires a growing intellectual maturity and an ability to organise yourself in a way that reveals a greater capacity for independent study. Personal responsibility and self-motivation are essential preconditions of success. These are lessons well worth learning from the start.

We want our Sixth Formers to be successful whether in university entrance, on the sports field, or in cultural pursuits. We also want our Sixth Formers to be considerate and responsible members of a happy and thriving community. The ethos of the Sixth Form is very positive and revolves around Sixth Formers trying their hardest. We are honestly not concerned whether a student has the potential to achieve grade As or grade Ds; however we are passionately committed to ensuring each Sixth Former is working to the very best of his ability at all times.

Your time in the Sixth Form will pass very quickly, and it is important that you adjust to the demands of A Level learning as soon as possible as you will be sitting your first AS examinations in January 2008. For this reason, as part of your induction into the Sixth Form, you will undergo a full day of study skills training within your first week to help you through the transition from GCSEs to A Level, but help does not end there. All external entrants to the Sixth Form have a weekly meeting with me to ensure all is well and discuss any issues which may otherwise prevent a smooth transition to A Level learning.

We encourage all Sixth Formers to seek assistance whenever they need it, and your subject teachers, Form Tutor, Mr Dennis and I will always be pleased to provide advice and guidance. Above all you must remember that a key element in a successful Sixth Form career is openness and honesty; if you are experiencing pastoral or academic difficulties, or are behind with work deadlines, do not suffer in silence; come and talk to us! You must also realise that learning is not a passive activity in the Sixth Form, and you can't just expect to turn up at lessons and hope that your teacher will do all the work for you. As you are studying subjects you have chosen, teachers will expect this to be reflected in your approach to work which should be both positive and well organised. More than at GCSE you will be expected to carry out independent study, especially reading around the subject and completing extra exercises, whilst in class, teachers will expect you to be active and willing to participate in discussions.

The purpose of the Sixth Form Handbook is to provide basic but important information on key aspects of Sixth Form life and should be used as a reference manual. The Handbook is constantly being updated and if, over the next two years you have any suggestions for additions or alterations please feel free to submit them.

**Howard McWilliam**  
Head of Sixth Form

# The structure of the Sixth Form

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## Mr McWilliam - The Head of Sixth Form

Responsible for the good order, day-to-day running and academic performance of the Sixth Form. He supervises and leads the team of Sixth Form Form Tutors and Prefects, and is on hand to assist with any problems or queries that you may have. He works with subject staff and Form Tutors to ensure each student realises his potential. The Head of Sixth Form assists the Director of Studies and Head of General Studies in the development of the Sixth Form enrichment curriculum and takes Sixth Form assemblies. He also assists the Head of Careers with the running of the university application system, and provides advice and guidance on Gap Years and university applications. Mr McWilliam can be found in his office in the JCR, and this year he will oversee the AS cohort.

## Mr Dennis - The Assistant Head of Sixth Form

Deputises for Mr McWilliam in his absence. He manages the JCR, oversees the Sixth Form Council and has a lead role in monitoring academic performance and behaviour. He can be found in the Mathematics Office and will assist with any problems or queries that you may have. This year he will be overseeing the A2 cohort.

## The Sixth Form Form Tutors

Your Form Tutor is the person immediately responsible for overseeing your welfare and general progress over the two years. Accordingly, it is your Form Tutor to whom you should turn in the first instance if you wish to seek advice, or have a particular requirement or difficulty. Your Form Tutor will help you in the process of learning independently and will play a crucial part in your Higher Education plans, assisting in the completion of application forms and compiling your reference.

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**Mr Marshall** (Head of Chemistry and Head of Science) – Form SB

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**Mr Cooke** (Design and Technology) – Form CH

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**Mr Ahmed** (Physics) – Form SI

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**Miss Martin** (Chemistry) – Form SA

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**Mr Bishop** (Head of Geology) – Form UW

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**Mr Curtis** (Head of Economics and Business Studies) – Form UJ

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**Mr Meakin** (Head of Computing and IT) – Form LK

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**Mr Lee** (Head of German and Head of Careers) – Form UN

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**Mr Alldred** (Mathematics) – Form UE

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**Mr Robinson** (English) – Form UG

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**Mr Curry** (Physics) – Form SG

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**Mr Hone** (Head of History and Politics) – Form LH

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# Expectations of success

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## Our mission:

**To help our young men become mature, self-confident, self-sufficient, compassionate, well-rounded, courteous individuals, who possess a steadfast sense of purpose and are eager to reach beyond the average, who have developed independent study habits and are able to rise to and enjoy personal and intellectual challenges and who, through their experiences, are able to fulfil their academic and personal potential.**

## What does this mean day-to-day?

From Sixth Formers the School expects:

- } Good attendance and punctuality.
- } Appropriate use of Private Study time.
- } Good organisation and completion of work set.
- } Background reading and extended study.
- } At least five hours work outside the classroom per subject per week.
- } An appropriate balance between schoolwork, part-time employment and socialising.
- } Setting the best possible example in terms of study habits, behaviour, dress and involvement in extra-curricular activities to younger students, visitors and members of the public.

*When you accept a place in the Sixth Form you automatically agree to accept the routines and obligations that go with it.*

From Parents the School expects them to:

- } Ensure the good attendance and punctuality of their son.
- } Monitor the balance between their son's schoolwork and other interests.
- } Monitor their son's progress by asking to see work and Reports.
- } Be aware of course demands and ensure that targets are met.
- } Attend Parents' Evening and other meetings.
- } Keep the School informed when appropriate and relevant.

Sixth Formers and their Parents should expect:

- } Provision of an appropriate learning environment.
- } Provision of high quality learning opportunities.
- } Academic monitoring, mentoring and target setting to assist Sixth Formers in reaching their full potential.
- } Identification of underachievement and intervention where necessary.
- } Formal and informal reporting to parents.
- } Help and advice for Sixth Formers applying for Higher Education.
- } Extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities both in and out of School.

# Staff and studies

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You must expect teachers to chase you up if you fail to hand in work on time or if you break the rules: the School must provide a framework in which you can gradually develop the skills and self-discipline required for independent study. However, in the Sixth Form we expect that the relationship between staff and pupils will be less formal than it has to be lower down the School. You can speak to your Form Tutor, subject teachers, Mr Dennis and Mr McWilliam about problems arising from your studies – or indeed about anything else that may worry you and therefore upset your work. We specialise in treating each Sixth Former as a unique individual, worthy of the personal attention which that implies.

# Time management

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In the Sixth Form you will quickly discover that the number of commitments you have has a tendency to multiply! In addition to your heavy academic commitments, you might also find yourself involved in Sport, Drama, Music and House duties and events, and in a variety of other activities. You will also expect there to be an extension of your social life. All of these will naturally make significant demands on your time.

It is, therefore, vital from the outset that you should establish your priorities, bearing in mind that you cannot do everything well, and that academic study must always have precedence. As your other interests develop, you must aim for a sensible balance; being over-committed is just as dangerous as being under-committed. You should aim for excellence in your academic studies and in at least one extra-curricular activity. If you feel that you are becoming over-burdened or, on the other hand, beginning to drift fairly aimlessly, you must seek advice from your teachers, Form Tutor, Mr Dennis and Mr McWilliam.

# The purpose of a Sixth Form course

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The Sixth Form should benefit you in several ways:

- } It should enable you to further your studies in subjects which you enjoy.
- } It should provide you with the means to acquire the better academic qualifications needed for admission to Higher Education, or to enhance your application for employment.
- } Through discussion and contact with others in the Sixth Form (in and out of the classroom) you should cultivate a wider range of interests.
- } It should help you to mature as a person by providing opportunities for mixing with others, for taking responsibility and for participating effectively in the corporate life of the School. To obtain the most benefit from the years spent in the Sixth Form, you must be prepared to work hard and to play a full part in the extra-curricular life of the School community.

# The Sixth Form timetable

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8.35 am	Registration in Form Room
8.45 am	Assembly
9.05 am	Period 1
9.40 am	Period 2
10.15 am	Break
10.35 am	Period 3
11.10 am	Period 4
11.45 am	Period 5
12.20 pm	Period 6
12.55 pm	Lunchtime
2.00 pm	Registration Form Room
2.05 pm	Period 7
2.40 pm	Period 8
3.15 pm	Period 9
3.50 pm	End of the School Day

Full assemblies take place on Mondays and Thursdays. The Headmaster gives Monday's assembly and Thursday's assembly rotates between Whole School assemblies in the Hall and separate assemblies for Anglicans, Jews and Moslems. Tuesday's assembly will rotate between House and Year meetings. 8.35-9.05am on Wednesdays and Fridays will be a Form period for dealing with examination administration, reviewing an individual's progress etc.

## Unallocated periods

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In the Sixth Form you will have eight unallocated periods each week (colloquially called 'Frees') and it is important that you use these as study periods. Effective use of these periods for additional study within school will free up more time out of school for other activities. Moreover, studying in school where you have access to the appropriate staff, textbooks and facilities makes good sense. Effective work in study periods is best carried out in the quiet surroundings of the LRC - the JCR has too many distractions to make it a good working environment! In the Seventh Form if you opt to continue with 3 courses at A2 you will also do at least 8 compulsory Private Study periods each week in the LRC for which you will have to register.

## The importance of making a good start

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The Autumn Term accounts for about half the teaching time in the AS year, and the eventual outcome of your AS examinations is in large part dependent on the study habits that you develop in the first term. You will need to establish a systematic work strategy in the first fortnight of Term, and one that enables you to apportion your study time sensibly and fairly. So you must return to School in September determined to tackle your AS courses with vigour and imagination, and equally intent on developing effective study skills and habits. You should be in no doubt that the Sixth Form is, by some margin, your most important year at school; it lays the foundations for the Seventh (A2) Form, provides you with the opportunity to develop a range of skills, and determines your university options.

A Level is now divided into two halves, and you may start taking your AS examinations from as early as January of the Sixth Form. All Sixth Formers begin AS courses in four subjects (excluding General Studies) in September, each of which consists normally of three papers, although in some subjects the number of unit examinations is reduced because of a considerable coursework component. The results achieved on these AS papers are of critical importance since they will add to your existing GCSE profile. They will also have a very significant bearing on your eventual A Level grade in 2009 and so effectively determine your range of university options.

Your results in the AS papers will not be entered onto the grades section on your UCAS form, (which you will complete in the Autumn Term of 2008) and universities will make conditional offers on the basis of the predicted A Level grades we provide. There is provision to re-sit AS and A2 modules on all occasions they are offered by the relevant examination board, and you should speak to the relevant Head of Department if you feel your results could be better. If however, you were to have gained excellent AS grades the School will be able to mention them in the reference we will write for your UCAS form.

