

UCS

December 2010



End of Term Newsletter

Summer Results & Development Work

The school year began well with good news of A-level, AS and GCSE results. In the first year in which A* grades have been awarded at A-level, the UCS performance was particularly pleasing. Just under 30% of UCS A-levels were graded A* in 2010 (a higher figure than we had anticipated). In most subjects, A*s require A grades at AS in the Transitus Year to be followed with an average score of 90% in the harder A2 Sixth Form modules. The achievement, therefore, is genuinely impressive. Overall, well over 90% of UCS A-levels were, once again, graded A*, A or B (just under 70% A or A*). Our first cohort of girls did especially well at A-level with 98% of their grades at A*-B, and 75% at A or A*. We continue to break the 80% barrier for A & A* at GCSE each year too (82% this year). I hope that we will do even better than this as time goes on, but it is good to see that our place amongst the UK's top academic schools remains secure.

We continue to develop UCS sites and facilities. This summer saw the creation (and now completion) of a new, secure entrance to the school with a fully functioning Reception Office for visitors and deliveries. The office opened in November. It is already working extremely well. Next summer will see the extension of this building along the front of the Theatre building, creating a covered colonnade for pedestrians and some additional teaching space. This will not just improve the look of the Frogal site considerably, but will also improve our teaching and study facilities further.

After the completion of this project in 2011, we will be turning attention to the Junior Branch site in Holly Hill. We hope to be able to publish details of some exciting development plans for that school during the course of next year.

School Inspection & Parent Feedback

The new arrangements for school inspections mean that we can never be absolutely certain when our turn will come. It cannot be far away.

The inspectors called at The Phoenix School in December. Inspections now involve two separate visits. The first phase at The Phoenix went very well. The second phase (which will involve more extended observation of teaching and learning) will take place in mid-January.

UCS Junior Branch and Senior School will be inspected together and, almost certainly, during the early part of 2011. A key element of the first phase of the inspection will be parental feedback: a form will be communicated to parents for rapid return. This is an important part of the process, so I ask parents to be prepared for it and to take the time to complete the form and return it according to the tight timescale that the inspectors will require.

This will be the second time within fairly quick succession that UCS parental opinion has been canvassed. Many thanks to those of you who completed the online questionnaire we sent out in June. The results were both encouraging and really helpful. Overall satisfaction ratios were gratifyingly high. It was also very good to receive advice from parents on aspects of the UCS service that we can improve. There was very wide support for a firmer shift towards electronic communication. We continue to work at this and expect to make further changes within the next year or so (as you will see later in this newsletter, we expect to rely entirely upon text messaging, e-mail and web-site for all emergency communication in future). We are also developing more formal methods for the tracking of pupils' academic progress as they move through the school. Simon Marshall (Academic Deputy Head) is leading this work (which must be a careful and subtle process at UCS, working alongside our sophisticated and extensive pastoral network rather than seeking to complicate it). An initial pilot scheme will get underway with a single form next term. Having learnt from that, we will introduce a second pilot across a year-group in September. If all goes well, we should then be in position to introduce a thorough-going scheme for all students.

Emergency Communication: Weather-Related School Closure

I am pleased that we were able to keep the school open throughout the recent period of snowy and icy weather. That will always be our intention. However, it is not always possible. It is worth outlining our procedure for emergency communication in such circumstances again.

Whilst we will take full account of the conditions close to the school and the state of the transport system, the most important factor that determines whether or not the school can operate is the availability of staff, many of whom live some way from Hampstead. Staff are required to inform us by 7.50 a.m. if they believe that they may not be able to get to school. If we believe it necessary to close the school, we will communicate that decision to all parents by SMS text before 8.00 a.m. We will also place the message clearly on the front page of the school web-site. In addition, we will send email reminders to parents, alerting them to the web-site message.

Although the Junior Branch and Senior School will normally make the same decision, we will send separate messages. Please act on the one relevant to your son or daughter.

If we are able to make a decision earlier than 8.00 a.m. we shall do so, but please do not waste time telephoning the Senior School or Junior Branch switchboards. Text messages will be sent and staff will be busy.

