Head of School End of Term Update
Year 11 – March 2024

Dear Year 11 Community,

This week's communication comes to you in a different format with more in depth information and guidance on a number of areas.

I wanted to share with you some celebrations, key information and updates for the next term.

Please see below for more information, and please prepare that this is a significantly longer update than usual!

Half Term Revision Sessions

We are hosting half term revision sessions for Year 11 students to come in and revise with their teachers at UTC Reading.

Sessions are running on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday across both weeks of half term. Separate details have been sent to students and parents from Richa Pareek.

Supporting learning and revision

As we approach the GCSE exam season for our year 11 students, we asked Maximise your potential, a company specialising in study skills, to run a webinar to help parents support their children in the run up to and through the exams.

We know that not everyone could attend so wanted to share the headlines, key resources and main tips from Jeremy's session. We have run sessions with Jeremy many times in some of our schools and feedback from the students has always been very positive, so we hope you find this useful.

Context

There might not be many school days left before the exams start, but the biggest changeable factor that can impact on your children's grades now is you. They won't necessarily tell you this, but surveys constantly report that you, whether you are a parent, stepparent, carer, grandparent or someone close in their support network, are their biggest motivators, and cheerleaders. They don't need you to be the experts in their subjects, but they need your support, advice and comfort - it makes a huge difference.

What you can do to help

There are two big categories of support you can give your children in the run up to their exams: pastoral and educational. Pastoral care is the practical and emotional support you give, including ensuring they:

- Stay hydrated: a dry roof of the mouth means they are 2% dehydrated, which doesn't sound like much but means a 20% loss in ability to focus. Make sure they take water into every exam, and drink plenty while revising.
- Exercise: children should take a break every 30 minutes or so to move and ideally get some fresh air. This is proven to improve concentration and memory, vital for revising.
- Eat well: breakfast in particular is important before exams but they should eat a balanced diet throughout to aid concentration and mental alertness, avoiding too much sugar and caffeine.
- Get enough sleep: the NHS recommends 8-9 hours minimum per night for teenagers and avoiding devices such as phones and laptops for at least one hour before bed. If possible, keep devices out of bedrooms to remove temptation.
- Maintain a positive mindset: setbacks are inevitable, but it is crucial that students can accept and learn from these. If they're struggling with a topic, or don't score as well as they want to in a past paper, practicing and revising this area is much more important than the areas they are confident in.
- Revise in a quiet, calm place with no music. Listening to music while they revise is proven to negatively impact the ability to memorise and recall, and of course makes the environment less like the exam.
- Practice resilience: they are very likely to have difficult moments in the next few weeks, and maybe even in the exams themselves. Their ability to pause, think, regroup and start again will help them get more marks.

A lot of these things can seem obvious, but they all add up to making a big difference to your child's ability to concentrate, memorise and recall information.

From an educational perspective, there are two big things you can do.

Firstly, help them revise effectively. This means:

- Making a revision plan that takes account of days out, football matches and other social plans, focuses more time on their weaker areas and is specific to a part of the subject, so not just 'English' but 'Macbeth' or even better an aspect of Macbeth.
- Using resources such as GCSE Pod, Seneca learning and Quizlet. The second two of these are free (some content on Seneca is paid for but most is free) and cover all GCSE topics. There are also some good channels on YouTube including Dr Frost for maths, Free Science Lessons, and Stacey Reay for English (some content may be paid for but again most is free).
- Doing past papers, ideally timed, as this is the best way to learn the biggest lesson in taking exams: to read the question properly and ensure they understand what it is asking them to do. More information on this is below.
- Revising using active recall techniques. This includes mind maps (especially those in colour as it really helps recall), but also creating flashcards or posters with key information. It can aid recall by 20% over reading something four times.
- Continuing to read, preferably around the subjects they are studying, but any reading that broadens their vocabulary, outlook and comprehension improves their grades.
- Try having a whiteboard to hand: popular with A Level students, these can be used for writing to do lists, formulae, key vocabulary and of course wiped clean and used again.

Secondly, encouraging them to get the most out of their subject experts, their teachers. Engage with the lessons they have left, attend the revision sessions and ask questions if they are not sure.

The number one way to lose marks

Jeremy shared videos from examiners and teachers in a number of subjects in the webinar, and this is their biggest tip: read the question properly and ensure they understand what it is asking them to do.

This is harder that it seems; if we believe we already know what we're being asked to do, our brains do not take in new information, especially when we are in a hurry or in the pressurised situation of an exam.

Exam boards publish lists of the 'command' words that students must understand and be clear on the difference between (e.g. 'evaluate' rather than 'describe'). Students can print these out and stick them up where they revise, checking they properly understand what each word is asking them to do.

In addition, exam boards also publish their specifications and examiners reports for each subject. Teachers can share the codes for these, and they really help students

understand how to get the extra single marks here and there that can add up to a whole grade or more.

And finally…

All Year 11 students have access to the GCSE Pod platform which is paid for by UTC Reading. This enables them to access thousands of revision videos, revision notes and practice questions to support their learning.