The speed of adjustment to the pace and style of AS standard work in the Sixth Form naturally varies from individual to individual. The work will be more demanding than at GCSE, and there will be plenty of it. If you are going about your studies in an appropriate fashion you will find yourself very occupied with academic work, both during the evenings and over the course of a typical weekend. You must therefore adjust very quickly to these facts of life in September, for you will rapidly discover that the key to academic success lies in commitment, organisation and momentum. In the first term of the Sixth Form (and possibly beyond) you may find the change in approach to study unsettles you. You will certainly need to organise your work. For example, you must look ahead and not think of set periods of homework. Staff will expect work to be completed on time. It should not be left until the last minute but should be done efficiently during Private Study periods in School or at home. Moreover, the work set by the subject teacher is a minimum and wide background reading is necessary in every subject. Some people have problems at first, but this should not discourage you.

## Academic study

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The volume of work in the Sixth Form will be greater than you have so far experienced, while the nature of it will also be different. You must take responsibility for organising your own timetable, as homework and assignments will seldom be set on a 'next day' basis. Instead, they might be set a week or even fortnight in advance.

On average, they are likely to take about five hours per subject per week to complete, and you must plan your work programme sensibly, bearing in mind that you are studying four subjects, all of which will make similar demands on your time. You must establish a work routine, and then stick to it. Keep a careful record of all work set (together with any references) and plan in advance when and where you are going to do your reading, thinking, researching, note-making and writing. Do not leave everything until the last minute, and do acknowledge the importance of deadlines.

You must therefore pace yourself. Most people find themselves under pressure on occasions, for reasons which are entirely understandable – you might, for instance, have been absent through illness, or be heavily involved in rehearsals for a play or concert. In such circumstances, if you are under pressure to meet deadlines, you should discuss the problem with your teachers in advance, who will invariably be sympathetic.

Sensible planning is therefore the key, and formal written homework and assignments should never be deferred until 'the night before'; it is for this reason that work is always set well in advance, so that you can plan ahead and organise your routine. Set yourself ambitious, yet realistic targets, and develop a pattern of study that enables you to meet them.

## Homework

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There is no specific homework timetable in the Sixth Form, and the volume of homework and nature of deadlines will vary from subject to subject. In the Sciences you may be required to complete one-hour exercises by the next day; in the Arts you may be given a week to research and write an essay – a process which could take five hours (or more) in total. Given the variety of approaches to setting homework between subjects, you will need to be well organised and plan your time carefully to ensure deadlines are met:

- } Using the Homework Diary and wall planner we provide you with are simple, quick and highly effective ways of staying on top of your workload.
- } As a general rule you should be doing at least five hours of homework per subject per week.
- } Homework can of course be done in the LRC during Free Periods. Avoid doing academic work in the JCR!

## The style of A Level work

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You will quickly discover that there is a world of difference between the approaches to GCSE and to A Level study. The transition to new methods of study will not occur overnight, but occur it certainly must if you are to derive the greatest possible benefit from your lessons in the Sixth Form. AS Level classes are smaller and more intimate than those in the Lower and Middle School, and this places a much greater emphasis upon your active involvement in lessons. You are likely to see each of your teachers for several lessons each week, and you will quickly appreciate the importance of developing a good working relationship. In the Sixth Form, the role of the teacher is not to spoon-feed, but rather to direct, advise, stimulate and encourage. It is highly unlikely that many lessons will be confined to lectures and dictated notes; most (and especially in Arts subjects) will be characterised by discussion and exchange of views. You must arrive for each lesson prepared to be lively, interested and involved; reading ahead is of course a precondition of active and informed contribution to classroom discussion.

You must quickly get into the habit of making your own notes in class, as new information and ideas emerge in the course of discussion. Personal and intellectual motivation are needed throughout your courses, and not simply in the weeks preceding public examinations. In most subjects, there are seldom many 'right answers', and so no purpose is served in passively waiting for them to be provided. Your aim should be to become an independent learner; this is the main feature of A Level work. Remember that your class work and formal assignments are only part of your AS preparation; a regular review of your files and notes, as well as additional reading, is essential.

## Personal involvement in your subjects

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You should be thinking about your subject not simply in lessons, but also between lessons. The formal work set by teachers represents the minimum requirement, and you should always review your current work in your Private Study time. You should also quickly get into the habit of reading widely and engaging in investigative research. You should make notes on everything you read and thus learn how to summarise the most important features of a textbook chapter or article.

Teachers are but one of a number of sources of information, and you are advised to recognise as much from the outset. They will, of course, suggest suitable reference material, but it is your responsibility to consult it and to make full use of it. You will quickly discover that textbooks are a useful aid but a dangerous master; the unthinking copying of sections of textbooks, or pasting from the Internet, as a means of 'getting homework out of the way' is easily identified and utterly worthless. You should be stimulated by your A Level subjects, and this requires a personal involvement. The passionless recycling of textbooks or website pages and bland processing of class notes simply advertise a lack of any such involvement. Indeed, any strategy of dashing off homework at the last moment, without planning or conviction, is the quickest route to academic ruin, and can quickly develop into an irreversible and potentially fatal habit.

The excitement of personal and academic development is linked to intellectual curiosity and an energetic commitment to independent reading and thinking, both within and beyond the specification and classroom. You must resolve to develop judgement in selecting and evaluating your material; concepts and techniques must be mastered, and then applied, and to carry out these important tasks, it is essential that everything you read and write is thoroughly understood. When your written work is returned, you should always correct errors, and add material and ideas that you omitted. Work is not completed when it is handed back; the accompanying comments are far more important than the mark awarded, and the learning process incorporates your corrections and additions. Keep a sensible balance between your subjects, and don't make the common error of simply 'marking time' in one of them for a term, for this will cause problems to mount up at a later date.

# The Sixth Form – outline of the AS Year

## Autumn Term

- } Study Skills day: introduction to the practicalities of life in the Sixth Form and work on study skills to ease the transition from GCSE to A Level.
- } You negotiate minimum target grades with your Form Tutor.
- } The first half of the Term is spent settling in, determining priorities and establishing an effective pattern of study. Your Form Tutor and you establish your relationship.
- } During the Autumn and Spring Terms of each of the two Sixth Form years your progress towards achieving your minimum target grades will be assessed approximately every four weeks, and you will undertake

a formal review of your progress with your Form Tutor. During these sessions the emphasis is on identifying strengths and weaknesses, recommending action and resetting the target grades for the next assessment period. Your parents are contacted directly if we are sufficiently concerned about your level of effort and progress.

- } Your parents receive a summary of your Progress and Effort grades in October and November, and at the end of term your parents receive a full written report.

## Spring Term

- } Depending on your choice of subjects you may sit some of your AS modules in January.
- } In early February there is a Parents' Evening and you are encouraged to attend this event with your parents so that you can correctly and thoroughly evaluate your progress.
- } Every two years during the second half of the Spring Term the School holds a Careers Convention and you are encouraged to attend to consider where your A Levels might lead to after university.
- } A few weeks before the Easter break you will be booked in to attend the annual UCAS Higher Education Convention in Manchester. This provides an invaluable opportunity for you to commence your research on universities, courses and grade offers, as well as to also find out more about Gap Year projects and careers in the Armed Forces and other sectors.
- } Midway through the term your parents will receive another summary of your Progress and Effort grades, and at the end of term your parents will receive the second full written report of the year. Before going on the Easter break you will review your progress with your Form Tutor who will identify strengths and weaknesses, and recommend action which needs to be taken before the start of your AS examinations.

## Summer Term

- } Study Leave for AS examinations starts in mid May. These examinations are vital because they account for half of the total marks available for your final A Level grade. Also AS results are used by universities in their selection process. Competitive universities only tend to select candidates with top AS grades.
- } After the AS examinations have ended, you return to your timetabled classes to begin your A2 courses. During this period you will complete a week of work experience directly relevant to the course you wish to undertake at university.
- } You may take a maximum of two days leave of absence during this period to attend university visit days. In addition you receive information on the university application system, writing the Personal Statement and on university welfare issues such as student finances, accommodation etc.
- } If you are intending to apply for Medicine, Dentistry or Veterinary Science you should apply to take the UKCAT. You should consult the particular institutions you wish to apply to for specific guidance on this.

# The Seventh Form – outline of the A2 Year

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## Autumn Term

- } As soon as you return you should make an appointment with your Form Tutor to discuss your UCAS reference in the light on your AS results and the courses you intend to apply for.
- } During the first fortnight you will have a private meeting with the Head of Sixth Form to review your performance in the AS examinations, discuss your Higher Education aspirations and set target grades.
- } In the course of this term, you will make final decisions about future plans. If you are intending to enter Higher Education the following year you should aim to submit your application before Half Term. Those applying to Oxbridge and for Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Science have to have their forms completed before mid October anyway. However, we also strongly encourage all Seventh Formers to make an early application to UCAS in order to maximise their chances of success.
- } Those intending to apply for Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Science or Law should consult Mr Lee about whether the BMAT or LNAT is required for the institutions they intend to apply to.
- } University interviews begin, and any student called for a university interview will be offered interview practice within School. Mr. Feely will co-ordinate interview practice and preparation for prospective Oxbridge applicants.
- } Seventh Form Parents' Evening takes place in mid October.
- } The same assessment and monitoring arrangements apply as at AS, and at the end of term you discuss your full written report with your Form Tutor and this is sent to your parents.

## Spring Term

- } Some A2 modules together with possible AS resits will occur in January.
- } University interviews continue and offers are made through UCAS. Students attending Russell Group (i.e. research orientated university) interviews are asked to complete feedback forms detailing their experiences. These feedback forms help us advise future students.
- } Completion of the Student Support Application form to determine your student loan entitlement and fee level.
- } You make final decisions about UCAS offers you are holding. If you are having difficulty securing something suitable you are strongly advised to consult the UCAS Extra website.
- } Your final report is discussed with your Form Tutor and sent to parents at the end of term. At Half Term your minimum targets change to the grades you require for your preferred university offer, with you aiming to get as many A and B grades as realistically possible.

## Summer Term

- } Study leave and public examinations begin in late May.
- } A Level results are published in mid August and Higher Education offers are confirmed.
- } Candidates who fail to meet offers can apply through Clearing.
- } If you are applying post A Level, for the next academic year, you begin the process of UCAS application and should be available to come in to School to discuss your application with Mr Lee or Mr McWilliam.

# The curriculum

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The Sixth Form currently offers 23 subjects at AS and A2 level:

- } Art
- } Biology
- } Business Studies
- } Chemistry
- } Computing
- } Classical Civilisation
- } Economics
- } English Literature
- } French
- } Further Mathematics
- } Geography
- } Geology
- } German
- } Greek
- } History
- } Latin
- } Mathematics
- } Music
- } PE
- } Physics
- } Politics
- } Religious Studies
- } Systems Control and Design

There also exists an arrangement with Bury Grammar School Girls for students at the Boy's School to take up courses which we do not offer (e.g. Psychology, Theatre Studies, English Language etc) and vice-versa. However, this is subject to annual change and you are strongly advised to consult with Mr. Young if you require more information.

While we operate joint teaching in a number of subjects and have many other close ties with Bury Grammar School Girls at Sixth Form level, the two Sixth Forms remain quite distinct from one another, and in no way should they be regarded as co-educational.

