

Summer 2016 Revisited

My 43rd Vacational Studies summer was my most enjoyable. It is very easy to say this as every summer is more enjoyable than the last. A combination of experience, developments on the Course and seeing returnees hone their skills ensures that this will happen each year. 2016 saw our highest ever percentage of returnees. 70% were back for more. What a tribute to the staff and participants on the 2015 Course. As the internet is rapidly replacing the printed word, there is a strange duopoly of permanence and impermanence. While what is on the web tends to remain there forever, it cannot be easily found. The 'news-sheet' part of the printed brochure used to provide a record of what happened each summer and these are preserved in my own Vacational Studies archives and in the 'History' section on the website. If I am not careful, however, these annual revisitations will replace each other on the web. So I am starting to store them. 2015 is [here](#).

Tom Goodwin was back as Course Manager. This was his ninth year with us. He has just announced his engagement to Veronica Martins who was a student and then staff member. This will by no means be the first Vacational Studies marriage. One way or another, young people and their parents find they can get more from a Vacational Studies summer than they can ever have imagined. Lives can be changed.

On the teaching side in 2016 were Bernardo Savill back for his seventh year; Thomas Olszewski (also i/c IT) for his sixth; Summer Wood for her fourth; James Hearsey and Neil Caplin for their third; Kelly McEwan, Kathrin Weers and Rebecca Berchtold for their second. Newcomers were Thomas Fenton, Rhodri Stratton and Leonie Crowley.

Joe Wallis was back for his eleventh as Academic Manager with Chloe Huelamo back for her tenth as Senior Teacher. Becky Cadman was back as Office Manager for her fifth year in various incarnations. Tanya Fernández Fernández was back for her eleventh summer as Matron. As Senior Sports/Social Organiser was James Guest back for his fifth summer having worked his way up from UK Rep. In charge of Hawtreys was Tom Dell in his fifth year. In charge of Douai-Elstree was Pedro Mol also in his fifth year. In charge of Mary Hare was James Steel in his fourth year. Assistants were Darcey Daniels (Hawtreys) in his second year and Jaime Blasco (Cheam) in his fifth.

Apprentices were Emma Vroom, Joan Carbonell and Benedict Smith (9 July–7 August); Luca Parisi (9-24 July) and David Garcia Garcia, Cristina Percival and Madalena Tavares (24 July–7 August).

Prefects were Camilla Gottardi, Carlotta Gottardi, Thomas Lacquet, Maxime Mengue, Pablo Mol, Tristan Mühlbauer and Helen Veit. Exceptionally, Tristan was appointed after the start of the Course when he explained why Prefectship had not been requested at the time of application and following his appearance in Board Meetings. All of them knew exactly why they were with us, all did well in the classrooms and in the extra-curricular programme, enjoyed being Prefects and felt the taste of responsibility had been good for them. The Testimonials I am able to write if asked will also assist them. The number was rather higher than I had envisaged, so there was a 'justify your existence' meeting after a few days. All justified their existence.

The House Captains' meeting gave them the chance to justify their existence as a House Captain after four days with James giving his opinion on how well the job was being done. Several were reinforced in their opinion that they were doing well. Two accepted our opinion that a change was

needed. House Captains after this meeting were: Cheam; Leonor Silva and Eduardo Temporale; Douai-Elstree: Alex Aparicio and Paddy Douglass; Hawtreys: David Pons and Charline Lacquet; Mary Hare: Celestine Koole and Marina Antonetto.

Mentors this year were led by Angel Sanchez-Cantalejo Hevia as Head Mentor. He scheduled and chaired the Mentors' Meetings. Mentors were Alexander Beschi, Isabel González-Fierro Piñero, Lea Juricic, Katrin Lacquet, Benedetta Magni, Sofia Martínez-Villaseñor Piñero, Lars Mucklejohn, Rutger van der Peijl, Gustav Persson, Elinor Tandberg, Adriana Tur Marí and Alfonso Vandekeybus. So effective has Angel been in his role as Head Mentor that he gave me the idea that our young people should chair their own meetings. This is why the Student Council (that did not happen this year as Tom and I were so busy) will now be student-led with Councillor positions applied for in the same way that Mentor posts have been. It will be up to the Head Councillor to arrange and chair meetings, minute them and also minute the results.