If in doubt as to whether to make a start for school before 8.00 a.m., you should be guided by the conditions near your home or wait until you hear from us.

School & Student Achievements of the Term

Sport

This has been the best UCS rugby season for a while. The highlights have been the tremendous success of the U16 XV in winning the Middlesex championship for their age-group. Last year they lost the final of the same competition by a single point. This year they ran away comfortable winners. They were not alone. The U14 XV reached their final as well. Postponed by the weather, the match is due to be held on the final afternoon of term (after this newsletter was written). They have already done really well. Let us hope they crowned the season with another cup.

Other year-groups have enjoyed success too. The U12 & 13 toured to Venice at half-term. At senior level, the 2nd XV did pretty well (winning 4 and losing 4 of their 8 matches). The 1st XV record was disappointing (with only a single win), but that is misleading. A spirited, committed and immensely co-operative squad, they deserved far better. Jon Cooke (no pushover himself) regards them as the best senior squad he has coached at UCS and was even more disappointed than them at their lack of match success.

Basketball, netball and winter league tennis have also been popular and successful this term. Our swimming squad continue to train with great dedication. They will be competing in some galas next term.

Music & Drama

The end of the Autumn Term is always a frantically busy time for the UCS Music and Drama Departments. An excellent Chamber & Instrumental Concert was followed by an outstanding autumn Concert. Both saw concerto performances (by Indigo Bates and Harry Morgan respectively) of the very highest quality. The Centenary Choir delivered a most popular concert of Vivaldi and Poulenc just before the end of term. And the UCS Carol Service was especially moving this year. It is the only event that brings together children from all three UCS schools in a uniquely effective seasonal celebration.

With a new Director of Drama this term, there was a special air of anticipation around the Lund Theatre. *The Dracula Spectacular* in October (directed by Sixth form students and performed by students from the Lower Remove and below) was tremendously enjoyable: funny, irreverent, and energetic. *Fame: The Musical*, directed by Gillian Rabie with a band directed by John Bradbury, carried on the energy and added even more. This was slick, confident, well-disciplined and really impressive musical theatre. We look forward to more treats next term.

Kids Lit Quiz

For the first time ever, two UCS teams from the Entry and Shell participated in an inter-school quiz to test their knowledge of children's literature. They travelled to Broxbourne in Hertfordshire to compete against 23 other schools and two teams of authors. They did not win, but it was a good event and there is always next time.

Community Action & Outreach

We continue to work hard to foster links with local schools and charities to develop our outreach and partnership work. Many Transitus and Sixth Form students use their Friday afternoon activity time to work with children in nearby Primary Schools. This term we have established a link with KidsCo (the national childrens' charity) and three UCS students work weekly at a KidsCo hostel in West Hampstead.

This term, we have also hosted seminars for gifted and talented Sixth Formers from three local state schools in English, History and Science. They have been extremely well-received, and we hope to expand this venture in the future – thanks to the generous input of UCS staff.

This is also, of course, the term for our own charitable fund-raising. The targets for Community Action this year are: The Anthony Nolan Trust; Buguruni School for the Deaf in Tanzania; The Leslie Margot Trust (raising money for a play facility for use by able-bodied & disabled children at Kentish Town Primary School); The Ghanaian Girls School Project; KidsCo; and the UNICEF Pakistan Flood Appeal. All charities are chosen by UCS students and we have heard about them each in recent school assemblies.

It looks as though we shall have raised over £16,000 this term (more will follow through the school year) from activities such as: The Gorillathon race around the London Underground; the UCS Superheroes Calendar, the Battle of the Bands; a FIFA computer tournament; bag-packing at Sainsbury's; Miss UCS (a competition for male staff only!); the cookie shop; various bake sales and two 5-a-side football tournaments. Congratulations and thanks to all involved, especially to Adrian McAra, Max Hind and Tom Hardy who oversaw the whole business.

Half-Term Trips

While our Lower School rugby players visited Italy over half-term, we were also able to schedule some important Geography fieldwork for senior students and a German exchange trip. A large History party travelled to Berlin, Krakow and Auschwitz, and three Sixth Form students accompanied by Mr Reynolds and Miss Lodato, worked for a fortnight with disadvantaged children in Goa, India as part of our association with the charity Lighthouse International Ministries.

