

Biographical note

Ian Mucklejohn - who, as the Director, co-ordinates the Schools - was born in London. He is a graduate of the University of London with an Honours Degree in English Language and Literature, is an Associate of the College of Preceptors and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. He has had many years experience in teaching. He is a published writer. He is the founder of Vacational Studies and has three eight year-old sons of his own.

Vacational Studies

Pepys' Oak, Tydehams, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 6JT, England

Telephone

National 01635 523333

International +44 1635 523333

Telephone (mobile)

National 07717 007007

International +44 7717 007007

Fax

National 01635 523999

International +44 1635 523999

E-Mail

vacstuds@vacstuds.com

Web Site

<http://www.vacstuds.com>

Skype

vacstuds

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"My horizons have been broadened, my confidence has been boosted and I know that I will never forget the past twenty-eight days"



Residential
English
Language
Courses
11-17 Years

summer
2009

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Studies®

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Accredited by the
BRITISH
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"She wondered, how could it be that 4 weeks passed so fast"



Residential English language courses

Vacational Studies Courses have been running for 36 years. We have tried in this time to develop an enjoyable balance between 'vacation' and 'study'. Here is our programme for Summer 2009.

the courses

Accredited by the British Council

Vacational Studies is 'Accredited by The British Council' and is a member of English UK – formerly ARELS (The Association of Recognised English Language Services) – a professional body, membership of which is granted only after thorough inspection by The British Council and re-inspection every four years. We were last inspected in 2007 and are Accredited until March 2012.

About this brochure

This is an Information Book. The first part (this section) gives you a factual overview of the work we do, so you can decide if we are right for your youngster. The second part ('News 2008-2009') is written in a different style so you have an idea of my personality which necessarily influences the atmosphere on the Courses. It gives a more detailed rationale of the 2009 Courses and what has shaped them, so you and your son or daughter will be fully informed and can prepare for the experience. If your application is accepted, both sections are essential reading. In particular, 'Unrealisable Expectations' in the second section deals with fundamental issues and must be read.

What we try to do

Vacational Studies tries to create a totally international Course with students from as many different countries as possible, including Britain. We avoid accepting a large number of students from any particular country. In this way we try to ensure that English is the main medium of communication among the students. By using English not just as a school subject but as a living language, we hope our students will realise better its importance and value. Our students want to use English to make friends. This element of self-motivation greatly increases their fluency.

The emphasis on the practical use of English is combined with a full sports, entertainment and excursion programme helping young people to learn 'English internationally'. But it is more than this...

Residence

The Courses are all fully residential. Students eat, sleep and receive classes in the Schools.

The students

We accept boys and girls – near-beginners, intermediate and more advanced students – aged 11 to 17.

The Courses are sports-orientated and encourage good social development in a community situation.

Pre-Vacational Studies

We accept boys and girls – from beginners upwards – aged 7 to 10. This course is available at Howard House at The Mary Hare School and is described in the insert.

Students who will benefit

Please make sure that our Course is suitable for your child and that he/she wants to come. Those who will benefit and we enjoy having with us will be internationally-minded, interested in English, outgoing, gregarious and able to function independently. They will also be willing to accept the constraints of community living. We consider it so important that our standards and expectations are understood and accepted that we ask parents to confirm that they and their children have read the rules and that they agree to abide by them. A slip sent with the rules is provided for this purpose.

How they will benefit

We hope that our students will learn a great deal of English, make good friendships and develop a positive international feeling. As well as formal study, we concentrate on the holiday aspect of the Course. While we try to involve students in all activities, we naturally respect the wishes of those who like to read quietly or be with friends. Over the years, we have built up an excellent reputation with parents and young people all over the world. Many boys and girls spend several summers with us renewing old friendships and making new ones. Students from the '70s and '80s are now sending their children. Most students come to us on personal recommendation. The numbers on the Courses are deliberately kept quite small so that the staff can get to know everybody and treat each young person as an individual.

Choice of Course

The Courses have the same format. The only differences are location and dates. 2009 dates are:-

Mary Hare	5 July - 2 August 2009	(4 weeks)
Cheam	11 July - 8 August 2009	(4 weeks)



The Schools and surroundings

For 2009 we have Courses at two Schools near Newbury – The Mary Hare School and Cheam School. Newbury is a small country town in a pleasant part of southern England in the Berkshire Downs. It is 70km west of London and 45km south of Oxford. The Schools we use are among the best in the area.



the schools

The Mary Hare School

The Mary Hare School is a campus comprising several buildings that we have used since 1982. Various architectural styles are represented. There are formal gardens and woodland and extensive grounds which include several playing fields, a range of tennis courts, a gymnasium and a large indoor swimming pool.

Cheam School

Cheam School is a late nineteenth century mansion that we have used since 1975. A particular feature is the sunken formal garden. The School's large grounds with playing fields, lawns and woods, back onto Watership Down. There is a sports hall/gymnasium and a range of tennis courts. It has an open-air swimming pool.



The Mary Hare School



Cheam School



the programme

The teaching

We use Task-Based Learning. The emphasis in lessons is to help develop the students' speaking, listening, reading and writing skills through a topic and task-based approach. This involves working with students on a variety of activities centred on a particular topic and helping them with the language needed to complete the activities. In 2009 part of the teaching programme will be to create a film script; use the script as a basis for language-study; film the script; edit the film; download the film onto YouTube accessible via our Facebook page. The students will use English as a working language. We try to give students materials and activities that are different from those in their own countries. Oral and written English are taught and there is an emphasis on conversation practice. A prize is awarded on each Course for academic excellence.