You will commence your A Level education at Bury Grammar School Boys undertaking four subjects at AS level. In the Seventh Form you can continue to study all four or you can drop one of these subjects and study three subjects at the A2 standard. Currently around a third of Seventh Formers initially choose to continue to study all four subjects at A2.

In order to progress to the Seventh Form you will have to pass at the equivalent of Grade E or better at least three of your four academic subjects. We shall also reserve the right to ask your parents to withdraw you from the Sixth Form if at any stage we feel you are not working to capacity, or if you are behaving in a way which is preventing others from fulfilling their potential.

As seen on Page X you will have a forty five period weekly timetable, where a period represents thirty five minutes. Your timetable is constructed as follows:

- } 32 teaching periods in the Sixth Form (i.e. 8 periods per subject), and 24 periods in the Seventh Form if you drop to three subjects.
- } 2 Friday Activities periods.
- } 3 Wednesday Games periods.
- } 8 unallocated periods.
- } At least 8 compulsory Private Study periods if you follow three A2 courses in the Seventh Form.

There is a major increase in workload; in the Sixth Form you will do four subjects and will have 2 teachers for most subjects. What you decide to study at the demanding A2 standard, in the Seventh Form, assuming you qualify for entry, will very probably be determined by the outcome of your AS examinations. There is also no fixed timetable for homework at A Level; some teachers may set work to be completed after every lesson while in essay-based subjects homework tends to be weekly. As the flow of work is uneven, with lean and heavy periods, you must be very disciplined in how you organise your workload; and the quicker you can get into a firm routine and stick with it the easier it will make your life later this year and at A2. You should use your non-lesson time during the day to get all the routine tasks, note-making, additional research etc. completed and complete essays, exercises, write-ups and revision at home.

## The importance of doing well at AS

You need to do as well as possible in your AS examinations for the following reasons:

- } These represent the relatively easier half of the marks compared to A2.
- } To give yourself the best possible grounding in preparation for the very demanding concepts and ideas that you are going to encounter at A2. The divide between AS and A2 is at least as great as it is between GCSE and AS.
- } Most A2 courses have a synoptic module i.e. a compulsory module which requires you to be able to draw upon and link together all of the AS and A2 work for that subject.
- } So that we can write the most positive university reference we can for you. Competition for places at the best universities is fierce and you will need to give yourself every advantage you can to secure offers.

## The successful Sixth Former

We recommend that you should be doing at least 20 hours academic work per week outside the classroom. There is always something you can be doing to ensure you are putting enough time into your studies, and are not wasting valuable opportunities.

You should actively seek assistance whenever you feel you need it, and follow all advice given to you. If you choose to stick your head in the sand and ignore problems in the initial stages of your A Level career then you are only storing up bigger problems for the future especially as most A2 courses have a module which builds directly on the AS material. No Sixth Former should be afraid to ask for extra help!

At Bury Grammar School Boys we view learning and understanding as a highly reciprocal activity between you and the teacher, and if you genuinely do not understand something the teacher will always want to help you; you will get as much help as you want or need!

In addition to your academic work and acting on all advice provided to you by your teachers, you should be doing the following:

- } Regularly visiting the relevant areas on the VLE ([www.bgsboysonline.co.uk](http://www.bgsboysonline.co.uk)). This facility also allows you to contact your teachers outside normal hours.
- } Wider reading: all departments are well resourced in terms of textbooks so that you can make extra notes and be able to bring something new or different to a class discussion.
- } Finding new sources or angles on a particular subject using the up-to-date journals in the LRC, or the Internet.
- } Making sure your notes are in order, neat and tidy and as detailed as possible.
- } Revising material in preparation for the next lesson so you can understand more easily how new material links in as well as keep the work fresh in your mind, thus reducing the burden of work at examination time.
- } Going back over your previous work and using the teacher's comments to improve it, and even put it back in for a remark.

Those who do best at A Level have the following characteristics in common:

- } They are well organised, keep their files up-to-date, and devote adequate time to thinking about their subjects, preparing work and revision.
- } They keep abreast of developments in their subjects by watching current affairs programmes, reading quality newspapers and appropriate magazines. The LRC takes copies of all quality daily newspapers as well as essential magazines like The Economist, History Today, New Scientist, Nature etc. They then use this knowledge in discussions and written work to give extra depth and authority to their ideas.
- } They actively use the VLE, and engage in all of the relevant learning activities.

- } They act on all advice given by teachers in order to hone the core skills essential for success in each subject.
- } They view learning as a two way process and engage positively in class. They concentrate, take adequate notes, ask questions, test ideas etc.
- } They are enthusiastic about all of their subjects, and will stick with them until they understand in times of difficulty.
- } They seek assistance whenever it is required.
- } They have a clearly defined, realistic long-term goal and also a realistic plan of how they are going to achieve this.
- } Finally, and perhaps most importantly, they do not lose sight of their priorities.

While all this may seem highly prescriptive it has been proved time and again to be a formula for success. Rarely do the least able get the worst grade; it is the least industrious or complacent who tend to be disappointed! Each year we can give examples of Sixth Formers of a more modest ability at GCSE who follow our advice and go on to excel at A Level.

## School and departmental facilities

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You are advised to make the most of the many facilities available in the School, designed to assist you with your studies. All departments have a Library and/or designated rooms, which offer specialist books and other material. The LRC is also an excellent venue for research and study; it contains thousands of books, CD-ROM and Internet facilities, all of which provide for access of information. All Sixth Formers have a number of periods they can use for Private Study each week. You might choose to read one or more of the daily broadsheet newspapers or periodicals on a regular basis, and are particularly valuable for extending your horizons, keeping in touch with current issues, and preparing for university interviews. All departments are also happy to give extra assistance on academic work if you think you need it. Such time represents an excellent opportunity to go through an essay or numerical problem, to do some research, to discuss a project, or to have a general chat with a teacher about your academic progress and ambitions.

## Study time

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The need to organise your work was mentioned earlier. You must strike the right balance between your academic work and your extra-curricular activities. Important though it is to cultivate wide interests and friendships, you must not allow these interests to undermine your academic progress. The proper use of study periods is an essential part of your management of time. It is too easy to let these periods drift by without anything positive being achieved. The social facilities available in the JCR should be used sparingly and sensibly. Private Study will be taken in the LRC or an empty classroom. The recommended allocation for self-study is five hours per subject per week. In the Seventh Form you will have at least eight periods of compulsory Private Study built into your timetable if you continue with three subjects. In this case you should undertake at least six hours self-study per subject each week.

## Pastoral care

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We take our legal Duty of Care very seriously at Bury Grammar School Boys, and the same high standards of welfare which boys experience in the Lower and Middle Schools continues in the Sixth Form.

The pastoral structure of the Sixth Form is based on Form Groups. Form Tutors are responsible for a group of about 12 students throughout their time in the Sixth Form. The group meets twice each day for registration (8.35am and 2.00pm) and assemblies take place three times a week i.e. Monday, Tuesday and Thursday. 8.35-9.05am on Wednesdays and Fridays is devoted to examination administration and discussing progress etc. Inevitably, close relationships are formed both between the Form Tutor and students, and amongst the students.

The Form Tutor is the daily representative of the School to the students, in terms of ensuring messages are passed and the normal administrative functions are undertaken, for example. However, it is regarded as equally important that the Form Tutor, through the relationship which he or she builds up with their group, also becomes the representative of the students to the School. Thus, Form Tutors raise issues of current concern to students with the relevant School authorities, and keep subject staff, for example, informed about any pastoral problems which may be being experienced from time to time by individual students.

The Form Tutor is also the immediate link with parents, and in co-operation with Mr Dennis and Mr McWilliam, will communicate with parents when problems arise at School, as well as being the usual first contact for the parents if they have any concerns. Two formal meetings are automatically arranged: February of the Sixth Form and October of the Seventh Form.

At these parents and their son meet with his subject teachers and Form Tutor to discuss his all round progress. Also private meetings are arranged whenever a parent, Form Tutor, Mr Dennis or Mr McWilliam feels the need arises.

As much as possible Form Groups are arranged on a homogeneous subject basis; thus, for example, a Form Group may consist of a group of students who are all taking A Level Mathematics, with a Mathematics teacher as the Form Tutor.

However, an additional layer of Form Tutor advice is also provided to deal with the complex process of Higher Education application. Towards the end of the Summer Term in the Sixth Form the Form Tutors collect information from subject teachers and students in order to write each student's confidential UCAS reference. The Head of Careers has overall responsibility for the running and co-ordination of the Higher Education applications, and is assisted by the Head of Sixth Form. You should attend Open Days and start your research on universities and courses during the period between finishing your AS examinations and commencing your summer break. You should also discuss with Mr Lee if you will need to register for the UKCAT and/or BMAT for Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Science and the LNAT for Law.

The school can offer you the services of a Counsellor should you wish to take advantage of them. The School Nurse and the Health Support Worker will also provide you with confidential counselling should you wish to make use of it.

## Academic monitoring and support

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If you do experience difficulties, you should immediately seek advice from your subject teacher, your Form tutor, Mr Dennis or Mr McWilliam. They are always ready to help. Progress is monitored on a regular basis throughout the course, and new targets set as necessary. Central to monitoring progress and providing direction is the Form Tutor and individual action planning. You are encouraged to consider possible future career paths, research requirements in terms of qualifications, skills and experience, and devise strategies to obtain them

We believe that success is achieved by maintaining a triangular partnership between you, your parents and the School. To this end we are keen to keep your parents informed of your progress and we do this via your Progress and Effort grades, Reports and Parents' Evenings. Parents are encouraged to contact the School if they suspect any developing problems.

## A Level Performance System (ALPS)

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To support you and allow us to monitor more accurately the quality of your learning we operate the ALPS in the Sixth Form. The ALPS is a system of continuous assessment and appraisal, which takes the form of setting targets for your performance at regular intervals during each of the Autumn and Spring Terms of your A Level career, in each subject, and checking to see whether these targets have been met. If they have, then the next set of targets could be set higher, thereby providing a strong motivation for you to steadily improve your performance during the course of your A Level career. Your Form Tutor will give you sound advice on what you need to do in order to meet a higher target. If on the other hand, targets are not being achieved, then you will be given whatever extra help and support is needed. The whole point about this system is to help you to be motivated to do your best at all times, and thereby achieve the best A Level results that you possibly can.

Targets are given in the form of grades on a scale of A to E, which we call Target Grades (TGs). In no sense should TGs be thought of as predictions or forecasts of the grade that you will ultimately achieve: instead, keep thinking of them as a realistic challenge which you feel motivated to aim for and hopefully exceed.

The first thing that happens, and this takes place within the first week of starting the Sixth Form, is that you sit down with your Form Tutor and between you decide on a suitable TG for each one of your AS subjects, for the first four weeks. Naturally, which grade constitutes a realistic target will depend both on the difficulty of the subject and on your particular academic ability. As your typical new member of the Sixth Form tends to have no real idea of what grades he should be aiming at, purely to provide a starting point for discussion, we provide your Form Tutor with a set of suggested TGs for you which you can either accept as your first set of targets, or you can negotiate higher TGs with your Form Tutor.

