



UPS News

Issue 2.1

October 2014

Aiming for Excellence

LINKS is a school that is dedicated to providing our students with the skills and knowledge that will allow them to achieve excellence in all that they do.

Life as we know it is constantly evolving and our students must adapt and change on a daily basis if they are to stay ahead of the game. 90% of the world's knowledge has been developed over the past 50 years and there is a good chance the pace of learning will increase rather than decrease. The content learned on exam courses is insignificant in comparison to the skills developed to enable continuous and life-long learning. So why do we prepare students for examinations?

The O-Level examinations are a stepping stone to A-Levels; A-Levels are a stepping stone to a Bachelor's degree; the Bachelor's degree is a stepping stone to a Master's degree and the Master's degree is a stepping stone to a career but the reality is that most of what they learn at school, college or university will not be applied in their life-times; in their careers.

The ability to problem solve, to analyse, to communicate, to lead, to delegate, to initiate, to create, to debate, to investigate, to research, to collaborate, to learn, to select, to apply and more, will benefit them in their careers, in their social lives in their family lives and in their communities. These skills will enable them to pursue excellence in all that they do. Students will not always remember the content of their exam courses beyond school and university, unless it is specifically related to their chosen careers, but the skills they develop will be utilised on a daily basis. These they will never lose.

This begs the question as to why we do not forget about exams and concentrate solely on the skills. The answer though is simple. We prepare students for these exams because universities and employers have not yet come up with a better alternative for assessing academic achievement. If we do not prepare students for these exams they will not have access to the next level of education or the next step on the career path.

In fact it is worse than this. If we do not prepare students to achieve the **highest academic grades** they will not access these next steps. Why? Because everyone out there is following the same curriculum, has access to the same past exam papers, has access to the same short term memorisation techniques that all but guarantee high grades at O-Level and A-Level. When it comes to applying for the limited number of university places all candidates have the same academic profile. We therefore must and will dedicate considerable time and energy to ensuring our students can achieve these top grades.

The challenges and questions faced by students applying to university today and in the future are:

- a) Everyone has the same grade profile so how does a university select me over the competition?
- b) How do we make sure that when we are selected we succeed as independent critical thinkers capable of higher order thinking and capable of achieving success right from the start?
- c) How do we ensure that we are employable once we have our academic qualifications?, what is it that employers are looking for?

There are additional challenges brought about by the competitiveness and constant evolution of the global employment market but these three are big enough for now.



Having been on the admissions committee at a UK University, and a Higher Education adviser for A-Level students for over 18 years I can tell you that the following are considered:

1. A-Level results
2. O-Level results
3. Personal Statement – the ability of the students to sell themselves in writing
4. Breadth of Education – variety of academic and non-academic disciplines
5. The breadth of extra-curricular activities that specifically highlight a student's ability as a communicator, critical and creative thinker, collaborator, leader and innovator.
6. The reference from the school. Where the school expands on all in point 1 to 5.

In some instances an interview will be required where the student will be asked to demonstrate their academic level but more commonly their ability to think.

Failure to provide our students with the opportunity to develop all of the above will lead to failure.

The good news is that scientific and educational research has shown that providing the opportunities to develop these all important skills from an early age will enhance, and not hinder, academic success. Students who develop these important life-long skills are able to apply their knowledge in the examinations no matter the style of question and importantly, when at university are able to learn independently and earn success. Students who have just crammed at O and A Level find it very difficult in the first two years at university and do not often achieve their fullest potential.

Criticism over the past few years as to the ease by which students from all backgrounds are achieving A star and A grades has led to examination boards changing the style of questioning in the examinations, without warning. The purpose of the exam is to determine how well understanding of the content has been developed not how well a student has memorised particular answers to particular styles of questions asked in previous years. As a consequence our students must develop more than their short term memory if they are to get the grades required to take the next step in their journey.

At Links we are developing opportunities both in and out of the classroom that will enable them to enhance their academic grades and to shine above all their competitors who will also match their academic grades.

We are not a school that is sacrificing academic success in favour of more extra-curricular activities. We are a school that

is determined that all tools in our tool kit will be utilised to help our students achieve this success. We are looking to the O-Levels and we are focused. However, we are also focused on A-Levels, degrees and careers.

Students today have it a lot tougher than in our day, competition is greater; where O-Levels would have earned you an entry level position in a multinational company before you now need a Master's degree. Where you were previously only competing with people from your own area for a job, it is now a global market place. Where previously the job you were going to do was one that had been done the same way for decades, we now prepare students for jobs that do not even exist yet.

This is why research carried out with over 5000 companies world wide suggests that employers are focused on:

- a) Communication Skills
- b) Numeracy Skills
- c) IT Skills
- d) Collaborative Skills
- e) Critical Thinking Skills

as well as grades in school.

Success will not be easy, even at O-Level, but success can be earned through a great deal of hard work, from all interested parties. This hard work is more than just studying books, or websites, or past papers, it includes participating in so much more. Our message to our students is look at points 1 to 6 and a to e again, think about what is needed to be successful and do everything you can, in the time that you have.

Our message to parents is equally loud and clear; we are focused on success and we know what it takes to achieve it. Work with us and we will not only be aiming for excellence, but achieving it too!

GRADES DO MATTER

*but our students
will require so much more
to achieve excellence*

Richard Davidon
Head of School