



Re-founded 1555

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Ripon Grammar School

Engineering Specialism within a Grammar School



30th September 2016

Dear Parent,

These notes are intended to provide some information on the Sixth Form programme that your son or daughter has embarked upon. We hope that they will prove useful in underlining the key elements of these crucial years for your son or daughter, and provide useful information to you.

This is a busy time – daunting but exciting too, and it is time that will fly past. Our mantra for the sixth form years is that at the end of them, each student should feel that they can look back upon their time in the sixth form with no regrets.

Our sixth form promotes a firm ethos of high expectations – both in academic terms, and in the contribution of our sixth formers to the life of the school around them. We want them to be curious, passionate, wholehearted young men and women, who take responsibility for their progress. This is the point at which our students start to really stand on their own two feet – making decisions and choosing paths that will define their futures. These decisions and choices can only be made by them, but they are not alone, and as a school we will always give them the springboard they need to succeed, and the advice and support to make the decisions that are right for them.

The next two years will undoubtedly be the most critical in the education of our sixth form students. With a relatively new post-18 educational landscape, and an uncertain employment market beyond that, it has never been more important that our students use this time well, realise the importance of every opportunity that comes their way, and aspire to be the very best that they can be.

Alps target setting

To give our students a focus and direction, we use the ‘A level performance system’ (Alps) of target grades. This is a process built upon a vast database of results, which provides a profile of what a student is capable of achieving at AS and A level, based upon their average GCSE score. The targets suggested are minimum projected targets, and many students will aim and achieve higher grades than those suggested by the Alps system.

Each subject area will negotiate a target grade with each student, informed by the Alps profile and by the student’s own aspirations. This is the grade which the student is then aiming towards in each piece of work during the year.

We have emphasised to the students that the Alps target grade is not a guarantee, and the data from our own school last year shows that students with the same GCSE points profile can have widely differing rates of success at the end of the course. How the student uses their time, the focus and commitment that they show, and their independent study skills and organisation are critical to their

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success. It is perhaps also worth pointing out that as a school we are unable to offer the opportunity to resit the lower sixth year, and because of the greater academic challenge of A2 courses compared with AS courses in what is a very fast-paced and intense environment, that **it is not usually practical for a student to continue to an A2 course with grades lower than a D.** Where students have missed these grades, we will speak with student and parents to seek the best way forward for the individual, and to offer whatever pastoral, careers and academic guidance may be needed. With this in mind, it is crucial that each student makes the very most of their ability, and the opportunities that sixth form study offers them.

To achieve success: -

- **Aim high, and be fully committed to reaching your target.**
- **Be organised – with work, note-making and revision.**
- **Use your time wisely (you should be doing a minimum of 4 hours study per subject per week in addition to lesson time.)**
- **Don't miss school time unless it is absolutely unavoidable.**
- **Make sure that social life doesn't impact negatively upon school life – we would strongly recommend that big celebratory events are scheduled for weekends, not school nights!**
- **Ask for help whenever, and as soon as, you need it. We are here for you.**
- **Don't compete with those around you – focus on your own goals.**
- **Make sure that you have a life beyond your studies!**

Paid employment

The Alps data shows that paid work can often be beneficial, giving students a break from school, a chance to learn and exercise a range of new skills, and some financial independence. Where students undertake paid employment for up to 10 hours a week, there can actually be a statistical improvement in their grades. However when the working hours exceed 10 per week, the same data shows a massive and abrupt decline in grade scores.

Pressure and Time Management

It is beyond doubt that the next two years are going to prove incredibly busy for students, especially at key points before mocks and examinations, and when they are making post-18 choices.

Because students will undoubtedly encounter some pressure, parents, students and school need to be aware of the potential for stress to develop at these times, and to be able to respond as needed. There has already been, and there will continue to be, a focus upon time-management and coping strategies as part of the sixth form pastoral programme throughout the year.

For those students who feel that they are not coping well with the many demands upon them, the key is to recognise that stress is not a weakness, nor something to be handled alone. Talk about how you

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are feeling, whether at home, with friends, or with tutors, teachers or the sixth form team at school. Organisation is important too – since being on top of work, events and deadlines is a big factor in the management of pressure, and avoiding stress.

Careers and post-18 choices

Although it feels very early, post-18 choices will be made in the next 18 months, and the sheer range of options, as well as the financial ramifications of these choices makes it important to start thinking and planning early.

Our starting point is that:

- There is no ‘one-size fits all’ solution; every student will have a different set of priorities and aspirations, and will follow an individual route into the world of employment.
- Every student should aspire as highly as they can, and should take an open-minded approach to all the options available, before narrowing down their choices, and making the decisions that are right for them. (Concerns over student finance should not immediately rule-out an option, until the options have been explored and understood.)
- These life decisions cannot be made for the student by the school, but we will give them every support and help in discovering and considering all the options available, and in preparing them to make these decisions.

There is a huge range of different possibilities, from moving straight into employment via an apprenticeship or other employment-training scheme, to vocational training, foundation degrees, university courses in Ireland, Europe or America, to taking a gap year. Our careers programme will provide information on all of these areas over the coming months.