These suggested TGs are produced by a statistical exercise which involves looking at the correlation between average GCSE scores, and A Level grades ultimately achieved by Bury Grammar School Boys students over the last few years, for each A Level subject. These statistically suggested TGs represent the minimum performance that you should be aiming at.

In providing you with suggested TGs we are not giving you grades in the 'normal' sense. So, if your suggested TG is a B, say, we are not saying, "You have achieved a B". Instead we are saying, "Previous Bury Grammar School Boys students with your level of GCSE performance have tended to end up with a B at A Level in that subject, so B is the minimum grade you should be aiming to achieve over the next few weeks, and hopefully you will actually do better than a B".

We feel that it's important that you should have a direct input into the process of deciding your TGs, rather than just having them imposed by your Form Tutors, because that should help your motivation. However, at the same time, you have to be realistic when choosing each TG: it would possibly have a demotivating effect if you failed to achieve unrealistically high targets. If in doubt it is better to start with a relatively modest target, with a view to upping the target as time goes by: it's up to you to prove by performing well that a higher TG is appropriate.

At regular intervals your subject teachers will assess your performance over the foregoing period and award an achievement grade based on that performance. Then your Form Tutor and you will sit down together again and compare the awarded grades, and possibly increase the targets for the next assessment period if the grades matched, or even bettered, the TGs: but if the grades awarded were below the TGs, then you will receive appropriate help and guidance from your subject teachers, Heads of Department, Form Tutor, Mr Dennis and Mr McWilliam. Your parents will be kept informed of your progress.

ALPS operates up until the February Half Term of the Seventh Form. After that, the emphasis will shift to concentrating on aiming at the grades needed to get onto your desired university course.

## Intellectual and cultural opportunities

Membership of the Sixth Form opens all kinds of windows to invigorating intellectual and cultural opportunities. Some will be of the informal variety, such as the meeting of minds in the classroom or LRC. You might also participate in an organised Debate or the Mock Law Trial Competition, and have the opportunity to engage in a number of group exercises. Making visits to local art galleries and theatres in your own time will also help enrich your time in the Sixth Form. There are subject related visits to countries such as France, Germany, Belgium and Ireland e.g. student exchanges, the Battle Fields Tour. There are also obligatory Field Courses for those studying Geography, Geology and Biology, and it would greatly assist those studying French and German to spend part of at least one holiday in the appropriate country.

The most important section on your university application form is the Personal Statement, where you have an opportunity to explain your passion for your chosen degree subject, as well as giving details of your interests and extra-curricular achievements. Students who have participated in a wide range of intellectual and cultural activities, and who can show evidence of individual

initiative, are at a significant advantage, especially now that the competition for places at the more popular universities is so intense. You will also be a much more interesting candidate at interview, and you should take advantage of the mock interviews you can arrange with individual departments in your Seventh Form.

## Prefects

All Sixth Formers have the opportunity to become School Prefects. The position of Prefect is regarded as a privilege and an opportunity to exercise responsibility, leadership and initiative in many different ways. The privilege can, of course, be taken away! It is hoped that all Sixth Formers will play an important part in School life and an integral part in the running of our four Houses, assisting staff in maintaining the good order of the School, assisting Form Tutors with their Forms and at School events, as well as being involved in Drama, Sport and Charities. Prefects have a responsibility for general conduct in the building and they assist the Staff with supervision at Break and Lunchtime, and with monitoring of the LRC and JCR. In practice a Prefect is never really 'off-duty', and by his conduct, bearing, dress and courtesy gives a lead throughout the School, and shares a corporate responsibility for the effective running and good name of the School. Prefects receive an organised programme of training before commencing their duties, and there are regular Prefect meetings, chaired by the Captain of School, at which Prefects can highlight issues of concern to Mr McWilliam and Mr Dennis.

### More About Becoming a Prefect

} **Becoming a Prefect is regarded as a privilege. It is not an automatic award; while it is highly rewarding it is also a difficult task and we will only appoint those we feel are able to cope.**

} **Prefects are expected to maintain the highest standards of work and behaviour.**

} **We expect that members of the Sixth Form but especially Prefects will take an active role in the life of the School and develop a sense of responsibility towards fellow students and the community beyond.**

} **Prefects are expected to undertake regular duties; these will be organised and run by the School Captain and Vice Captain.**

We deliberately restrict the number of students who may become Prefects. All those who have a suitable profile will be considered and from this group the new School Captain and Vice Captain are selected. Not everyone wants to become a Prefect, but all students should aim to be able to offer a good profile since it is precisely this level of achievement and participation that universities and employers look for and which will enable you to write a convincing Personal Statement on your UCAS form, as well as enable us to write the most positive reference we can.

# Sixth Form Council

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Mr Dennis co-ordinates the Sixth Form Council, which meets every Half Term. The purpose of this is to discuss the concerns and views of the Sixth Form body. All Sixth Form Form Groups are represented on the Council. The Council elects its own Chairman and Secretary who between them prepare the agenda, run the meetings, take minutes and delegate other members to investigate further any realistic proposals. The Council will then work with Mr Dennis to organise resources, source funding etc.

# The Enrichment Programme

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The enrichment programme has been designed to

- } Meet the needs of young adults about to enter the world of Higher Education or employment.
- } Ensure that all Sixth Formers receive as broad an education as possible.

The main elements of the Sixth Form enrichment programme are:

- } Study Skills
- } Friday Activities
- } Wednesday Games
- } General Studies: all Sixth Formers take the AS General Studies examination; however in the Seventh Form it is your choice whether you take the A2 examination or not. Usually this depends on whether or not General Studies will be accepted as part of your preferred university offer.
- } UCAS Application: all Sixth Formers attend the annual UCAS Higher Education Convention at the GMEX in Manchester; the practicalities of electronic application; composing the Personal Statement, and presentations by representatives from local universities etc.
- } A week of relevant work experience after the end of the June AS examinations.
- } Visiting speakers on topics as diverse as voluntary work, drugs awareness, safety for young road users and student finances.
- } Prefect Training

# Friday Activities

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Friday Activities is a joint enterprise with Bury Grammar School Girls and a diverse range of options are offered in co-educational groups. Currently the options available are:

- } Sculpture
- } Art
- } Mock Law Trial Competition
- } Computing
- } Community Service
- } Design and Technology
- } Contemporary Issues
- } PHSE
- } Law and Government
- } Humour
- } Squash
- } Aerobics
- } School Magazine
- } Photography
- } Pilates
- } Song and Dance
- } Sports
- } Cookery
- } First Aid
- } Year Book
- } Young Enterprise
- } Bird Watching

# Sixth Form games

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Wednesday Games is a compulsory part of Sixth Form life. The philosophy of the Physical Education Department is to provide you with the opportunity to take part in a wide range of physical activities, to encourage you to fulfil your full potential and to continue active participation on leaving School, whatever your ability.

The Wednesday Games programme offers you a wide range of activities, some of which are taken with a view to representing the School in sports matches on Wednesday afternoons and Saturday mornings, while others ensure that you are benefiting from the many advantages to be had from regular sporting activity. Activities undertaken on Wednesday afternoons include: Rugby, Football, Hockey, Cross Country Running, Cricket, Tennis, Swimming, Volley Ball, Badminton and Weight Training.

# Work experience

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After you have completed your AS examinations in June you will undertake a one week period of work experience within a field that you are seriously considering entering after university. Mr. Dennis will start to co-ordinate this after the Autumn Half Term, and it will be your responsibility to find something suitable. Undertaking as relevant a period of work experience as possible will greatly enhance the chances of your university application being successful. For some degree courses, namely Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Science, you will not be made an offer unless you can demonstrate a number of periods of relevant work experience.

# Responsibilities

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Sixth Formers are the custodians of the JCR, and while you have free run of the facilities during the day you must always remember that the JCR is used quite heavily outside School hours by the Old Boys, Parents' Association and local groups, therefore you must ensure that you take good care of it. If you do not then you will find yourself excluded for a period of time, and if you have caused any damage you will be expected to pay for it. Persistent offenders can expect a more severe response!

It is a mistake to think of Sixth Form education only in academic terms: your social, personal, moral and spiritual development is an important part of the education process. You should take every opportunity to develop your powers of initiative and responsible leadership. The Sixth Form has a vital role to play in the life of the School community. You will be expected to participate in at least one area of the wider life of the School; if anything it makes writing your UCAS reference easier! The success of many extra-curricular activities depends on your organisation and enthusiasm. Your support for clubs, societies, teams and House events will help the School and also benefit you. The way you conduct yourself has considerable effect on the ethos of the whole School. You will be expected to set an example to the other students and to abide by the regulations on behaviour and dress.

**It is part of the legal contract which your parents sign that you will attend all of your timetabled lessons, including Games and Activities. You will find that there is a great deal to cover at A Level in a relatively short space of time. To put it into perspective, we have the same amount of time to get you ready to cope with the demands of reading for a degree that you have just spent completing your GCSEs. If you miss a timetabled lesson without permission, then the teacher will report it to Mr. McWilliam and action will follow.**

# Junior Common Room

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Members of the Sixth Form have the privilege of access to the JCR. This separate building is an extremely comfortable place to relax in and there are facilities for hot drinks, sitting and chatting and listening to music, lockers, Pool, Table Soccer and Table Tennis. An objective of the Sixth Form is to achieve a controlled transition between School and the adult world, and with this in mind you are given more freedom and there are fewer regulations. One of the roles of the Sixth Form Council is to oversee the use of the JCR and its many facilities. It is expected that the condition of the fabric and furnishings will be maintained and that the rooms will be kept tidy at all times.

The Sixth Form has a collective responsibility to ensure that the JCR is well treated and that litter is tidied up. You should take special care not to damage the fabric of the seating and to this end you should not clamber over the furniture. Sports equipment is prohibited in the JCR and ball games are expressly forbidden. Any damage must be reported to Mr Dennis or Mr McWilliam with immediate effect, and in most cases those responsible for the damage will be billed for the cost of repair. The Sixth Form Council assists Mr Dennis in the management of the JCR, and suggested improvements should be made to them.

You will be provided with a locker in the JCR and should therefore not leave valuables unattended. If you forget or lose your locker key you should see the Caretaker. Lost keys will normally be replaced within a few days at a cost of £3. Large sums of money and expensive goods should not be brought into School. If you do need to bring in an expensive item for a lesson or other organised activity e.g. sports equipment or electronic equipment it should be left in the School Office.

It is hoped that you will recognise that by having use of the JCR a privilege is being extended to you. You must reciprocate by behaving with maturity and by setting an example for younger students to follow.

# Special educational needs

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In the Sixth Form the provision for those with special educational needs is overseen by the SENCo, and Miss Batey will undertake this responsibility while Mrs Cooke is on maternity leave. Her role is to identify all students with special needs, be they the Gifted and Talented, those with a specific learning difficulty or those with other difficulties which may prevent them from fulfilling their potential. She works across all academic departments to

ensure these students receive the particular package of assistance most appropriate to their individual circumstances.