A staff of professional teachers with experience of the teaching of English, give 4 lessons, each of 45 minutes, every day except Sunday and excursion days = 15 hours per week. In addition, there is a 30 minute 'homework' period each afternoon. Classes are graded according to age and ability in English. Students are placed first in an 'assessment group' and complete a range of oral and written tasks, including a formal placement test. The combined results of these tasks together with the teacher's opinion eventually determine placement in a class. Class placements are constantly reviewed and students may be moved to more or less advanced classes, according to their performance. The teacher:student ratio is approximately 1:12. Maximum class size is 16. We provide all books and teaching materials. Course books used include 'Cutting Edge', 'Over to You', 'Reward', 'Matters', 'Energy 2', 'Smart' and 'Total English'.

A Certificate of Attendance is sent at the end of the Course. This Certificate is accepted in some countries as justification for a state bursary. For example, the Italian Ministry of Education has decreed that a Certificate issued by a British Council Accredited School counts towards the Italian School Leaving Certificate. In Monaco, a bursary can be applied for.

Sports

Sport is an important part of the Course. Our Sports/Social Organiser arranges a regular programme including football, basketball, volleyball, baseball, tennis, table-tennis, swimming, etc. 'House'-based competitions run throughout the Course. There is also 'Sports Day' when the Schools meet for friendly competitions in the major sports.

We take all practicable safety precautions – for example, students using the swimming pool are always supervised by staff.

Social activities

We try to create a relaxed and friendly 'family' atmosphere in which young people will feel 'at home' quickly and make good social contacts. There is a variety of non-sporting activities on the programme – games, talent shows, folies bergères, discotheques, barbecues, concerts, optional theatre visits, etc. The programme is a full one. There is always something to do and students are encouraged to participate.

Excursions

There are three days out. We intend one to be to London for sightseeing; another to a designer outlet or town for shopping; the third excursion is to 'Sports Day'. Travel and staff supervision on these excursions are included in the Course Fee. Other excursions can be arranged on request.

A typical day

08.15	Breakfast
09.00	First class
09.45	Break
09.55	Second class
10.40	Break
11.10	Third class
11.55	Break
12.05	Fourth class
12.50	Break
13.00	Lunch
13.45	'Homework'
14.15	Break
14.45	Organised sports and games
18.00	Evening meal
19.00	Games, films, etc.
21.00	Hot chocolate and biscuits
21.30	'Club'
22.30	Bedtime (or 22.45)

Pocket money and stamps are obtainable from the Office every day from 13.20 – 13.45 and 14.15 – 14.45.



“It is amazing that you manage to create the same good atmosphere as all those years ago”

Tennis lessons (optional extra)

Tennis may be played at any time. Lessons are not needed. We can arrange professional lessons, if required, for beginners or near-beginners only. Six one-hour lessons are given in groups of no more than four students. These must be requested in advance on the Application Form. If tennis lessons are taken, a tennis racquet must be brought.

As these lessons are prearranged, it is not possible to refund the cost of lessons booked, but not taken. Parents are asked to make sure that lessons are really wanted before booking them. If tennis lessons are requested, the cost (£40.00) should be added to pocket money.

Shopping afternoons (optional extra)

In addition to the organised excursions (which are included in the Course Fee), there are one or two optional shopping afternoons which are not included in the Course Fee. These are in Newbury or another town near the School. We think it safe for young people to shop in these towns unaccompanied by staff, if parents have indicated their agreement to this on the Application Form. This helps them achieve a measure of independence. Younger students can be accompanied by staff if parents or we so wish. There will be several staff in the town while our students are shopping. Travel is by private coach from the School with accompanying staff. The cost of transport (payable by students if they wish to go) is about £8.

Theatre visits (optional extra)

Tickets for smash-hit West End musicals that are booked out months in advance have been requested and we will be allocated a limited number. Students who apply early enough will be able to see one of these shows. The cost of each (show + travel to the theatre) will be in the range £30-£50. The cost should be added to pocket money. If it is not possible to provide a ticket, the money will be added back to pocket money.



Here is a typical menu for guidance:-

Breakfast:

- Choice of cereal
- Choice of various breads, meats, cheese, fruit
- Jam, marmalade, other spreads
- Tea, coffee, milk, fresh orange juice

Lunch:

- Choice of one cold or three hot dishes
- Buffet-style salad bar
- Choice of desserts
- Fresh fruit

Dinner:

- Choice of one cold or three hot dishes
- Buffet-style salad bar
- Choice of desserts
- Fresh fruit

Before bedtime:

- Hot chocolate and biscuits



Food safety

Vacational Studies policy is not to serve any food about which there is any concern for any reason. We serve only what we believe parents would feel safe to serve their own children in their own homes.

Meals

Food is an important part of the Course. Meals are prepared by professional caterers to a high standard. Our specification for lunch and dinner is a choice of hot dishes (including one vegetarian) or a cold dish, choice from a salad bar comprising about ten different items, a choice of desserts and fresh fruit. Students can have the first choice they want and can return for another choice as ‘seconds’. If they cannot find anything they like, they can ask us to ask the caterer to prepare something special.

There is always a vegetarian option. Other special diets can be catered for. Cold orange juice or other drinks are available at no charge. There is a small ‘tuck shop’.

At times throughout the Course, the menu will be varied to include, for example, barbecues (spare rib, hamburger, jacket potatoes, coleslaw dip, crisps, ice-cream, etc.) There will be a traditional British ‘Christmas Dinner’ (roast turkey with stuffing, roast potatoes, Brussels sprouts, cranberry jelly) and an ‘English High Tea’ (sandwiches, scones, jam and

cream.) There may also be ‘national meals’. If they wish, students from various countries can advise the kitchen staff on how to prepare and serve a meal consisting of dishes from their own country.

Any student can join the Food Committee which meets the Caterer regularly to discuss all aspects of the catering.

How we encourage the use of English

On each Course there are students from many different countries. We try to ensure a mixture of nationalities in classes and dormitories. We aim to stimulate the speaking of English socially in various ways. Members of staff and the British student(s) constantly encourage English-speaking around the School.