Next Term's Events

Term Dates & April Bank Holiday

The late date of Easter this year leads to a longer than usual Spring Term and a late start to the Summer Term. This is especially significant for examination candidates who will have relatively little time at school after Easter before the start of their GCSE, AS or A-level exams. Instead they will have more time before the Easter holiday in which to plan and prepare their final revision. Some guidance on revision from Mrs Spencer of the Learning Support Department is included in this mailing.

The late start to the Summer Term will also be marked by a particularly long first weekend, caused by an additional Bank Holiday to mark the Royal Wedding on Friday 29 April 2011. UCS will be closed on that day. There will be no other changes to our dates for the coming terms.

AS & A2 Exams

A number of Sixth Formers will sit AS and A2 modules at the start of next term. Some exams are scheduled before we have returned to school. Please note that, in the interests of A-level teaching that must continue throughout this period, we cannot permit study leave for these exams. Candidates need not attend morning school if they have an exam in the afternoon, but must remain in school following a morning exam and must attend lessons normally on the days before their exams.

GCSE Mock Exams

Mock exams for the Upper Remove will, occupy the week immediately before and the week immediately after half-term. So, exams will start on Monday 14 February and end on Friday 4 March. This is planned to achieve the minimum incursion into teaching time whilst also allowing students to use the half-term break for additional revision. There will be occasions during this period when individual students do not have exams. They may revise at home on these days.

Music & Drama

There will be a full music programme next term, including our annual Pupils' Jazz Concert (always a highlight) and culminating in our Spring Concert, normally the biggest of the year.

There are three drama productions next term. Transitus drama students will direct and perform *Be My Baby* by Amanda Whittington on 26 & 27 January. Stephen Powell of the 6th Form is directing Noel Coward's *Hay Fever* for performance on 1, 2 & 3 February. Then at the end of term (29 March – 1 April), Allan Steven will direct Dennis Potter's striking *Son of Man*.

Salsa for India

We will be holding a fundraising concert for the UCS Goa project on the evening of 5 February, featuring, once again, the outstanding UCS Salsa Band and giving the opportunity not only to support a truly life-enhancing charitable project, but also to learn to dance salsa.

Higher Education Events for Parents & Students

With the Higher Education landscape growing ever more complicated and competitive, I am pleased that UCS has been able to expand its Sixth Form team quite considerably this year. We have processed more UCAS forms than ever before and completed them earlier than ever before. Our students have also started to receive offers earlier than ever before.

We will be altering the timescales of HE advice for the Transitus and their families too. The traditional UCAS evening for students and their parents will be held on Monday 4 April and will be remodelled to include sessions on Oxbridge, Art Foundation & other Creative courses and overseas applications as well as the traditional UK university advice.

This will be followed up by a seminar/conference day for all Transitus students on Wednesday 6 April to be entitled *Beyond UCS*. As well as looking at UK and overseas university applications (with anumber of our ex-students returning to give the consumer view), it will also include input on gap year organisations, business opportunities, creative courses and internships.

Modern Languages Evening

The Modern Languages Evening, *Euro-Star*, takes place in the Lund Theatre at 7:30 pm on Tuesday 8 February 2011. Tickets will be available at the start of next term. Make a date in your diary for an evening of foreign-language sketches and music, performed by every year in the school, as the *Euro-Star* train makes its stops all over Europe. And join us afterwards in the buffet car - I mean, the Refectory - for food and drink from the countries we've visited.

Staff News

Steve Wells

Steve Wells retires from UCS at the end of this term. He joined UCS in 1974 and has spent his entire career here. For some that would indicate timidity or shortness of achievement. Not for Steve. For him, it has been exactly the reverse. In his 36 years at UCS, he has contributed and achieved more than most of us manage in a single career. An enthusiastic and inspiring teacher of Physics, he has been Head of that Department, he was part of the team of committed young rebels in the 1970s and 1980s who forced the school to take football seriously (he was refereeing right up until last season), he has been deeply committed to UCS pastoral work and, of course, has been part of our Senior Sixth Form team for over twenty years. Overseeing this crucially important part of the school's work has seen Steve at his absolute best: drawing together his formidable administrative skills, tremendous efficiency, a genuine and personal concern and sensitivity for the best interests of every student, and a deep-seated interest in Higher Education and the functioning of universities. Countless UCS students have benefited from his advice, his patience and his continual willingness to go the extra mile. He is a true UCS professional. We will miss him hugely as a gifted colleague and adviser, but even more as an enthusiastic, loyal and generous friend.