For those who are identified as Gifted and Talented the SENCo provides them with the necessary documents to register as a member of the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth. However this is an entirely voluntary arrangement, and whether or not you choose to use NAGTY's materials or attend events organised by them will be your decision. For those intending to make a realistic application to Oxbridge Mr Feeley co-ordinates this (this is discussed in more detail below). If you have a diagnosed specific learning difficulty e.g. Dyslexia, the SENCo will consult with you and your parents and draw up an Individual Education Plan which is made available to the relevant Staff. The SENCo in consultation with you will review this regularly.

## University Entrance

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There is no doubt that the way to get the most out of your Sixth Form course is to have that sense of purpose that comes from knowing what it is you are aiming at. The people who make the greatest success of their course are those who consider, early on in their Sixth Form life, the decision as to what they want to do later. Without being certain of what career they want to pursue, they enquire and inform themselves about the very many career and Higher Education opportunities open to them. They also try to look into the financial implications of any choice. In this way they are at least able to get a clearer idea of the general direction in which they wish to move and are better equipped to make wise decisions when these have to be made at the start of the Seventh Form.

## Oxford and Cambridge

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Each year students from Bury Grammar School Boys apply to Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Both universities make exacting conditional offers, based on A Level results and occasionally, for some Colleges and subjects, additional 'STEP' Mathematics papers or Advanced Extension Awards (AEA) papers taken at the same time as A2 papers. Both universities admit candidates of the highest intellectual calibre; successful candidates are not only academically able, but also have a

passion for their chosen subject. Such a passion needs to be developed at an early stage, and serious candidates are encouraged to read very widely indeed.

Mr Feely is the Oxbridge Co-Coordinator. His job is to identify, as early in the Sixth Form as possible, those students capable of making a realistic application to either Oxford or Cambridge, provide them with appropriate advice and organise the additional coaching they will need to be able to make a strong application and perform well in interview. He fosters links with the Colleges and Admissions Tutors and is always happy to give an opinion on which particular College a Sixth Former should apply to in order to maximise his chance of receiving an offer.

In addition to the coaching offered by Mr Feeley individual departments will provide 'Oxbridge' lessons as early as the second term in the Sixth Form. If you are intending to make an application to an Oxford or Cambridge College the onus is very much on you to read and think about your subject, to familiarise yourself with current developments in it, and to advertise your enthusiasm and interest by moving way beyond the confines of A Level work.

## Acquisition of key skills and wider experience

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University departments are looking increasingly for evidence in the Personal Statement and Reference that an applicant has acquired a number of key study skills during their Sixth Form. The onus is therefore on you to develop such skills at every opportunity. Several of these skills relate directly to your academic work: they include the ability to organise your files effectively, to make notes on a range of material, and to conduct investigations and research exercises. Beyond this, you should be able to provide evidence of communication skills e.g. the preparation and execution of at least one formal presentation to a class, and of ICT skills e.g. the use of computers in the preparation and completion of work assignments, building up of useful databases, familiarity with CD-ROMS and Internet material etc. All university applicants should also arrange suitable work experience and be familiar with career options, together with what is involved in particular careers.

To this end, all Sixth Formers should consider the following:

### } **Work experience**

This is covered in more detail on page 14.

### } **Careers convention**

These evenings, which are arranged in a two year cycle, consist of talks by outside speakers on particular career areas and representative from many occupations and local universities are present. The main areas are Law, Financial Services, Medicine, Journalism, Marketing, Geography, Science, Design, Engineering and Languages, amongst others.

### } **The gap year**

You might wish to consider whether you would like to take a 'Gap Year' between leaving Bury Grammar School Boys and going to university. Some, but by no means all, universities welcome this, and it represents a unique opportunity to do something challenging and mind broadening. There is a substantial amount of material available in the Careers Room, and you should also consult with Mr Lee and Mr McWilliam.

### } **The wider personality**

A recent survey 'What Makes A Graduate Employable?' underlines the importance of acquiring skills over the course of your time in the Sixth Form. A wide range of employers were interviewed, and skills particularly highlighted included: spoken communication, literacy, personal and transferable skills, the ability to work in a team, previous work experience, numeracy, IT and computing skills, adaptability and problem solving skills. These are precisely the skills that Admissions Tutors are increasingly looking for, over and above your academic record and potential. Employers also look for evidence of other interests such as cultural and sporting achievements, community service and voluntary work of all kinds. It is worth reviewing your overall profile, with your parents and Form Tutor, on a regular basis.

## UCAS timetable

In order to help you research your application in a sensible fashion and timescale, and to enable us to provide appropriate advice and support, it is imperative that you keep to the timetable shown below:

### } **September 2007**

Documentation on the Sixth Form is sent to parents in which Mr. Lee explains the Higher Education application process. All Sixth Form students and their parents are strongly encouraged to contact Mr Lee or Mr McWilliam if they have any questions about it.

### } **March 2008**

Careers Convention. All students from the Third to Seventh Forms and their parents are invited to attend this careers forum organised by the Careers Department and featuring representatives from local universities, professional associations, employers, the Armed Forces, etc.

### } **March 2008**

All Sixth Formers attend the UCAS Higher Education Convention in Manchester.

### } **June 2008**

After the June AS examinations all Sixth Formers are given a presentation on the electronic university applications system and writing the Personal Statement. Deadlines are also communicated e.g. you need to have taken the UKCAT by the time you start the Seventh Form, best to submit your application before October Half Term because applications submitted after this date may not reach UCAS until mid November and you could be disadvantaged in the university selection process etc. Your Form Tutor collects information from your subject teachers and you to use to construct a draft of the Reference. If you are considering Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Science or Law make sure you see Mr. Lee about the UKCAT, BMAT or LNAT! All Sixth Formers attend presentations on university life and writing the Personal Statement which last year were delivered by representatives of the Universities of Lancaster and York respectively.

### } **August 2008**

Notification of AS results and you make decisions about A2 courses.

### } **Early October 2008**

Completed UCAS forms for Oxbridge and Medic, Vet & Dentistry candidates. They should be submitted electronically to Mrs Cloke, the Headmaster's Secretary. This deadline should allow the school time to process and dispatch them by 15th October deadline.

### } **December 2008/January 2009**

Oxbridge interviews and notification of offers.

### } **January 2009**

Early A2 examinations and AS resits.

### } **February 2009**

Completion of the LEA Student Award Application. These are required to qualify for part payment of fees and the right to apply for a student loan.

### } **March /April 2009**

Notify UCAS of Firm and Insurance offers.

### } **June 2009**

A2 examinations and AS resits.

### } **August 2009**

A Level results published and clearing begins.

### } **September 2009**

Post A Level applications procedure.

# Where to go if you need help

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There are all sorts of people you can turn to if you are experiencing difficulties.

## **Academic problems:**

- } If the problem is one of organisation of your work, for example, letting things pile up, missing deadlines or not making efficient use of your Study Periods, then your Form Tutor will be able to offer practical help.
- } If the problem is of a subject specific nature, lack of understanding of a particular topic or a feeling that you are being overloaded with conflicting work deadlines, then talk to your subject teachers, Mr Dennis or Mr McWilliam.
- } If you are considering changing courses (first Half Term only!) then you should discuss your plans with your Form Tutor, the relevant Head of Department and then with Mr McWilliam. Only if we are satisfied that you have thought through all the issues surrounding a change of subject, and discussed them with your parents, will you be allowed to make a subject change. Even then all such changes are subject to sufficient space being available in the relevant sets, and whether or not too much work has already been covered for you to be able to realistically catch up.

## **Medical / social problems:**

- } If you feel unwell then you must not just go home. You must report to your Form Tutor, Mr Dennis, Mr McWilliam or the School Office first who will make the necessary arrangements should you need to go home.
- } You must bring in a parental note next day covering any absences including leaving early due to illness. A parent should also telephone School on your first day of absence.
- } There may be times over the next two years when you feel under pressure and stressed. In such situations you are encouraged to talk to your Form Tutor, Mr Dennis or Mr McWilliam.
- } You can arrange to talk in confidence with the Counsellor, Health Support Worker or the School Nurse.
- } If you would prefer not to discuss your problems in a School environment then you should consider making an appointment with your GP, or using one of the local youth service help organisations e.g. Connexions.

## **Higher Education:**

- } Your Form Tutor is your first source of help and advice, and will work with you on application forms, Open Days, etc.
- } More detailed advice can be obtained from Mr Lee and Mr McWilliam,

# Part-time jobs

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Many students decide to take a job at some stage during the two years of the Sixth Form. Having a job brings some advantages such as a degree of financial independence, experience of the world of work which may help shape career decisions, and a new outlook on life. However, a job during term can create problems and may leave you with insufficient time for study, or problems in meeting School commitments such as sporting fixtures. As a general rule it is always best to think long-term, and a few extra hours spent earning money stacking supermarket shelves during term, may have adverse future consequences if you do not secure the A Level grades needed for a university place. Research has indicated that male Sixth Form students start to under-perform academically if they do in excess of 8-10 hours of part-time work per week.

If you find yourself becoming over committed because of a job on top of your A Levels then discuss the situation with your Form Tutor, Mr Dennis or Mr McWilliam. You should also take advice from your peer group, some of whom may have found themselves in similar situations.

# Sixth Form regulations

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We try to keep rules to a minimum, and they are all designed to create an effective and positive learning environment in the Sixth Form. Many of the rules are just common sense and good manners, whilst other pertaining to lateness and registration are legal requirements.

*The Golden Rule: if you are unsure what to do in a certain situation, ask rather than 'taking the law into your own hands!'*

1. You are obliged to register twice each day in your Form Room i.e. 8.35am and 2pm respectively. As a basic issue of Health and Safety those arriving late should sign in at the School Office and inform their Form Tutor at the earliest opportunity. If assembly has started you must wait in your Form Room and not go to the JCR. If you have not arrived by 9.30am the School Office will contact your parents. Persistent late arrivers are likely to have to report to School at 8.15am until they have convinced Mr McWilliam that they are in the habit of arriving punctually.
2. All school commitments, whether academic lessons, Games, Activities, sporting fixtures or CCF must be honoured. Permission to miss any such commitment must be supported by a note from a parent and your Form Tutor, Mr Dennis or Mr McWilliam must sign

this. You should then go and inform the relevant member of staff and show them the signed note well in advance. The School takes a dim view of Sixth Formers who miss such commitments without permission; at the very least you will be required to make up the lost time outside normal School hours.