We institute a ‘House’ system at the start of the Course. In each House will be students mixed by nationality, gender and age. Team games are played as House Competitions for House Points. Additionally, House Points are awarded for individual excellence – such as using English socially. House Points can also be deducted. The House with the most Points is awarded a Treat. A Treat can be given at any stage in the Course and another Treat will be given at the end. We intend that the House Points and the Treats that are awarded from these will be positive inducements for participating and an encouragement to use English.



The course fee includes:

- residence at the School
- travel Heathrow-School/School-Heathrow¹
- all meals²
- tuition
- the sports programme
- the use of facilities
- excursions³
- insurance⁴
- the laundering of clothes⁵

The course fee does not include:

- pocket money
- optional church/theatre/shopping visits
- travel to and from England

There are NO EXTRA CHARGES except for optional church, theatre or shopping visits and professional tennis lessons. A deduction of £8 is made from pocket money to provide indoor board games and records, tapes and CDs for the ‘Club’. £20 ‘caution money’ will be retained in the student’s pocket money account until the last day when it will be returned less deductions for damages (if any).

¹ At specified times and terminals – see ‘Travel’
² Except lunch on excursions, but including lunch on Sports Day
³ Travel and supervision, not entrance fees
⁴ As described in the ‘Insurance’ slip
⁵ If washable at 40°+, indelibly named, not sensitive to bulk washing/drying and at your own risk



Health

Minor illnesses are treated by our own staff. There is a Matron in each School. We also use the services of doctors in the locality. The St John's Ambulance Service provides training for all our staff at the start of each Course in the latest methods of basic first aid and resuscitation. We ask parents to give us full health information on the Application Form. We request that those with food allergies come with a 1ml. Adrenalin (Epinephrine) 1:1000 injection pen – an 'EpiPen'. Children of EU/EEA nationality should bring a EHIC (European Health Insurance Card), available from their health service, entitling them as temporary residents to the same free treatment under the British National Health Service as British citizens for all, including pre-existing, conditions.

Religion

The Courses are interdenominational. If parents so wish, we shall arrange for Catholic or other students to attend an appropriate service. Please indicate this on the Application Form. Transportation to and from the church is payable by students.

Residential accommodation

At all Schools, students sleep in dormitories. Girls are in one part of the house, boys are in another.

Insurance

Every student is covered by special Insurance while they are with us. Details are on the enclosed information sheet. Briefly, the Insurance includes refund of full Course Fees if certified serious illness or accident to the student or parent during the month before the Course prevents attendance on the Course; private emergency medical treatment to the value of £1,000,000; personal possessions and luggage cover to the value of £500; personal money cover to the value of £200; return air fare or repatriation to the value of £1,000,000 if an APEX reservation is lost because of delayed or advanced departure through illness or accident while the student is with us. Personal accident insurance is included.

There is no extra charge for this Insurance. Every student is automatically covered (subject to the stated conditions) when the application is accepted.

How we look after students

We understand the concern felt by parents when their sons and daughters are away from home. They are under constant supervision, as far as is practicable, both in the School and on excursions. Our total staff:student ratio of about 1:7 ensures that our students are well looked-after.

In addition to the staff, on each Course may be one or two older ex-students, 'Staff Helpers', to assist with the sports and entertainment programme. We aim to have at least one native English-speaking student – a 'UK rep'.

During the Course, progress reports are sent to all parents describing performance in class and also social behaviour. At the end of the Course, all parents are sent a final report and leaving certificate together with a report from the Director on the student's general progress and behaviour.

If there is a problem

We shall contact you. Parents must ensure that we have a telephone number through which they can always be reached. If it is an emergency and we cannot reach you, we shall contact the person named in section 8 (our 'emergency contact') on the Application Form. If we cannot contact either of you, we shall assume your authority to act 'in loco parentis' and in a medical emergency, for example, give consent to appropriate medical treatment. We send students a list of rules and standards of behaviour expected before the Course begins. These are straightforward. Basically, we expect students to obey the law, respect the buildings, equipment and the feelings of other people and to show good manners. Students must read and know the rules before they come.

If a student is correctly motivated (see section on 'Students who will benefit'), there should be no discipline problems. If any should arise, we reserve the right to contact parents and, if we consider it necessary, require that he/she be taken home at the parents' expense without refund of Fees. We also reserve the right to send the writer of the original 'letter of recommendation' a photocopy of any correspondence we enter into.



how to apply

How to apply

Answer all the questions on the Application Form and return it to us with (if this is a first application) a letter of recommendation from the school on behaviour and attitude to study. We shall tell you immediately if the application is acceptable and for which Course. A 'waiting list' operates when the Courses are full.

Letter of recommendation

To ensure that all our students are well-motivated and keen to participate, we ask that a brief letter of recommendation from the school accompanies all applications from new students. This should mention behaviour and attitude to study. No such letter is needed for students we already know or, exceptionally, when this might cause conflict with educational authorities.

When the application is accepted

We shall write to inform you of this and include our Invoice for the Course Fees. The Invoice can be settled in full immediately, or 50% can be paid immediately and the balance by the date shown on the Invoice. The place is confirmed when the full Course Fees have been received by us. We shall also request travel details.

How to pay

Please see the 'Course Fees' slip.

Pocket money

Pocket money can either be brought by students (as cash or a £ cheque drawn on a British bank, payable to 'Vacational Studies Pocket Money A/C') or sent in advance to the National Westminster Bank, 30 Market Place, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 5AJ in £ Sterling to Vacational Studies Pocket Money A/C 65400100 (IBAN number GB19 NWBK 6015 0765 4001 00) or in euro to Vacational Studies Pocket Money A/C 10388494 (IBAN number GB19 NWBK 6072 0610 3884 94). Our BIC number is: NWBK GB 2L. We also have a £ Sterling Girobank account for personal money. The number is 255 7444. We do not recommend an amount, but students will tend to bring about £350. Optional tennis coaching fees and the cost of theatre visit(s) should be added (if applicable). Do not send more money during the Course.

Clothes and possessions

Notes and advice on what to bring and other information will be sent to parents and students in advance.