We strongly encourage all Year 11 students to be making the most of this resource to support their progress.

Parents can access a whole host of resources and guidance on how to support your child by visiting the GCSE Pod parent page here: Parent Resources - GCSEPod

There are also live webinars available regularly for students and parents to attend to learn how to make the most of this fantastic resource.

For help with GCSE Pod in school please speak to Jennie Thomson or Richa Pareek.

Respectful Behaviours

This week we have had fantastic celebration events with our students to celebrate their achievements this term and their respectful behaviours.

It has been fantastic to see that students are proud of their achievements!

To celebrate some of these successes I wanted to share with you that Year 10 students have now collected just under 10,000 positive points since September and are competing in overall attendance figures.

Across our tutor groups the running totals stand at:

Tutor group	Total positive points
11 Tutor 1	1078
11 Tutor 2	874
11 Tutor 3	955
11 Tutor 4	1264

As you can see – 11 tutor 4 are pulling ahead in behaviour points and I am looking forward to seeing how the end of year totals look!

Speak Up and Speak Out with Whisper

PROBLEM?
Whisper it!

If you have a problem or concern in school or at home, you can report it to a member of staff anonymously.

To: 07860 021 323

UTC3 [+ your message]
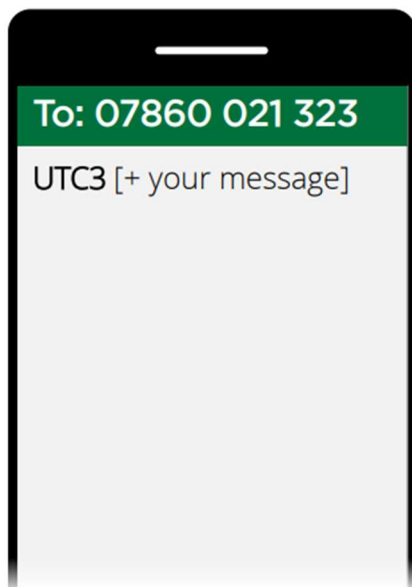
When To Report...

You or a friend are being bullied

You are concerned for
a student's welfare

A student, member of staff, or parent
has behaved inappropriately

You need to talk to someone
about a problem

Suggestion for changes or
improvements in school

Report via SMS or visit:

https://swgfl.org.uk/whisper/utc3/

I am pleased to share that we continue to have great usage of the Whisper Button and suggestion boxes to support students being able to Speak Up and Speak Out about any issues they are facing.

We have had 80 reports using Whisper and our average response time is now at 13 hours which is something we are really proud of in being able to respond to our students quickly, even over weekends, evenings and holidays.

Safeguarding Contacts over the Easter Holidays

UTC Reading is closed from 28th March to 16th April 2024. Whilst there are revision sessions happening in the building, students are able to speak to a member of the safeguarding team or any member of staff.

However, outside of these hours If you have any concerns for the welfare of a child over the holiday period, the safeguarding team at UTC Reading are on holiday and will be unavailable to respond to phone calls or emails.

Please see details below of local safeguarding contacts if you require support or advice over the holiday period

Brighter Futures for Children (Reading): Call 0118 937 3641 or email cspoa@brighterfuturesforchildren.org

Wokingham Children's Services: Call 0118 908 8002 or email triage@wokingham.gov.uk

Bracknell Children's Services: Call 01344 352005 or e-mail MASH@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

West Berkshire Children's Services: Call 01635 503090 or email child@westberks.gov.uk

NSPCC: call 0808 800 5000 or email help@NSPCC.org.uk

Child line: Call 0800 11 11

Samaritans: Call 116 123 or text SHOUT to 85258

Return to UTC Reading after Easter

All students return to UTC Reading on Tuesday 16th April to their full timetable.

I will be having a really clear focus on dress code and classroom expectations when we return so I wanted to remind our community of the expectations around this.

You can find our dress code here: https://www.alet.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2023/11/2022-2023-Student-Dress-Code.269125211.pdf

You can find our behaviour procedure here: https://www.alet.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2024/02/GOV017.2_Behaviour-Procedure-UTC-Reading-Jan-24.pdf

Fantastic news and achievements

UTC Reading's A Level Computer Science students working on a program to run scientific experiments from space have achieved Flight Status in a Europe-wide competition – meaning their program will run on Astro Pis installed on the International Space Station (ISS) in April!

The students – Fred, Oviya and Tanisha – are participating in this year's Astro Pi Mission Space Lab, which is run by the Raspberry Pi Foundation and the European Space Agency. They set a challenge every year for students in schools across Europe to design a program that can be run using Python programming language on a space-adapted Raspberry Pi computer inside the International Space Station.

This year's challenge was the design a program that could measure the speed of the space station specifically using sensors on the Raspberry Pi.

Fred, Oviya and Tanisha had their programs accepted for Flight Status and their programs will be run on the ISS in April. The data collected will be transmitted back to the students for further evaluation.

David McArthur, *Teacher of Computer Science at the school* said: "It's a really challenging project … using 'Google' to calculate the speed of the ISS is pretty simple. Using a camera, an accelerometer and the IMU sensors on the Pi …is something completely different and really challenges the students' creativity and technical knowledge."