3. Requests for absence from School for anything other than Open Days, organised trips and driving tests will only be considered if supported by a parental letter addressed to the Headmaster. However your Form Tutor must still approve the above mentioned exemptions well in advance. Permission for absence will not be granted for driving lessons and these should be done outside of School hours. Also wherever possible please do not arrange routine doctors or other health appointments during School hours.
  4. Should you need to leave School because of illness, your Form Tutor, Mr Dennis, Mr McWilliam or the Health Support Worker must be informed so that the necessary arrangements can be made with your parents. On returning to school after a period of absence, you must bring a supporting parental note (or equivalent e-mail) for your Form Tutor confirming the reason for absence.
  5. If because of illness and injury, you are unable to participate in Games you must provide your Form Tutor with a parental note. You must then sign in on the Off Games register with the teacher supervising the LRC at the start of the session, and remain there, completing work, until the normal end of the activity. If you do not cooperate with this instruction disciplinary action will be taken.
  6. You are entitled to leave the School site during Free Periods and at Break and Lunchtime, but must ensure that you return in good time for your next lesson. As a basic requirement of Health and Safety, if leaving the School site in a Free Period you must sign out and in on the form provided in the School Office. However, you are strongly advised to use your free time wisely. Free Periods represent valuable extra study time during which you have access to the LRC; they can also be a useful opportunity for you to meet individually with staff. Private Study in the LRC is done under quiet conditions. You are also free to leave school (provided you sign out) after your last lesson/commitment of the day, as long as it is also after afternoon registration. However you must inform your Form Tutor of your intentions, and depending on your academic position at the time they may insist you do Private Study in the LRC instead.
  7. If you are experiencing pastoral or academic difficulties you are encouraged to discuss these with your teachers, Form Tutor, Mr Dennis or Mr McWilliam. Staff will always be supportive in helping you to realise your potential, and you should take advantage of the help and expertise on offer.
  8. If you fall behind with your work, or if your work bears the hallmarks of insufficient effort, then you should discuss the situation with your subject teachers, Form Tutor, Mr Dennis or Mr McWilliam.
- If you are failing to realise your potential owing to a lack of effort then you will be placed in Compulsory Private Study where you will spend a proportion of your Free Periods working in the LRC under supervision, and you will have your progress in relation to your Target Grades monitored and communicated to your parents every 2 weeks.
9. The JCR should be used in a responsible fashion:
    - } Litter must be cleared up and the furniture treated with care.
    - } **Ball games are not allowed** and any equipment used for such purposes is liable to indefinite confiscation.
    - } The Sixth Form Council assists Mr. Dennis in the management of the JCR, and suggested improvements should be made to its members.
  10. If you wish to drive a motor vehicle to School then you must first obtain a consent form from Mr McWilliam. Motor vehicles may not be brought onto the School site and should be parked legally in surrounding roads taking care not to inconvenience local residents. You must also not take your car down to Buckley Wells on Saturdays.
  11. You are reminded that gambling and the consumption of alcohol and tobacco are forbidden whilst under School discipline. This extends to lunchtimes, the roads and pubs surrounding the School, and off-site activities such as sports fixtures. You should also be familiar with the statements in the School's Anti Drugs and Alcohol Policies.
  12. The School recognises that you are likely to have a mobile 'phone for security reasons. However, to avoid unnecessary disruption you must not use your 'phone during lessons, Private Study or while walking around within the School buildings. If your mobile 'phone disrupts a lesson, assembly etc. then you will be liable to serious punishment.
  13. To ensure that your property is secure, we strongly advise that items of significant value are not brought into School and that any items of value that are in School are secured within your locker, or handed in at the School Office. **Items of value, which have to be brought to School for some reason, should not be left loose in the JCR.**
  14. You are reminded of the Sixth Form Dress Code, a copy of which is enclosed in this Handbook. The Sixth Form is a professional place of work and therefore demands appropriate standards of dress and appearance. In particular jackets must be worn by all Sixth Formers outside the JCR and shirts should be tucked in with top buttons and cuffs done up; trainers are not allowed and outdoor coats should not be worn inside the buildings. Extravagant hair styles and piercings of any nature are not permitted.
  15. You are expected to treat one another in an adult fashion with respect, sensitivity and understanding at all times. Intolerant behaviour of **any kind** is unacceptable. You still come under the reach of the School's Anti Bullying Policy.

16. We expect all members of the School to exercise good judgement in their friendships, as in other areas of School life. While it is expected that some members of the Girls' and Boys' Schools will form close relationships with one another during their time here, it is also important to remember that the main purpose of attendance at School is to study and learn. In addition, senior pupils do act as role models for younger members of the School. Therefore, School is an inappropriate context for strong visible expressions of such relationships. The prevalent view among Sixth Formers appears to be that the majority are comfortable with couples showing affection for one another in the JCR, but only up to the point that the couple's behaviour becomes exclusive of others and therefore unsociable. This would seem to be a sensible rule of thumb for behaviour in this part of the School. Outside the JCR but still on the School site, it is inappropriate for there to be physical expressions of any relationship, including holding hands. We do not expect to find you in compromising circumstances that could lead to misunderstanding. You should realise that you act as role models to the rest of the School community. As such the highest standards of behaviour are expected at all times.

## Sixth Form dress code

Sixth Formers do not have a single, compulsory uniform and we put trust wherever possible in your sensible judgement. Guidelines are set out below; you are expected to dress in a respectable, smart and business-like fashion in keeping with the traditions and values of the School. General points at the start of the Clothing List for First to Fifth Formers (marking, suppliers, lost property), together with rules about Sports Hall footwear apply to Sixth Formers too.

### We expect:

- } A formal (collared) shirt of a reasonably sober, conventional design and pattern with either a smart business tie, Prefects' tie or another official School tie. Shirts should be **tucked in** at all times, regardless of style, and top buttons and cuffs must be fastened.
- } A business suit or a jacket of conventional design (not suede or leather) and trousers of a formal style designed to carry a crease.
- } Appropriate non-casual footwear (i.e. no trainers or excessively large boots).
- } Pullovers, if worn, must be V-necked and of a single reasonable colour, and without prominent logos.
- } Outdoor coats to be of a blouson, anorak or overcoat style. Hooded tops are not to be worn under any circumstances, and are liable to confiscation.

} A white shirt should be worn for Founders' Day, Prizegiving and the School Photograph

These regulations are reviewed from time to time in the light of experience. If in doubt about an item of clothing you should consult Mr McWilliam.

## Rules for Sixth Formers driving to School

### The following rules are to be observed at all times:

1. If you wish to drive to and from School you should apply for permission from Mr McWilliam. Such permission should generally be sought only if other suitable forms of transport are unavailable. **You are encouraged to use public transport whenever possible, and to walk to the School if you live near it.**
2. If you do drive to School you must possess a current full driving licence. Your parents are responsible for ensuring that the vehicle authorised for use is fully taxed, fully insured against all risks, and has a current MOT certificate (where needed). **Passenger lifts should only be given if there is a full passenger liability insurance, and drivers must not carry passengers under 18 without first having obtained the permission of the passengers' parents.**
3. **Cars should be parked off site at all times.** You must also not take your car down to Buckley Wells, even on Saturdays
4. If you are learning to drive you should not drive on to the School site, even whilst under the supervision of an Instructor. While it is reasonable for you to be allowed time off to take your theory exam and driving test (arrange this with your Form Tutor), you are not allowed to take time off for driving lessons.
5. You are reminded of the importance of safe and sensible driving, and especially in the areas of Bridge Road and Tenterden Street. The provisions of the Highway Code must be respected at all times, as must all legal and other provisions affecting drivers and passengers. No one else's car is to be manhandled or interfered with in any way. It is specifically forbidden for you to drive another student's vehicle.
6. **Before you travel to a school activity in another student's car, you are responsible for getting your parents' permission to do so.**
7. The registration number of any car which may be driven to school must be notified to Mr McWilliam on the relevant pro forma. Any subsequent changes in the registration details of a student's car must be notified to Mr McWilliam in advance of it being

driven to school e.g. if you might be driving a family car to school occasionally, we expect its number to be registered with us.

8. Picnicking in cars should be avoided, and car radios should never be left on at such a volume as to disturb others while cars are parked. Any litter from parked cars should be deposited in the nearest rubbish bin.
9. There should be no smoking whatsoever, and any car driver caught doing so or allowing his car to be used for smoking will be punished.
10. The following guidelines, also applicable to parents dropping off and picking up pupils should be observed:
  - } Please keep entrances clear at all times and park as close to the kerb as possible.
  - } Please avoid reversing into driveways and doing three-point turns if at all possible.
  - } Please do not drive into, or turn around in the Staff Car Park or Playground for any reason.

Normal School rules about general behaviour apply when travelling to and from the School, and when you are walking to/from or sitting in cars parked near it. If you ignore or break these rules then you will be liable to punishment.

Where local residents or others believe that the Law is being broken in any way or a severe nuisance is being caused, **the School has no alternative but to advise them to contact the Police directly.** It will not try to discourage them from doing so unless there are genuinely extenuating circumstances, and for legal reasons it cannot get involved in policing operations. It will, however, investigate any complaints of inconsiderate behaviour against Sixth Formers. We have noticed that there has been an increase in Police and Traffic Warden activity in this area. Please help us to keep local goodwill and to live in as much harmony as we can with our hard pressed neighbours.

## EMAs

Education Maintenance Allowances are paid to students staying on into the Sixth Form whose parents earn less than £30,000. Depending on parental income you will be paid directly a weekly sum of £10, £20 or £30 as long as your attendance is satisfactory. You will also be eligible for bonuses of £100 at various points in the academic year if you stick with your course and receive good reports.

You can get more information and an application form by ringing 080 810 162 19 or online at [www.ema.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.ema.dfes.gov.uk)

## Careers advice

Careers provision for Sixth Formers is comprehensive and includes:

- } Interviews with members of the Sixth Form team.
- } Access to a specialist careers officer.
- } Use of the Careers Room and all its resources.
- } Comprehensive advice and assistance on completing UCAS and Oxbridge applications

In the Careers Room you will find:

- } Comprehensive careers information.
- } Library with many Higher Education reference books.
- } Current Higher Education prospectuses.
- } Interactive careers guidance computer programmes.
- } Information about University and College Open Days.

# Essential Sixth Form study skills

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What follows is an introduction to the essential study skills you will need in the Sixth Form. The exact study skills you will need to develop will be dependent on the subjects you are studying and your own strengths and weaknesses. It is difficult to generalise about study skills, and you will need to work with your Form Tutor and subject teachers to find your most effective approach to study.

# Top tips!

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1. Get yourself organised: keep a work diary listing work set, work completed and work outstanding.
2. Try and stick to a regular work rota: do a little bit of study often, rather than leaving huge amounts of work to the eleventh hour before a deadline. Late work is invariably rushed, often incomplete, and of inferior quality. By starting an assignment well in advance of a deadline you will get the chance to ask for help if you need it. Most A Level students need to do at least 20 hours self-study per week in addition to lessons.
3. Work in a studious environment, not somewhere where you will be distracted. In School use the LRC. At home work somewhere where you will not be disturbed (and where you can leave books and folders safely).
4. Define your work tasks. Make sure you understand what is expected of you. Seek clarification if you are uncertain about essay titles, the parameters of note taking, etc.
5. Don't be afraid to ask for help when you need it! Don't suffer in silence and don't pretend you understand something when you do not.
6. Use all the available resources: teachers; textbooks; LRC; periodicals; the Internet; newspapers; television and radio; fellow students.
7. Motivate yourself. Have a goal to aim for: on a micro scale a favourite TV programme in half an hour after some revision; on a longer scale a university grade offer.
8. Work in attention span units. Few students can work effectively for more than one hour before their concentration starts to ebb (this is particularly so with revision). Divide your working time up into attention span units (40-60 minutes) punctuated by short breaks, and alternate between knowledge development and knowledge consolidation activities. Research indicates that your most effective concentration span is your age +1 up to a maximum of 25 minutes.
9. Get a dictionary! Examination boards now penalise poor spelling and grammar at A Level.