Careers Department – Mrs Wilson and Mrs Locke

Our careers advisors, Mrs Wilson and Mrs Locke will be working with all students over the next two years to consider their options, and to explore the routes that are most suited to them. **They are also very happy to meet with parents to discuss advice and guidance if that is helpful. They can be contacted through the school switchboard on extn 229 or email Mrs Wilson on wilsonf@ripogrammar.co.uk or Mrs Locke on lockej@ripogrammar.co.uk**

The careers website www.ripogrammar.co.uk/careers contains sections on higher education, school leaver training schemes, gap years, studying abroad etc, as well as a range of useful links to other sources, including information on student finance through the government website www.gov.uk/studentfinance, and a link to ‘*Martin Lewis’s Money Saving Expert Guide to Student Finance.*’ (Parents wanting to learn more about this subject may also find useful a youtube clip labelled: ‘Martin Lewis student finance 2012’.)

The careers notices, advertising many excellent external opportunities for students to add to their skills and experience and research different courses or careers, are circulated through form tutors, displayed on the careers noticeboards and **emailed to all 6th form students** every month.

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The school's programme for careers and post-18 choices is already underway, with work encouraging students to identify their current skill-sets, and to consider what they can do to add to these in the months ahead.

- All lower students will have the opportunity for a practice interview in the last few weeks of this term, conducted by external interviewers and providing oral and written feedback to help them develop their interview skills. They are currently preparing CVs and covering letters in preparation for this.
- During this term students will also be introduced to the process of career planning and encouraged to make individual careers guidance appointments where appropriate.
- In early January we will provide a session for the lower sixth where former students who have followed a wide variety of routes will be available to talk about their experience, and the practicalities they have encountered. There will also be presentations on university study, and on alternative routes beyond school.
- On the 8th March 2017 there will be a **higher education evening** for parents and students, which will include presentations from universities on student finance and university choices.
- Alongside this there will be further sessions on alternative routes into employment, and on gap-years, as well as a Careers Fair later in the year with a wide range of companies and employers in school to speak with students and to offer guidance and advice.
- In response to student feedback, we will also be offering sessions exploring the different routes opened up by sciences and by arts courses, as well as hearing from a range of further education and training organisations, and discussing gap year advice.
- There will be sessions set up for those needing to take university admissions tests such as the UKCAT and LNAT, as well as advice for those seeking a career in teaching.
- In the summer term 2017, all students will attend the UCAS convention in Leeds, and the Newcastle and Northumbria university open days.
- There will also be residential trips to Oxford and Cambridge for those interested in applying to these universities.
- In July there will be a presentation to the lower sixth form on writing strong personal statements – and time set aside for all students to work on these.
- There will also be a week set aside for students to gain work-experience in July 2017 (10th-14th).
- There will be further guidance on applications to university and employers, and mock interviews for all students.

If any parents feel that they would be willing to be involved in our careers process – either through acting as mock interviewers, or through our careers club or mini presentations to students on career areas, our careers staff would be delighted to discuss this with them. They can be contacted through the school switchboard on extn 229 or email Mrs Locke on lockej@ripogrammar.co.uk.

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Work Experience

Whether applying for university courses, or seeking alternative routes into employment, **relevant work-experience is increasingly becoming a key factor in successful applications, and this is something which many universities state should be continuing right through the degree course.**

Additionally, certain very competitive courses such as medicine and veterinary medicine place particular emphasis upon a range of such practical experience.

As part of our sixth form careers programme, we set aside a week in early July (10th-14th July 2017) when we expect all lower sixth formers to arrange work-experience placements for themselves.

Since we are in direct competition for placements with Harrogate schools, and given the need to ensure insurance and health and safety cover for all those taking part, it is critical that students start making these arrangements as early as possible, confirming the placement and passing details on to Mr Walker when agreed.

Communication

There are a wide range of members of staff available to offer support, advice and encouragement – from form tutors and the sixth form pastoral team, to subject teachers, Mrs Wilson and the Careers office, Heads of Department, and of course the Headmaster and senior leadership team.

All of these will play some part in the monitoring and support of every student, and all are very happy to speak with parents and students at any stage.

As a sixth-form, we value feedback and communication from our students and parents. There will be a series of surveys during the next two years where we will ask for observations on various aspects of sixth-form life, (starting with a transition questionnaire later this half-term). Please understand that we do take these extremely seriously, and that our planning is in significant part shaped by these views.

We will be in touch with parents regularly over the next two years to update them on the progress of their son or daughter.

- There are three reporting points during each year of the sixth form (in October, December and March), each accompanied by a letter updating parents on the key areas of sixth-form focus at that stage.
- There is a review of each lower sixth former's progress in November, involving discussion between tutors, subject teachers and sixth form team. Any concerns arising will be communicated to parents.
- A similar review for selected student takes place at the start of the Autumn term in the upper sixth, to reflect on AS level results.
- There is a lower sixth parents' evening on the 7th November to meet with subject teachers, and a similar event for the upper sixth.
- There is a Higher Education evening in March 2017 for parents and students, when speakers from universities will talk about the process of choosing a university, and about student finance arrangements. Mrs Wilson and Mrs Locke will also be available to meet with parents.

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- Finally there will be a celebration evening at the very end of the upper sixth, to celebrate the success of the students, and to wish them farewell.

Overall then, there are 11 points of formal contact between school and home over the two years of sixth form, in addition to any other communications that may take place. Please rest assured that we will be monitoring the progress of each student very closely, and keeping parents informed at every stage, and do get in touch with the form tutor if you have any concerns.

For information, the lower sixth form tutors are as follows:

L6A – Mr Seymour and Miss Bennett

L6B – Mr Demir

L6C – Miss Sutcliffe

L6D – Miss Green

L6E – Mr Chamberlain

L6F – Mr MacMillan

L6G –Mrs Schofield and Mr Weston

Yours faithfully

Mr T Fell
(Head of Sixth Form)
fellt@ripogrammar.co.uk

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