One of the participating students, Fred Padgham, explains the science: "My project involves using the camera to capture pictures of Earth from space at regular intervals, and, employing Computer Vision techniques, detecting significant features within the photos. By filtering and comparing these features across pairs of images, I am able to identify the same features on different photos, enabling me to determine the distance between them. Combining this distance with the amount of time elapsed between captures allowed me to calculate the linear velocity.

"Overall, it has been really fun to work on, especially because exploring space distance measurements and filtering methods were great rabbit holes to delve into," he said.

This is the second time UTC Reading students have made it through to the Flight Status phase of the competition in the last three years. In 2022/23 about 1,800 teams took part with 290 getting through to the Flight Status phase.

Good luck, space cadets, we will be eagerly awaiting progress reports from here on Earth!

A student who is making the most of all the opportunities UTC Reading can offer is marking another achievement, having become a certified Careers Ambassador for the school.

Faris Kadeb, who is studying Maths, Physics and Engineering, is an active member of the school community, where he is Student Director of Extra Curricular, and also Staff Sergeant for the school-run Combined Cadet Forces.

The Year 12 student has recently set up a series of events to benefit his classmates called Career Insight Talks, in which he has invited employers in to talk to the students about what careers in their sectors look like and how to get into them. So far Biology students have met representatives from the NHS and Engineering students have spoken with specialist chemicals company Infineum.

Faris' most recent achievement has seen him working independently towards his Careers Ambassador accreditation with Springpod, a careers platform for students. As part of the programme, Faris learnt about the Gatsby Benchmarks (a framework for schools to assess the development of their pupils in employability skills). He also undertook a number of event planning tasks, looked at leadership and teamwork, efficient writing techniques, effective feedback and finished up by interviewing Education Development Trust careers adviser Selina Sparkles and running a LinkedIn workshop for Year 12.

Stephanie Mitchell, Assistant Principal and Head of Careers, said:

"Faris now understands the 'why' behind the careers programme at UTC Reading and is equipped with the right skills to be able to excel in his role as Student Director of Extra Curricular. We look forward to working with him."

Faris said:
"I've always had a good relationship with my teachers, especially the careers team as I work closely with them to run events, however this course made me realise how much actually happens behind the scenes and it's not as simple as it looks!"

He is happy he took the course and says he would recommend it:
"I would definitely recommend this course to anyone who is looking to become a careers ambassador as it's helped me greatly. Setting up and running the first Career Insight Talk was really good for me, as was running the LinkedIn workshop. A lot of the things I do here at UTC I wouldn't be able to do elsewhere and it's massively helped me grow as a person, make really good industry links and develop skills I wouldn't have otherwise."

Fond Farewells and Happy Hello

As this term comes to a close, we unfortunately say goodbye to some members of our team.

Andy Ramdeen (Director of Science) leaves us to move on to a new opportunity. Andy has worked with us at UTC Reading since 2020 and as you will be aware has held a number of roles here at UTC including being a huge part of the Senior Leadership Team in our journey immediately after our OFSTED inspection. I would like to thank Andy for all of his efforts and contributions to UTC Reading and we are very sorry to see him leave, but wish him the best of luck in his new endeavours.

Edit Varga (A Level Mathematics teacher) leaves us to move onto a new opportunity in a new school. Edit has worked with us since 2018 and leaves us on an extremely high note this week having been voted the Teacher of the term by our student body. Edit has been pivotal in the success of many of our maths students and collectively from the staff and student body we thank Edit for everything she has done to help our students achieve wonderful things in Maths. I wish Edit the best of luck in her new school and her future career.

Louis George-Vaughan (Teacher of Engineering) leaves us this week to move into a role within industry. Louis has been with us for the past two years as a teacher of engineering and plays a huge role in our Combined Cadet Force. I would like to thank Louis for his dedication and effort to the CCF and for the support he has provided to our students in his time at UTC Reading and I wish him good luck in his future.

There are timetable changes happening over the Easter break to account for the changes in staffing and students who are impacted will receive a new timetable on their outlook account before Monday 15th April.

Over the Easter break we say a warm welcome to **Darryl** who is joining us in the Computing team to support delivery of programming and the learning content for students. Darryl started with us this week and has been learning the ropes of UTC Reading, ready to really hit the ground running after the Easter break.

A final note

I wanted to take the opportunity to thank all members of our community for their support at UTC Reading in helping us drive forwards the standards and maintaining high expectations.

The school has made incredible improvements over the last year and I am really proud of our students and how they have risen to the challenge to be a part of this change.

I am extremely proud to be the Head of School for a community who strives to be excellent and achieve fantastic future destinations that everyone can be proud of.

I wish everyone a fantastic break, a very happy Easter to those who celebrate, and happy Eid to those who celebrate.

Hoping that the whole community has chance to pause, rest and reflect over the next two weeks and comes back to UTC Reading feeling refreshed and ready for the final term of this academic year.

Kind regards

J.A.Thomson

Jennie Thomson

Head of School