## Reading and noting

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Reading is one of the core activities of studying. At A Level you are faced with three particular challenges:

- } The volume of reading.
- } The complexity of the material you will read.
- } Trying to remember what you have read.

### Reading style

Skilled readers vary their reading speed and method to suit both the material they are reading and their purpose in reading it. You 'read' a telephone directory rather differently from a novel. In your learning you should seek to use a similarly varied approach to reading. Here are some of the main techniques you can use:

- } **Skimming:** this involves looking quickly through the book and reading only things like contents, headings, introductions and conclusions. It is a quick and efficient way of familiarising yourself with a publication and is useful if you wish to check whether a book is relevant, or for finding particular information or ideas quickly.
- } **Scanning:** this is a very rapid search for some important point. It may be a diagram, a title or a key word. The essential thing is that you deliberately ignore everything except the one item for which you are scanning.
- } **Reading to understand:** this involves detailed study of a chapter, passage or article in order to absorb all the major facts and ideas. You may read it more than once, and take notes to summarise what you have read.
- } **Word-by-word reading:** There are occasions when you need to read every word extremely carefully. For example, when reading an examination question or following a set instruction.

**Skimming** is particularly useful for finding your way around a publication. You may skim the newspaper to find the articles you want to read, or a textbook to identify a relevant chapter. **Scanning** is useful when you want to identify a particular piece of information, for example some specific chemical formulae. Reading to **understand** is useful when you want to study something thoroughly.

To study efficiently you must learn to vary your reading style and become proficient at each type of reading. By developing the ability to switch from one method of reading to another you will vastly increase your studying efficiency.

### Language difficulties

Reading is more difficult when the author uses technical terms or complex languages. In this situation you should never guess meanings, but instead use dictionaries and subject glossaries to help you with definitions.

### Active reading

Reading is not a passive activity! You should be thinking about what you read:

- } Do you agree with the author?
- } What is the quality of the author/s argument?
- } Do you have a different point of view?
- } What counter arguments could you use?

### Taking notes

Clear, accurate and comprehensive notes are vital to A Level success (Sod's Law of Examinations states that the topics you failed to note properly are the ones you will be examined on!).

- (a) *The process of note taking:*  
 Highlight and underline texts as this focuses your attention on the text and:  
 } Makes you think about what the key concepts and issues are.  
 } Leaves a trace on the page of the sense you have been making of the text.
- (b) *Note taking proper*  
 Taking notes forces you to **think** because you have to decide what to write down and how to say it. What is more, if you read without taking notes, no matter how good your memory, you will find that ideas gradually drift away from you.
- Notes should:*  
 } **Summarise** the main theme of an article/chapter.  
 } **Highlight** the key ideas and arguments used.  
 } **List** out any important statistics/facts.
- Notes are best presented in point form or under subheadings with key ideas/points underlined and highlighted. They may contain quotes, **but beware of copying too much narrative straight from the text.** Notes should be detailed enough to cover all the relevant material in a depth necessary for A Level study, but not too detailed to make revision arduous and overly time consuming. Notes can be made more concise by the use of abbreviations.
- Good notes are invaluable and they act as:*  
 } **A form of 'external' memory:** a kind of extension to the memory capacity of your mind that enables you to have ready access to a far wider range of knowledge.  
 } **A symbol of progress:** notes provide you with evidence of the work you have done and so make an important contribution to your morale.  
 } **A means of pulling the course together.**
- (c) Making notes on notes is a most effective form of revision. The action of noting concentrates your mind in revision, and allows you to further order ideas and sharpen understanding.
- (d) Filing notes in an ordered fashion is a vital skill. Too many students lose notes or are unable to access material when they need it because of chaotic or non-existent filing systems. Treat yourself to some ring binders and box files!

# Computers and study

Increasingly the ability to use computers is expected in both academic and every day life. There is no doubt that you are at a disadvantage if you are not computer literate to at least some degree of competency. If you are new to

the school then you must ensure you have a logon name and password. You can get these from the IT Technicians in the LRC after completing an LRC Users Agreement.

Please be aware however that access to the School's computer system is a privilege not a right, and it is a privilege which can be taken away should you abuse the system. Indeed the School takes a strong line against any student who breaks the operating rules of the IT facility in the LRC, as their behaviour may disrupt the IT provision for other students and cost time and money to rectify. Rules are in place to protect the users and the system so please bear that in mind when considering appropriate uses of the computers and appropriate behaviour in the LRC, whether using one of the workstations or a laptop. The LRC is place of work, and music and the playing of movies are not permitted.

## Word processing

- } It is well worth becoming familiar with the Microsoft Word package available for word processing if you have not done so already. The sheer speed with which you can get words down and then move them around transforms the writing process. Essays can be rewritten, paragraphs moved around with ease and the presentation of your work often vastly improved.
- } The use of such a package is strongly encouraged for all project work although students must also learn the art of handwriting with clarity and at speed for examinations.
- } In some instances the use of word processing is more of a hindrance than a help e.g. when writing mathematical calculations, so stick to pen and paper when it is more appropriate.

## Spreadsheets

- } Repetitive calculations e.g. for field projects and so forth can easily be carried out on an Excel spreadsheet.
- } The package also has facilities to present data by drawing a variety of graphs. Some care and discretion is required to obtain a meaningful graph; it is important to fairly and correctly display the data, and not just present it in a range of pretty colours!

## Data acquisition

- } There is a wealth of information out there e.g. CD-ROMs of newspaper and magazine articles, summaries of data sets such as the UK Census and so on.
- } The Internet offers huge scope for research for projects and for general interest. Remember however that downloading someone's web page or an article in its entirety and handing that in is not the idea. Get information on the net from a variety of sources, digest it and produce your own conclusions in your own words.
- } Consider the source of information on the Internet. There is little censorship or vetting of material so how reliable is the source? Do they have a vested interest in what they are printing?

# UCAS

You will be given more details of where to go and how to find details of universities and courses at a later stage ([www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com) is a good starting point) but it is worth bearing in mind the following:

- } Increasingly an ability to use computers will help you with your university application as you will make your application on-line using the electronic applications system.
- } UCAS itself and all universities have their own websites giving up-to-date information on courses, Open Days and often give email addresses for Admissions Tutors.
- } Increasingly universities are also putting student profiles on their website – a picture of the type of student they believe to be suitable for their courses, not just in academic terms but also in terms of personal qualities such as communication and team-working skills. With ever increasing competition for university places this information could be invaluable.

## Studying Mathematics and Sciences

Clearly different study techniques apply to different subjects. The following gives some advice on ways of maximising your efficiency when studying Mathematics and the Sciences.

### **The key aids you have are the following:**

#### *Notes*

- } As with any subject it is vitally important that you have a comprehensive, clear set of notes. Make sure if you are absent from school that you ask someone in your set for a copy of anything you have missed. This is your responsibility, not the teacher's although of course your teacher will be more than willing to go through any problems once you have copied up missed work.
- } There is no point taking these notes if you then lose them. It is worth periodically filing notes into subject folders at home. Nor is it worth taking notes which are illegible – be neat and clear first time round.
- } Notes generally fall into two categories – 1) those taken directly from the board or dictated by the teacher and 2) those you have made yourself. In Mathematics in particular most notes will fall into the first category. There is little point in rewriting or summarising notes of this type. It may seem like a nice easy way of fooling yourself into thinking you are doing something constructive but it has little actual learning value. You would be much better advised to read through your

notes once and then try examples of that type. The second type of notes may need more work. In particular if you have taken notes from a book you need to ensure you haven't simply copied out the whole passage – take just the important points. Highlight key words that will trigger your memory.

#### *Textbooks*

- } Again the use of a textbook depends on the subject. In Mathematics the main use of your textbook is as a source of examples on specific topics.
- } In the Sciences you may be asked to take notes directly from the textbook. You are also strongly advised to read round your subject. This will help with such things as synoptic papers and research and analysis projects. You should also dip into journals like *Nature* and *New Scientist*.

#### *Past papers*

- } These in some ways are the most valuable study aid you have. After all they represent exactly what it is you will be asked to do in the examination. There is no substitute for practising past papers.
- } At the start of your revision process however you may not be ready to embark on a past paper. It may well be worth adopting the following strategy:
  1. Identify main topic groups from the specification.
  2. Work individually through these topics reading relevant notes, trying relevant examples from textbooks and asking teachers when unsure.
  3. Once you are reasonably confident with that module try a past paper.
  4. The first ones you try need not be under examination conditions.
  5. Once you are reasonably confident try completing one under examinations conditions i.e. set aside the allocated time, work in silence on your own and see how it goes. After the allotted time you may still need to go back and fill in any blanks with the help of friends or teachers but the experience of examination conditions and time pressure etc is extremely useful. It is also important to practise different topics and techniques mixed together; often half of the battle is identifying which technique will solve the problem before actually going ahead and applying that technique.
- } One important point to remember is that quality comes before quantity. While you need to practise plenty of past papers you should avoid the temptation to rush through them missing out the bits you can't do. There is absolutely no point in doing say ten past papers if you only do the bits that you could do already. You will have learned very little. The learning does come partly by doing the paper and practising techniques but also in the identifying and sorting out of problems. While this is the long, laborious and difficult part, it is the part that means you will do better next time round.
- } So the main advice is, the more past papers you complete and understand the better prepared you will be.

# Teachers and homework

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There is one huge misconception about homework which a surprising number of people still cling to. The misconception is this: the reason for completing my homework is so that the relevant teacher will not moan/contact my Form Tutor/parents and generally make my life unpleasant. That is not the reason for doing homework. There are two main points to homework; firstly for the teacher to check that you understand the work and have grasped the relevant concepts, and secondly, and equally importantly, for you to practise required techniques, check you understand the work and can apply these techniques appropriately and accurately.

Copying homework from someone else and passing work off as your own serves no purpose. Apart from the dishonesty of it, how can teachers help when they are not seeing your own effort? Don't fool yourself into thinking, 'Oh yes I could probably have done that myself – I think I understand what I'm copying.' If you understand it then do it yourself. If you don't understand, ask!

In the same vein, don't be afraid to ask for help with homework before it is due in. There is no point on the day homework is due saying 'Oh I couldn't do these three questions.' You should have contacted the teacher long before then. Similarly writing the question number and not providing an answer does not constitute a reasonable attempt at a homework question.