"This was the right thing at the right time"





“I miss you all so much.... this time with you was so amazing”



The Mary Hare School

From London, follow M4 to Exit 13 (Newbury). Leave M4 and immediately follow signs to 'Donnington'. Continue for 2 kms. The Mary Hare School is signposted on the right.

Address for students' letters:

The Mary Hare School, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 3BQ.

Telephone (to contact Course Manager):

National: (01635) 244221
International: +44 1635 244221

Payphone (for students):

National: (01635) 244261
International: +44 1635 244261

Cheam School

From Newbury, take the A339 road (signposted 'Basingstoke') for 10km into Headley village. Cheam School (Front Entrance) is signposted on the right.

Address for students' letters:

Cheam School, Headley, Newbury, Berkshire RG19 8LD.

Telephone (to contact Course Manager):

National: (01635) 267814
International: +44 1635 267814

Payphone (for students)

National: (01635) 268225
International: +44 1635 268225

The telephone numbers and addresses given above are only for use during the Courses. During the rest of the year, please use our Newbury Office address and telephone numbers.

Directions by rail to Mary Hare and Cheam

By train from London, leave from Paddington Station. Arrive at Newbury Station. There are normally taxis at Newbury Station. If not, there are taxi numbers in the phone box near the Station.

travel

Travel

It is quite usual for our students to fly alone. 90% of our students arrive and depart in this way. There are many cut-price air ticket offers. The cheapest tickets are to be found on the airline's web site, NOT by phone and NOT via a travel agent. We operate a collection and return transport service between Heathrow Airport and the Schools on arrival and departure dates at no charge, subject to certain conditions. We shall operate our free collection service for flights arriving at Heathrow Terminals 1, 2 and 5 from 12.00 to 16.00 on 5 and 11 July and free return service to check-in students on outgoing flights departing from Heathrow Terminals 1, 2 and 5 from 09.30 to 13.00 on 2 and 8 August. We shall arrange a taxi/minibus service at cost with known drivers for collections/returns that are not part of our free service. If flights arrive earlier than 12.00, students wait for our staff near the Information Desk. If flights leave after 13.00, we explain the procedure and take students to wait in the correct area.

For young children (under 12), airlines operate an 'Unaccompanied Young Persons (UYP)' or 'Unaccompanied Minors (UM)' service on request and look after them. As airlines insist on a named person meeting and returning a child and that the person remains until the flight has departed, parents should note that if they buy UYP or UM tickets outside our requested times/terminals, these UYP or UM arrivals and departures must be by taxi at cost. The driver is known to us and has been working with us for many years. He will meet students and check them in personally. It is normally unnecessary for students to be booked to fly UYP or UM. Airlines (especially British Airways) are very helpful with young passengers at any age.

Our free standard service cannot be used when arrival is later or departure is earlier than our stated dates or times, or if the flight is via Gatwick, Luton or Stansted, or if a student is booked UYP or UM, or is outside our requested times. We can make special taxi or minibus arrangements on your behalf. We do not charge for making these arrangements, but the cost of the taxi or minibus is payable by the student. (As a guide, a one-way taxi for one person to Heathrow is about £95 and to Gatwick about £115. For two or more people, the cost is shared). Special requirements should be indicated on the Application Form and details sent separately.

At the airport

Before travelling, we send an identity badge and luggage tags to ensure quick recognition. Our representatives will carry blue Vacational Studies' folders and will meet students at the entrance to the Arrivals Hall after leaving the Customs Hall. Staff collecting students on 5 July will be contactable on these UK phone numbers:- Terminal 1 – 07810 313993; Terminal 2 – 07901 996592; Terminal 5 – 07836 338399. Staff collecting students on 11 July will be contactable on these UK phone numbers:- Terminal 1 – 07810 314062; Terminal 2 – 07810 723924; Terminal 5 – 07917 334 444.

If you do not take our standard collection/return service, but we make other arrangements for you, the same procedure applies.

Visits to the schools

Visits to the Schools outside the Course dates may be made only by appointment through our Newbury Office.

If you come by car

Road directions are given after the Schools' addresses. Parents bringing students are asked to arrive at between 12.30 and 14.30. Parents collecting students on the last day are asked to arrive before 11.00.

On arrival at the school

All money is handed in at the Office for safe keeping. Students can withdraw money every day. We keep passports and tickets safely. We cannot accept responsibility for pocket money or valuables not handed to us.

On the first day

On request, students will be allocated to a returning student who will act as a guide, explaining the layout of the building, the way the Course runs and answering any questions.

Schools' addresses and directions



Finally

We have tried to describe the Courses fully and frankly. Please also see the section 'Unrealisable Expectations' in the News Section. The News Section (enclosed) contains more detailed information on various aspects of the Course. It is essential reading for the parents of Course participants and is not only a résumé of the previous summer. We hope this brochure contains all the information you need to make your choice. Any further details you may require can be obtained from the parents of our past students and past students themselves (the addresses of some of these are on the enclosed list) and from the Director. We suggest you contact our 'parental references' as they may offer useful advice.

Our Courses are designed with the benefit of years of experience and we are confident that we can combine the learning of good written and spoken English with an unforgettable and enjoyable holiday.