Fasal Khan

Personal difficulties have meant that Fasal Khan of the History Department has been away from UCS since early November. We have been pleased to welcome Dr Ben Wells who has been covering Fasal's teaching over that time, while Bill McAteer of the Maths Department has taken responsibility for his Remove form. Whilst I hope that Fasal will be able to return to UCS next term, I am pleased that Ben and Bill will be on hand to cover, should he remain away.

Deme Wardenship of Evans/Head of the Modern Languages Department

Simon Button will be stepping down from his responsibility as Head of Modern Languages at the end of this year. We are most grateful for his contribution over ten years in that job.

His place will be taken by Tom Underwood who, consequently, will step down as Deme Warden of Evans at the end of the year. A new Deme Warden will be appointed in due time.

Activities Week/Post AS period

Last year's first-ever UCS Activities Week at the end of the Summer Term was a great success. We will be repeating the initiative in 2010. So, normal timetable will be suspended for Entry, Shell, Lower Remove, Remove and Transitus students for the final full week of the Summer Term. Instead, a programme of trips, excursions, workshops, conferences and other activities will be arranged for all of these students. Attendance will be compulsory. Costs will be borne by the school.

David Rance will be organising the programme this year. An important letter from David to parents of Lower Remove students is enclosed with this mailing that is of special consequence to members of the Lower Remove. Due to circumstances beyond our control, the Lower Remove Activities Week trip to Belgium, to see the First World War battlefields and cemeteries, and other sites, must begin on Sunday 26th June. I apologise for any inconvenience that this may cause.

Transitus students and parents should note that school will resume immediately after AS level exams are completed. This will involve a programme of academic teaching, alongside important preparations for university application and community activities. It is compulsory for all students. Please do not arrange work experience placements, internships etc. that clash with Summer Term dates.

Traffic in Frognaal

I continue to receive regular complaints from local residents about careless parking in Frognaal by UCS parents when collecting their sons or daughters from school. The most common offence is obstructing driveways.

I always promise to pass the message on. Please park thoughtfully and please consider collecting pupils from streets slightly further away from the school – it will reduce congestion and give the boys and girls a bit more exercise.

Meetings for Parents Next Term

Remove Parents Evening A-K	Thursday 20 January 2011	4.20 pm
Remove Parents Evening L-Z	Tuesday 25 January 2011	4.20 pm
Lower Remove Parents Evening A-K	Wednesday 9 February 2011	4.20 pm
Lower Remove Parents Evening L-Z	Monday 14 February 2011	4.20 pm
Entry Form Parents Evening A-K	Thursday 10 March 2011	4.20 pm
Entry Form Parents Evening L-Z	Monday 14 March 2011	4.20 pm
Upper Remove Parents Evening A-K	Wednesday 23 March 2011	4.20 pm
Upper Remove Parents Evening L-Z	Tuesday 29 March 2011	4.20 pm

Spring Events

- January 26th & 27th Lund Theatre Be My Baby directed by Transitus students 19.30
- January 29th Great Hall Orchestra of St Paul's 19.30
- February 1st -3rd Lund Theatre Hay Fever directed by Stephen Powell 19.30
- February 5th Great Hall Salsa for India (tickets from the box office) 19.30
- February 10th Great Hall Old Gower's Annual Dinner 19.30
- February 16th Lecture Th UCS Jazz Concert 19.30
- March 8th Lecture Th Tea time concert 17.00
- March 10th Great Hall Chamber & Instrumental Concert 19.00
- March 15th Great Hall Parents' Guild Super Quiz 18.00
- March 29th -1st April Lund Theatre Son of Man directed by Allan Steven 19.30
- March 31st Great Hall UCS Spring Concert 19.30