Do not be under the misapprehension that the homework process finishes with the handing in of the piece of work. In the same way as with past papers a crucially important part of the process is sorting out mistakes you have made and learning from them. Why not work on the teacher's comments when you receive a piece of work back and put it in for a remark?

## Fellow Students

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Although I hope it has been made clear to you that copying achieves nothing, constructive discussion with fellow students certainly does. Two heads can be better than one. I am not however advocating halving your homework load by sharing it with a friend. What I am suggesting is doing homework individually but then sharing any common problems with a friend to see if you can figure them out between you. If not then you may find it easier to approach a teacher together.

A word of caution, make sure it really is a discussion. Have you really understood what your friend was saying? Could you work it out yourself next time? Also make sure the final answer is in your own words.

# Three general golden rules

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1. Slow and steady wins the race every time. By that I mean study little and often from the first day of the Sixth Form. There is nothing worse than playing catch up and although it might have worked at GCSE the 'I'll do no work throughout the year and then make a huge revision effort just before the exams' technique simply will not work at A Level. Several of the Seventh Form have recently, and all too painfully, realised the value of this advice.
2. Divide your time sensibly between subjects. It is easy to become bogged down in a particular subject if there is a test/exam/project looming in that particular area. You must endeavour, however, to keep the other subjects going at the same time. No doubt there will be some weekly variations in the division of your time between subjects but it is vitally important to keep your head above water in all of them at the same time. All too often students can get themselves into a situation of leaving some subjects, trying to catch up and in the process neglecting the original subject and so on. It is a thankless situation and one to be avoided at all costs. A little forward planning can go a long way.
3. Seek advice and assistance before things get out of control. We are here to help. Whether it be subject teacher, Form Tutor, Mr Dennis or Mr McWilliam please see someone. Let us know you are having difficulties and we will endeavour to help you form a strategy for sorting them out. There are very rarely problems that are insurmountable provided you are willing to work through them.

## Taking part in group discussion

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In the Sixth Form you will probably find there is more opportunity for group discussion than was the case at GCSE.

### **Group discussion is important in:**

- } Helping you articulate ideas and arguments in a clear coherent fashion.
- } Building self confidence.
- } Aiding group learning, as you may have novel ideas or a new approach which adds a different perspective to a topic.
- } Learning to appreciate the views of others and the dangers of dogma.

### How to make group discussions work

1. Contribute - throw caution to the wind and join in! Everyone has something valid to contribute and you have just as much right to take part in discussions as anyone else.
2. Contributions can be simple - they don't have to be complex and brilliant.
3. In any discussion you may occasionally grow confused and unsure of what exactly the discussion is about. Don't sit quietly by, but instead ask for clarification.
4. If a discussion is pre-planned, then prepare for it. Argument backed up with logic and factual content will always prevail over "hot air".
5. Show tolerance towards the views of others even if you disagree with them. Many issues are so complex that there is never just one right answer.

### Arguing at Advanced Level

Arguing in academic work is not at all the same thing as "having an argument" in everyday terms. Academic arguments should be objective, precise/logical, concerned to back your case with evidence, and to be open to doubt and criticism.

### Objectivity

Academic arguments should be impartial i.e. "It can be argued" rather than "I believe". They should stand or fall on the quality of their reasoning and the worth of supporting material, rather than by impassioned emotional commitment.

### Precision

You should express yourself in a careful, concise and clear fashion. Clarity of language is vital for precision of argument.

### Logic

Points and ideas shouldn't just be scattered around. They should follow some sort of sequence, such that the reader of your work can see the connection of one point to the next. Planning of written work is vital here.

### Supporting evidence

The other weapon in academic argument besides logical reasoning is to provide evidence to support your case. You cannot expect your reader to believe what you say simply because it is you saying it. You have to show your grounds for saying it i.e. the evidence, data, case study detail etc. which supports your argument.

### Open to doubt and criticism

Finally, your arguments should be presented in the spirit that they are unlikely to be the whole story, and you need to be capable of seeing some strength in alternative views. It is part of the spirit of operating in a world of logic and evidence that new arguments will emerge and that you may, quite legitimately, change your mind.

# The temptation to plagiarise

In writing an A Level answer, you are often working with ideas and terms that you are not familiar with. This makes producing a clear, coherent argument difficult and you may become nervous as to whether you will 'get it right'. Some students may be tempted to lift sections of words from the text books or other students' work to be on the safe side, or to save time if they are behind with their work. However, you should always strive to write in your own words.

Do not rely heavily on copying out segments from printed texts because:

1. Your teacher cannot judge how well you understand the topic and give you appropriate advice and support. Indeed, when the teacher spots what you are up to, he or she will be inclined to assume that you understand very little and so mark you down.
2. It does not read well as a form of writing. Because you are not developing a thread of meaning as you write, but stitching together segments of meaning collected from elsewhere, the sentences read very jerkily.
3. You do not learn about the ideas and terms in the course unless you try to use them for yourself.
4. You do not develop your own writing style so long as you are parroting other people's words rather than expressing thoughts for yourself.

It is particularly important that coursework which will be submitted to the A Level examination board is genuinely your own work. If this is not the case, then you are at risk of being disqualified from all the examinations that you are taking in that session. If you have any doubt over this, then you must ask the relevant subject teacher.

# Writing essays

### There are six key steps:

1. *Think about the essay title*  
In particular look out for command verbs such as explain and evaluate which will set the parameters of your answer. Underline key words and ensure that all aspects of the question are being addressed. Before you begin to prepare for an essay you must have a clear idea of what the question wants, and if necessary seek clarification from your teacher.
2. *Gather together material for the essay*  
Look back through your class notes to find out what is relevant to the question set. Find out from your teacher what extra reading you should do. Look out for other sources (e.g. newspapers, Internet, CD-

ROM), which may be relevant. Using relevant material taken from sources beyond basic textbooks impresses examiners. Without thorough research, you will not be familiar with the range of arguments and depth of supporting detail necessary to score well.

3. *Get some ideas down on paper*

By writing notes for your essay, you have already begun the process of getting ideas on to paper. However, up to this point your main emphasis has been on getting hold of what other writers have to say. Once you have completed the gathering together of material, you have to switch to thinking in terms of what you are going to say. The best way to approach this is by brainstorming, that is to say, jotting down a whole series of thoughts relating to the title. Brainstorming allows you to trap some of the ideas floating around in your mind.

4. *Organise material and draw up an essay plan.*

You need to start dividing up your brainstorming ideas from (3) into some sort of order from which a logical and structured argument can be formed. This could take the form of dividing points up into for or against a particular viewpoint, or by listing points under certain subheadings which will form the text of individual paragraphs in your answer. For example, a question asking what factors affect the distribution of population in Brazil could be divided up on a one factor per paragraph basis. How you actually construct an essay does vary from one subject to another, and detailed advice is best left to subject teachers. Suffice to say most essays should:

- } Have an introduction, outlining the topic to be discussed. Good introductions often impose a structure on the subsequent essay.
- } Be relevant to the question set. Cut out any irrelevancy or background narrative not directly related to the essay title.
- } Have a logical and developed argument.
- } Have a conclusion which summarises the main points and directly answers the question set.

5. *Write the essay.*

This is best done in one go, as this will help the flow of your argument. When writing your first draft do not spend too long worrying about the detail of sentences, for while you are writing you are too close to the words to make reliable judgments about them. It is easy to waste time fiddling about with small changes when a fresh run at the piece might show a useful way of recasting a whole sentence or paragraph. Word processing makes the subsequent recasting much easier.

6. *Review your essay*

In doing so, check the following:

- (i) Are your spelling, punctuation and use of English accurate?
- (ii) Do the sentences work, that is, do they make sense? Even at A Level, many candidates produce awkward sentences which have too many sub-clauses or lack a verb.

(iii) Do the divisions into paragraphs work? Do the breaks feel as though they come at the right place when the focus of the discussion shifts, for example, as you move from one factor to another?

(iv) Have you given sufficient explanation and illustration such that your argument has credibility?

(v) Does the argument follow? Does it make sense as you move from point to point?

(vi) And the most important check of all, have you answered the question in the title?

In the light of (6) you may need to make corrections, which again will be easier if you are word processing your essay.

## Effective revision techniques

I can offer no miracle approach to A Level success or academic panacea for intellectual woes. However, here are a few ways of getting the most out of your revision.

1. *Get yourself organised*

- } Make sufficient time for revision
- } Plan out a realistic revision timetable - and stick to it!
- } Set up a quiet place to revise (at home or the LRC).
- } Address extra-curricular dilemmas, e.g. part-time job versus revision. As examinations approach you must give academic work increased priority but occasional relaxation is vital!

2. *Note taking*

- } Clear and concise notes are remembered best.
- } Highlight key ideas and terms.
- } Summarise your own notes into a series of key points.
- } Make sure you have a complete set of notes. Sod's Law says the examination will always focus on your weak spots.
- } Keep your revision notes safe and well organised.

3. *Preparing for examinations*

- } Pull the whole course together: get a copy of the specification and do not compartmentalise information.
- } Start revising early enough i.e. months before the exam.
- } Change revision topics regularly to avoid boredom. but ensure thorough revision of all areas.
- } Revise actively by summarising notes onto cards or into diagrams; don't stare blankly at your notes.

- } Revise in circa 60 minute sessions. Your effective attention span in minutes is your age +1 to a maximum of 25 minutes.
  - } Practise past questions and papers.
  - } Try to think up likely examination questions for yourself, but beware of question spotting.
  - } Talk about the material you are revising with teachers, parents, friends, relatives, etc.
4. *As exam day approaches*
- } Ease off your revision as you need to be mentally alert for the examination.
  - } Revise during the day so that your mind is used to working in examination hours. You must be at your most alert at 9am not 11.30pm!
  - } If anxiety sets in talk to your parents, Form Tutor, School Nurse etc. Breathing exercises, meditation or visiting your GP may help.
  - } Check examination arrangements.
- On the day itself:*
- (i) Don't attempt any last minute revision, it will only disturb your carefully stored ideas.
  - (ii) Arrive in good time.
  - (iii) Don't let other candidates disturb you. Remain aloof if you need to.
  - (iv) Make sure you have the necessary equipment for the examination.

5. *In the examination itself*
- } Keep calm at all times.
  - } Read the rubric.
  - } Read the questions.
  - } Read the rubric (again).
  - } Re-read the paper and find the questions you have prepared for.
  - } As you tackle a question:
    - Examine the wording carefully.
    - Very quickly list some relevant points from the course.
    - Move back and forth between the question and your list as you sketch an outline plan for your answer.
    - Take the time to plan your answer before you start writing.
    - Everything you write should be relevant to the specific question asked.
    - Draw up a time plan for the examination and stick to it.
    - Write legibly.
    - First impressions count!
    - Write in a clear style using relevant jargon.
    - Express complex ideas in short sentences.
    - Structure essays with an introduction, a logically developed argument and a conclusion which all answer the question set.