“The best time of my life”





news – summer 2008

'I would like to thank you for the great time I had at Cheam! I had lots of fun. I miss it a lot and I really want to go back. It was the best time of my life!' (a Dutch student); 'Thank for all you have done for her this summer, as she feels that it was the best month of her life. I hope we can co-operate in the future for my other daughters' (a Greek parent); 'We would like to express our satisfaction with the experience she had at your Course. She has been rattling along ever since about what you all were doing, and it has been a pleasure to learn, that for her, this was the right thing at the right time. Obviously we were not in advance able to be sure, if this apparently very tight concept would suit her, as she would find things very different from her everyday life. But from your precise information on the web site we decided to give it a go, and luckily so. She has gained a lot of confidence in English and had a wonderful time' (a Faroese parent); 'Vacational Studies – the best place on earth' (a YouTube comment from a 2000 student); 'Many thanks for another lovely month' (a returning Sports Organiser). 'I would like again to say a BIG thank you for what you did for A. I am sure this has been a great experience for him. Time has passed but nothing has changed and this your success. I am very proud that I and my son have been a part of your 'story'. We keep in touch'; (a French parent and former student); 'I miss you all so much... this time with you was so amazing' (his son, our student); 'Just a few lines to tell you how happy has he come back from Mary Hare. He says indeed that it has been the best month of his life (although I've seen on the web site that this is a recurrent sentence!) Also, thank you so much for sending the "photo report" weekly! I've seen that he has been involved in all activities and has had a lot of fun. He arrived yesterday and he's still talking about all the fun and the good times he's had. No wonder then, he will come back next summer. I will fill in the form and send it to you'; (a Spanish parent); 'Teachers, staff and students, I miss you sooo much! I hope that some of you'll come back next year, I really want to see you again!' (a Russian student); 'This month has clearly been one of the best in my life. I really hope I see you all and more people next year' (a Norwegian student); 'It is amazing that you manage to create the same good atmosphere as all those years ago. He came back full of stories, very sad to have said goodbye to many new friends, a feeling I still remember well. He has had a wonderful time. Thank you so much' (a Dutch parent and former student).

Modesty prevents further comment – or quotations. They are all true and all heartfelt, I know.

Our 2008 Courses were the most international ever. Nowadays it is not just personal recommendation that ensures our world-wide reputation, but it seems that our web site shoots up the Google lists when the 'right' search terms are entered thanks to an 'optimisation' programme I embarked on last autumn which I describe in 'IGM's page' on the web site, along with hundreds of search terms in English and other languages.

So what was special about the summer of 2008? Please read on...

Summer 2008

Generally, after an indifferent summer like this one with a few rainy cloud-covered days, as soon as the last student has departed, the sun comes out for the next month. Not so this year. The weather just flicked from summer to autumn. Our students certainly had the best of the British summer of 2008. The sun even came out for Sports Day. But please read on for what happened later that day.

As I sit at the final dinner, the room buzzing with the conversation about shared experiences that old friends have, I think back to how different it was just four short weeks before. All our young visitors go on a journey, part linguistic, but mainly one of self-discovery. The parents who themselves were with us in the '70s and '80s and who are now enrolling their children even before the brochure is published know what will be achieved; know the reason for the tear-stained faces when their children come home. What we offer is simply a fantastic opportunity for growing up. But it can never be recreated in exactly the same way. It's here; it's now; it's nowhere else.

Back for a second summer as Course Manager at Mary Hare (now his school of choice) was Joe Littenberg who continues to be the coolest dude who has ever sat in a VacStuds office. An invitation to the Course Manager's table for lunch was a treat he innovated this year, enabling our students to benefit from the American wisecrack as well as the gently ironic British humour of his Assistant Course Manager, Tom Goodwin. On the teaching side, we had Joe Wallis back for his third year with us now as Senior Teacher. He led a strong team of teachers. Chloe Huelamo was back for her second year with us, as were Karen Thompson and Maria Parisi who decided on a change from Cheam. Newcomers Rhiannon Guy and Rachel Walsh threw themselves into every aspect of the Course wholeheartedly as did Nico Damianos. Richard Willis kept us on our toes and showed us what he was made of in 'Man O Man'. Jenni Cannings was also new. George Cockburn came back for a second stint as Sports/Social Organiser and even tried his hand at stand-up – briefly. So special were the events he created that I found it hard to compress them all onto the DVD. He had the advantage of a splendidly British crew all of whom showed remarkable dexterity with our language when presenting, some of which may have been lost on our clientele. His brother, Alistair, a man of many parts, joined him for his second year with us. Rob Hedge was back for his fourth stay. Duncan Cook had also been a British student some years before as had Helena Chadd's brother. All did very well. Bea Cerdan was our Staff Helper. Matron, Meg Clements, was new and did a super job in sick bay where she herself had to spend a little time after succumbing to the dangers of the Garden Fete. Our remaining 'UK Rep' was Lawrence Truscott who gave of himself to all aspects of the Course and was much loved. The students had a great time and many of them used the experience to advantage.

The prize for academic excellence was awarded to Gedaille Nauseidaite (Lithuania); for English-speaking to Hannah Hueckstaedt (Germany). Ulrike & Henning Hueckstaedt from the Jörg Weise Association came to Mary

Hare and Cheam to talk to the students about the JWA. They asked me to put forward to the Association the names of those students whom the Course Manager and I considered made a significant effort to further the international aims of the Course. We proposed Lars Erik Bjerke (Norway); Sissi Knepper (Germany); Christiane Lange (Norway); Miguel Domingos Marques (Portugal); Sverre Ramstad (Norway); Cris Sawicki (Poland); Hans Anders Stenersen-Grevstad (Norway); Lawrence Truscott (UK); Dagmar Winther (Faroe Islands).

Keith Rutherford let the mantle of responsibility rest comfortably on his broad shoulders in this his second year as Course Manager. When he addressed the students en masse, which he did daily, he took them step by step through his message so that they not only understood it, but agreed with it. An object lesson in management. Newcomer Nicola Johnson was the efficient Senior Teacher. She oversaw fellow newcomers Joseph Beckett, Matt Bury, Ceri Hughes, Anna Martinelli, Rebecca Morris and Andy Redwood as well as our sole returnee, James Hamilton. After two years as Assistant, Phil Stavri accepted the post of Sports/Social Organiser, ably supported by his crew of debutante Caroline Drewett, Hugh Irving back from being the British boy two years ago, Lara Santos in her seventh year and Matt Kelly back for a third time who, unusually, I elevated to ACM. Ana Alcantara sang and danced and was Staff Helper. Our Matron did not last the Course. Our UK Reps were the much loved Matt Jamieson and the outstanding Alastair Pearson. They were enormously helpful in and out of the classroom. The students appreciated what the Course had done for them and, on whole, integrated well. The prize for academic excellence was awarded to Ele Peronetti (Italy); for English-speaking to Martin Meyer-Lindemann (Germany). We proposed to the JWA Kristine Grændsen (Norway); Martin Meyer-Lindemann (Germany); Alastair Pearson (UK); Oliver Seifert (Germany); Gonzalo Torres (Spain).