No doubt catering will be one of the topics for the Student Council to get their teeth into. Catering was once again in the capable hands of Mary Hare led by Paul Leverton. In charge of Housekeeping was the superb Pam Swift. David Gibson was our link with the maintenance.

The link with Monaco Arts et Danses and the MAD programme started in 2015 resulted in visits from Fabris Kinsch and Clarisse Sesal (accompanied by her son, Benjamin) who taught a varied programme of dance and fitness in their different ways.

We had 'Ambassadors' for the first time this year. My thinking was that, as our young visitors are surrounded by people from countries they often know little about, let alone where these countries are on the map, they should have the chance to discover more. The Ambassadors were chosen for their ability to communicate in English, their knowledge of their own country and their willingness to talk about where they are from. We learned about Quebec from Émilie Hellman, France from Jean de Gourcuff, Germany from Jasper Stauf, the Balearic Islands from Angel Sanchez-Cantalejo Hevia and the Netherlands from Rutger van der Peijl. In most cases this worked well, in some cases brilliantly and the concept will be repeated. The two visits we had from the National Citizen Service (a UK Government initiative to give 16 year-old Britons the chance to undertake various tasks) highlighted the value of giving different cultures the opportunity to find out about each other. The groups who came to us were charged with finding out about foreigners. With some guidance on what questions to ask, they found they discovered more than they imagined they would.

The 'An audience with...' was started in 2015 and there several volunteers this time. James Steel, Tom Dell and James Guest spoke movingly about how the experience of being in charge that Vocational Studies gave them has been helpful in their lives. James was quite sure that he would not have been offered the legal position he will be going onto after the summer had he not been to describe all that he had done with us starting from his UK Rep days. Tanya Fernandez Fernandez and Pedro Mol spoke about how they had risen through the ranks. Their talk was illuminated by photos from their earlier days. Will Tremelling and Paddy Douglas spoke about the impact being a UK Rep had on them. Those who did not speak and who achieved success were invited to address the school at the final dinner. Among them were Eduardo Temporale who was awarded the prize for Academic Excellence, Émilie Hellman who was awarded the prize for English Speaking and Louise Gogstad who achieved a Level 10 in the Trinity GESE Examination with a remarkable five 'A' grades in the various sections.

As is clear from the way the Course is structured now, I think that having positions of responsibility and speaking in public are great ways for young people to develop their potential. Those who opt for positions of responsibility are now obliged to justify their existence and the staff then give their opinion on how the responsibility is exercised. Positions of responsibility can be removed and reallocated depending on performance. While there are easier ways of spending the summer holidays, I doubt if there are any that are more developmental.

The structure of the Course is clear with a progressive potential rise from House Captain to Prefect to Apprentice to Staff with other positions available in between which may facilitate the rise. The number of those wishing to achieve the highest rung of the ladder is greater than the space on that rung, so I am happy to be spoiled for choice.

I came to know all our young people via the board meetings and by sitting with them at meals. Some were easier to get to know than others. Without exception, however, all were remarkable in one way or another. I tried to encourage them to get to each other at a level deeper than casual acquaintance which, most discovered, is entirely possible over a four-week period. Some of the 'Lite' visitors found that it is tantalisingly harder to achieve this in a shorter period. I am privileged to come into contact with some of the most interesting people and the sharpest minds in the world. Many of these are on the Vacational Studies Facebook page and the Linked-In Alumni page. I hope that the freshly invigorated Vacational Studies Foundation will enable this richness of talent to be directed towards helping to develop those who could not possibly come to us in the usual way.

I noticed a change in the theme of one of the class videos. In the past, 'I' have been murdered to take over Vacational Studies. This time, my retirement was in the storyline. Just as those who come to me as youngsters remain frozen in time no matter how old they become, I shall endeavour to remain perpetually youthful.

More important than my words are the words of those who have experienced what I have planned for them. Rather than be embarrassed by the praise - which is, of course, more for the staff than for me - I have included these in a separate page: ['Days I'll remember All My Life'](#).

My thanks to all those who have entrusted me with what is most precious to them.