After five years as a teacher and latterly as Director of Studies, I was happy to offer the post of Academic Manager to Sarah Robinson. To prepare her for this and to comply with British Council requirements, she went through a DELTA course in Italy in which she achieved a Distinction. Invigorated by this, she supervised the teaching programme and was a familiar sight at both schools in her smart red Megane. She oversaw the preparations for the Trinity examinations. A newly revised Programme of Work included material on 'How to make a film in the English class-room' published by Joe Wallis and Joe Littenberg.

Also appearing at both schools, often accompanied by three seven-and-a-half year-olds called Ian, Piers and Lars, was Tristan de Souza, my capable ChildCare Assistant who explored the woods and grounds with them, introduced them to the delights of cooking, taught them how to tie a tie and kept them very happy indeed.

For the twenty eighth summer, tennis coaching was given by the sun-tanned Liz Fidler. The regular discos were provided by 'Pink Elephant Roadshow'. The students seemed to like them.

And there was me – visiting each school several times a day praising, admonishing, checking, filming and photographing, dispensing justice – some years like a deus ex Mercedes, but this year a deus ex white or beige Audi Avant or Renault Espace – and loving every moment, of course.

Pre-Vacational Studies (New for 2009. See insert)

Tom Goodwin is now my Assistant Director. He is trained in Early Years Teaching. Seeing him working with my 7 year-old sons made me realise what can be achieved with very young children. I have asked him to develop this aspect of Vacational Studies. He will be the main link to the charitable side of Vacational Studies and the Scholarships and will develop a youth section on the web site.

Vacational Studies films

Martin Webb's film 'Vacational Studies – Bringing English to Life' which he made in the summer of 2007 is now on our web site and complements his 2006 film which is also on the site. The third will be 'After VacStuds' showing how past students have used their English and gained from their international experiences. We shall also film students who are now adults and parents who have sent their own children to us to see the impact VacStuds has even after thirty years and more. Let me know if you would like to contribute.

VacStuds teaching programme

Half of the teaching programme was devoted to the film project and the other half to more conventional teaching. Rather than burn DVDs, we decided to put the completed class films onto YouTube and make them accessible through our Facebook page. We introduced the Trinity examination this year and structured much of the classroom teaching around its requirements. Although the students who took it were happy with both the examination itself and the results they obtained, we found that an option chosen by only half the students was having a disproportionate influence on the structure of the entire teaching programme. The

“Time has passed
but nothing has
changed and this
is your success”

bureaucracy was onerous and, while I managed to remove one of the more ludicrous tasks we as an examining centre were expected to comply with, there were enough left to take our staff's time away from the priorities of our own work programme. We shall not offer Trinity in 2009. Our own certificate will be enhanced and, as we are on the UK Department for Education's list of registered providers, may be a worthwhile addition to our students' CVs. Joe Littenberg and Joe Wallis's material will be revised so that the film project will be even more valuable as a teaching tool. Joe Wallis will be financed through a DELTA course in 2009 as Sarah Robinson was in 2008 so that even more of the Academic Management team will be highly qualified.

UK Reps, scholarships and a new assistant

The change from 'British Students' to 'UK Reps' was successful. They lived with the students, were subject to the same rules, but they arrived with the staff and were allocated to help classes by the Academic Manager and Senior Teachers. We shall offer two places at each school to Norwich School, as for the past two decades, but shall open it up to competition by making the same offer to other schools.

Sports day

On the hottest day of the year, I sat in my car and watched the weather forecast on the TV news. Another hot day was predicted, but for the late afternoon a grey cloud with a fork of lightning was pictured over Newbury. I decided to shift the start of Sports Day forward to the morning from the afternoon, even though this would mean losing the disco planned for the evening. The bus company, the caterers, the teachers and the sports staff had all their arrangements changed at a stroke. At 9 o'clock Sports Day started with the sun shining in an azure sky. It was a perfect summer morning. Both Course Managers were determined to keep Sports Day the day of friendly rivalry that it had been for the last two years, and, although a few students were keen the inject a note of verbal discord, they were a minority. The teams were well-matched and the honours were even. Each School performed its song and dance routine to an appreciative audience and each School gave the other three cheers as the bus drove away. The students had lessons that afternoon. Two hours later, the heavens opened. The electricity failed. A mini tornado sent driving rain through Mary Hare's roof and into the School though closed windows. The immaculate lawn on which the schools had performed their choreographed pieces was strewn with torn off branches.

Catering

Catering at Mary Hare was by their Catering Manager, Paul Leverton. I enjoyed all my meals there and added to my collection of recipes, so delicious were they. Once again, the kitchen staff entered into the spirit of the Course, decorating the dining room for Christmas, Valentine's Day or whatever the event might be. Nothing was too much trouble. Sodexo catered at Cheam again with Nick Dann in charge. My sons love Nick's catering when they eat at Cheam during the school year and he did not disappoint this time. Each School had its Food Committee, but they had little to comment on and the catering ran smoothly.

Parents, children and unrealisable expectations

It is important that all parents read this section. The relationship between ourselves and the parents of children in our care is a partnership. We want all our young people to get the most out of the experience. For this reason, I have written a 'Parental Control Condition' into the contract we have with parents. In brief, I say 'We do our best to fulfil our 'duty of care' under English law based on good will and the trust established by your and your child's agreement to the 'rules' as evidenced by the signed 'Agreement and Travel Details' form. If we think a problem is likely to arise, we shall try to contact you before it does so it can be prevented. Nevertheless, if your child's attitude or behaviour is such that we find we cannot exercise the control required to fulfil our 'duty of care', we shall pass responsibility for

control to the parent either by requesting the parent's presence or by telephone contact with the child. If this fails and we decide the child is beyond control, we shall expel.

Generally we have excellent support from parents. Occasionally, we do not. There is no child who does not accept that they sometimes do wrong, make mistakes or act aberrationally. What children accept so readily is unacceptable to a tiny minority of parents. For their child to do wrong must mean that the child is a victim of circumstance and that someone else must be to blame. Some also find it hard to transfer responsibility for their child to a third party – us – and believe they must provide a constant input. All we ask is that parents leave everything to us, in the knowledge that (i) they will hear if there is a problem, (ii) no news is good news, (iii) we have experience in dealing with children, (iv) their child may make mistakes and (v) if what their child does is serious enough for us to require that child's removal from the Course, they must comply at once.

We do what we can to encourage students to learn and use the Course to advantage. We do our best to look after them. We make no other claims. We cannot force a child to integrate. While we provide encouragement, they must help themselves. They will find others who speak their language and they may be tempted to take the easy way. They may come with friends from home. We cannot keep friends apart when they are at the same School. They must decide to broaden their international horizons, mix and use English. Parents may make requests, but we reserve the right to place students in what we consider to be appropriate classes and dormitories. The final report we write will be our frank assessment. As the teaching/learning situations are different, it may not be similar to the school report you are accustomed to. The Course is a communal experience. Individual freedom is restricted. Our school buildings are boarding schools – not hotels. Accommodation, washrooms, etc. are shared. Bedrooms are boarding school dormitories and these may be sparsely furnished. The schools we use are country houses adapted for use as boarding schools. Bathrooms may be away from dormitories. Clothes storage space may be limited. All sorts of compromises have to be made, but for most young people this is part of the fun. We also ask parents to accept that telephone contact with their children, especially in the first few days, is not a good idea. We ask that mobile phones are not brought. We are not being difficult, just putting into practice what we know from experience works. In effect, what we are requesting is a partnership between us based on our expertise and parents' trust in us. What we provide and the parameters of what we permit are in our literature. We act on the assumption that parents and students read it all. If your child is interested in drinking, smoking, going out at night and leading an independent life, please choose another organisation less restrictive than ours. We assume that parents will be realistic about their children. We exercise due control, but they have the freedom to do things that are wrong. If they do, there are repercussions outlined in the 'Notes'. We do what we can to prevent rule-breaking, but if it happens, parents must accept that it is occasioned by their child's free will, not lack of control on our part.

Let me put it into context. Ours is a new, exciting and active environment. Parental control appears absent. Our students are a long way from home, without the constraints and responsibilities that tend to check behavioural excess. No doubt there is also the desire to impress one's peers. They may call it 'being carried away'. Whatever the causes, occasionally a few of our students may indulge in behaviour that is simply anti-social. If they get caught, they may feel they have little to lose. Protected by this feeling that no one of importance will ever know, I am aware that some students have broken our rules and even the law. All students come to us after a 'letter of recommendation' has been written about them by their school. To remove this feeling of anonymity and to encourage students to take responsibility for their own actions, we write frank reports to parents. We reserve the right to send the writer of the original 'letter of recommendation' a photocopy of any correspondence we have with parents about children in our care.



Contacting students

The students who adjust best are those whose parents phone them only on the two 'Telephone Sundays'. If these parents wish to know how their child is adjusting, they phone the Course Manager and ask.

There are some parents who feel they must speak to their children frequently. We ask parents who must speak to their children outside 'Telephone Sundays' to phone the payphone, not our School Office number. We cannot search for children in a large building and campus. The payphone may ring unanswered. A student may answer it. If so, that student can be asked to search for a student. That student may or may not comply with the request.

Mobile phones

Last year, 'the curse of the mobile phone' caused a parent to block calls from her son's mobile to her phone. She could tell that his dependence on long-distance support was causing his failure to adjust. That boy returned this year and did not use his mobile. He had a great time from day one and will be back in 2009. A student who seemed to be taking a long time to overcome the black cloud of home-sickness was found to have a hidden mobile phone, provided by a concerned parent. We took it away. Within a short time, the black cloud lifted. Mobile phones are not useful in the context of the Course. The time young people spend with us develops their sense of independence. They need to be able to cope with small challenges on their own. An immediate call home at the first sign of a problem delays the growing up process that is a part of the experience we give young people. The only time a phone is useful is when a child is away from the school. For 2009, as in 2008, we shall allow mobile phones to be used only on trip days. In line with UK Government Education Department advice on the possible health hazard for young people of microwaves near the developing brain in an enclosed environment, we do not permit students to use mobile phones inside the school. We prefer that a mobile phone is not brought. Any mobile phone brought must be kept in the office and used outdoors. We accept no responsibility for loss of or damage to mobile phones that are brought. Any mobile phone kept other than in the office will be removed. We shall treat in the same way as a mobile phone, a laptop computer and any music device that has a sim card.

English law

I state on the Application Form that this applies. There is nothing sinister about the inclusion of these words. We are de facto in loco parentis in the summer. We accept responsibility for looking after a large number of other people's children. We take this responsibility seriously. Parents trust us to make wise decisions. Sometimes, however, we receive requests which we consider unwise. For example, we are asked to let children be unaccompanied by staff when we consider they are not responsible enough to be unaccompanied. Children feel that, if they ask their parents to request something from us, we must comply with a parental request. We are the ones closest to what is happening. We know what a prudent parent would do and would not do in certain circumstances. Legally, we are expected to fulfil the role of a prudent parent – no more, no less. Sometimes we do not agree with what a parent is asking us to do. We shall use our discretion in all matters. Under English Law a parent may not sign away a child's rights. This includes the child's right to be protected by adults. We shall do what we think is right for the child. This is why I state that English Law applies.

Theatre visits

Most students request a visit to the theatre. They are asked to choose which show they wish to see in order of preference on a form which shows the Invoice number. The earlier the application, the lower the Invoice number. Tickets are allocated by Invoice number. The lower the Invoice number, the greater the chance of getting one's choice of theatre visit. 2009 Invoice numbers start at 13414. A 'Theatre Visits' choice list will be sent out in May.



Property

We ask that valuable items (including expensive clothes) are not brought. All items with a used re-sale value over £40 must nevertheless be listed on the 'Valuable Possessions' form. At the end of the Courses we send back every named item of property left behind. Un-named items are also returned if we have a good idea to whom they belong. We can keep items in our office on request. While they are safer in our office than elsewhere, we accept responsibility only for items stored in our safe. Items given to us for safe-keeping are kept in our safe for the duration of the Course and are not removed at any time. Property not in our safe and lost other than when in the student's possession on a trip is not covered by the Insurance policy we include as part of the Course Fee. We accept no responsibility for mobile phones.

Health & EHIC

All students are entitled to free emergency treatment under the Medical Insurance policy included in the Course Fee *for illnesses or accidents that happen in Britain*. EU and EEA residents are entitled to free treatment under the National Health Service for illnesses or accidents that happen in Britain. *Pre-existing conditions are not covered by our insurance. No one (not even an EU or EEA resident) is entitled to free treatment under the NHS for a pre-existing condition unless they have an EHIC (European Health Insurance Card)*. EHICs were introduced on 1 June 2004 and are available from Social Security or Health Department offices overseas. If an overseas Social Security or Health Department office states that an EHIC is not needed because free treatment for a pre-existing condition is available for anyone in the EU or EEA on a short stay, that advice is wrong and the office should contact the Department of Health on +44 20 7210 5318 for confirmation. If they have a pre-existing condition and do not have an EHIC, students should have their own medical insurance.

Lost luggage

New arrangements for hand baggage mean that more cases are lost by airlines than before. We shall continue to help students who arrive with no luggage to buy necessary items, but as the contract the airlines have is with the passenger (not ourselves) they will not refund the cost to us. We shall inform parents what has happened and take the cost from pocket money. The airline will then reimburse the parent who will, we hope, have topped up the pocket money.

Excess baggage

The economy class limit is 20 kilos. Airlines insist that luggage over 24 kilos is put in a second suitcase (which must be bought) and then there will be an additional charge of £100. Students must, therefore, bring less than 20 kilos of luggage.

VacStuds DVD

'VacStuds 2008 All Over Again' has been edited from footage I shot during the Courses and sent to those requesting it. Eventually everyone sees the Courses through my eyes. For those students wishing to relive the summer and for those parents trying to find out what made it 'the best summer of my life', here is an instant walk down Memory Lane. Parents of 2009 students who would like a preview can request a copy.

Before and during the course

Parents are welcome to contact me on any matter. In July and August I tend to be at my desk from 08.00 (English time) until 10.00 and then I travel around the schools. For practical reasons, therefore, it is best to make contact with me during the Courses via the Course Manager. Just before the Course, I send each parent 'last minute' information with my GSM phone number. For information, this is +44 7717 007 007.

Staff helpers

If possible, we like to have a male and/or a female former student on each Course as unpaid helpers, providing a link between staff and students. They tend to be 18-21 and to have left a gap of one summer after being a student. SHs are chosen early in the new year. Potential SHs should contact me before Christmas. If 'leadership potential' or an equivalent phrase is mentioned in my letter accompanying the final report, this suggests that a SH application would be considered favourably.

After the Course

Please feel you can contact me about anything connected with Britain. For example, parents ask for my advice on continuing their children's education in Britain. I am happy to help. No charge! I see this as a natural extension of my work with young people. Students ask for information, sometimes ten or twenty years later or more.

Vacational Studies trade mark

Our logo and the words Vacation Studies have been registered as trade marks. We have no connection with any other organisation – whether with a similar or dissimilar name.

The Jörg Weise Association

This exists to encourage international understanding. Details are on www.vacstuds.com/JWA. At its meeting in Germany in 2008, the JWA asked me to put forward to them the names of those students the Course Managers and I considered had made a significant contribution to the international aims of the Course. 14 names have been submitted.

Giotto

This enables our students to keep in touch with friends from when they were students with us and to make new contacts for social or professional purposes. Details are on www.vacstuds.com/GIOTTO.

Vacational Studies Foundation

The Vacation Studies Foundation was registered as a Charity under English Law in January 2000 to assist talented young people. Details are on www.vacstuds.com/FOUNDATION.

H.T.W. Mucklejohn

My father, who was Company Secretary from the founding of Vacation Studies until his death in 2003, was a great support to me. In his memory, the Jörg Weise Association has donated in perpetuity a full Scholarship which I am able to award when I come across a young person who would benefit from our Courses, but cannot apply for financial reasons. If you know one, tell me.

Vacstuds on Facebook

seems to have replaced our 'Messages Forum' which I had to password protect to stop robots putting links there.

vacstuds.com

is our 'shopwindow' and main medium of communication. All our printed literature is there. This leads me to wonder if there is a point in actually printing anything, especially as information can be updated in seconds. Please assume that we expect all parents to have internet access and to check the 'Latest News' section at vacstuds.com for the latest news and links to the information we produce.

My thanks

...to all those who trusted with the care of their children this summer. Since 1973, it has been my privilege to have been involved in the lives of thousands of young people all over the world. In May I was invited to give a lecture at the Sorbonne in Paris. I was introduced by one of our former students as 'the man who changed my life.' There is no greater honour than this.

And finally...

For those who are interested, my second book about my adventures ('And Then There Were Three – Expanded Edition' (ISBN 1903933730)) was published in June 2006 and is available inter alia via www.amazon.com. I have put the entire text on www.andthentherewerethree.co.uk.

IGM – Autumn 2008

