

Forms 5 & 7 Distance Learning Programme

Offering pupils an impactful
education: the need to refocus



Forms 5 & 7 Distance Learning Programme

- We have an opportunity to add value to pupils during this challenging time;
- Building on our history of innovation, we believe there is great potential to blend contemporary studies with new activities, as we help pupils focus on their studies;
- Our three-stage approach provides a unique academic programme that meets the needs of our pupils, setting them up for success over the next six months.

As we all take stock and adjust to the challenges faced across society, we are coming to terms with a rapidly changing environment. For Forms 5 and 7, the cancellation of public exams has removed the finish posts of a two-year academic journey; a journey they have worked hard towards. This abrupt halt to their studies has understandably come as a great disappointment and led to confusion over what to do next. This is a situation that feels disarming, but one which also brings unexpected opportunities when examined more closely.

At Oakham, we are proud of the strength of our teaching relationships, the care we take of each other within our learning community and our history of innovation in education. Our curriculum is broad, providing multiple pathways, and we take pride in helping our learners to blossom and thrive in their studies. Following the cancellation of external exams, we have considered pupils' current and future needs, what parents will see as a meaningful programme and how to use staff expertise to the full.

As a result, we have created a three-stage academic programme that is innovative in the value it offers pupils, yet remains sensitive to the current complexities facing our broad community:

Stage 1

Consolidate existing courses, tie up the learning process and ensure that core aspects of each course are fully understood;

Stage 2

Academically 'pause and refocus' to see the world of knowledge and skills from a different perspective – inter-disciplinary learning as pupils transition from one course to the next; the real world application of skills and knowledge already learned;

Stage 3

Embark on future courses in a manner that builds engagement alongside subject content, sparking pupils' enthusiasm and shaping the summer ahead.

All Form 5 pupils are expected to engage with all three stages of the programme.

In summary: 'focus on the past – focus through a different lens – focus on the future'. Whether it is the start of Upper School studies, or embarking on university courses, each transition marks a new chapter and level of maturity in studies. We understand that it might be tempting to rush forward at this point. However, we have concluded that it would be a missed opportunity to abandon courses before they are complete and launch into routine studies of future courses. We have a unique opportunity to better prepare our pupils for the journey ahead, and we hope that they will embrace it.

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Stage 1

Consolidation process & optional assessments: Focus on the past

- The removal of all public examinations means that pupils have not had the opportunity to fully finish their courses and consolidate their learning;
- The consolidation process revisits foundational topics from across the courses, which not only act as stepping stones, preparing pupils for the increased sophistication of future studies, but are good and useful in themselves;
- The optional assessments allow pupils to receive feedback on their progress, give them ownership of the completion of their courses and provide insight that will help with external exams, should they be sat later in the year.

Although a pupil's understandable gut reaction when considering revision and assessment may be to focus on the impact of the grade or mark they will receive when they take it, there are other factors that should be considered.

Firstly, pupils have embarked upon courses in multiple subjects, not just the ones they intend to continue with for further study. There are benefits to finishing all their courses well; in a number of subjects, pupils will never study this subject in the future and their lasting impression of the subject, and indeed their perception of competence in it, will be something they reflect upon in due course.

Secondly, through the deep work that consolidation promotes, pupils gain a greater awareness that working through difficult academic material – potentially abstract and lacking relevance in isolation – can lead to unexpected insights as the whole body of work. They learn how 'ah-ha' moments come about through consolidating individual aspects of their courses, as pupils are finally able to join the dots between core themes, allowing a deeper and more meaningful level of understanding of subjects to be accessed. Perseverance leads to understanding which leads to satisfaction.

Finally, the momentum that builds as pupils approach final exams serves to promote their understanding and appreciation of the importance of diligence and hard work, and their ability to strengthen their academic capacity. At Oakham, we value learning, and understand the importance of study, not merely in order to pass an exam, but rather by seeing learning as an end in itself.

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Stage 2

The Academic Cornerstone Course (ACC): Focus through a different lens

- The Academic Cornerstone Course (ACC) is an opportunity to prepare pupils for their future studies and careers, by focusing on inter-disciplinary academic skills in six areas: numeracy, literacy, communication, analysis, creativity and leadership;
- These contemporary and traditional skills will aid pupils in their future learning, whatever their subject choices, helping them view academic studies from a different perspective.

Following consolidation of current courses and a chance to gain feedback on that process, our second stage of the term embraces this opportunity to prepare Form 5 and 7 pupils for future courses. Rather than merely focusing on the details of the next course – something that there is plenty of time to address from September onwards – we can foster a holistic approach to the curriculum, as core academic skills are introduced. This Academic Cornerstone Course (ACC) is the start of a longer-term programme for Form 5, and will continue throughout Form 6, as we believe it offers great value as an inspiring and impactful strategic initiative.

The ACC comprises six streams, covering both traditional and contemporary skills we believe will help pupils in their future learning. These streams are:

1. Numeracy
2. Literacy
3. Communication
4. Critical thinking and analysis
5. Creativity
6. Leadership in a changing world

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Each stream is led by a team selected from different departments, with staff working in an inter-disciplinary fashion to create bespoke programmes that will benefit each cohort. Each stream is challenged to create a novel learning experience that teaches pupils fundamental academic skills that we believe underpin success in school, university and the workplace in contemporary society. There will be a strong focus on the exploration of new ideas, the practice of new skills and the chance to study in a new way.

We live in a complex and fast-changing world where adaptability, resilience and optimism are key attributes. The ability to apply a broad range of academic skills to interpret, and shape, the environment faced is critical. The ACC offers pupils insight and builds their confidence in tackling both educational and real-world problems, as we help them to view these challenges through a different lens.

Stage 3

Bridging courses: Focus on the future

- The bridging courses help pupils to focus on future studies and experience learning in greater depth, building on consolidation courses and ACC skills;
- The studies will help pupils gauge their suitability for their chosen course, while also developing a greater appreciation of how it will benefit them, and how they can best prepare over the summer;
- While subject content will be covered, the primary aim is to help pupils gain a greater insight into their chosen course, igniting their enthusiasm and presenting a valuable, holistic picture of the experience to come, both academic and more broadly.

The final strand to the term will be an opportunity for pupils to look to the future, focusing on Upper School or university courses. Rather than starting A-level/IB courses half a term early for Form 5, we feel strongly that pupils need stepping stones to help them progress on their journey to the next stage in their education. We have therefore developed bridging courses that will allow pupils not only to experience Upper School/university courses, but also to start learning at a more sophisticated level, engaging them and inspiring them in the subjects they will study in the future.

Bridging courses are a chance for pupils to make the transition from their current to future courses; to learn and grow in academic maturity. They offer pupils an opportunity to explore new subjects and experience their increased rigour and depth. For Form 5, bridging courses will allow pupils to affirm their choice of Upper School subjects and give them confidence that the subjects they have chosen to study are the right ones for them. Historically, some Form 6 pupils may change their mind about the subjects they have chosen to study as the nature of the course becomes apparent. The experience that pupils will have through the bridging courses will give pupils greater confidence they are studying the right choices for them.

While there will be an academic focus to the bridging courses, there will also be aspects of broader educational experiences pupils can expect. This will be especially true with Form 7, where there will be a careers and life-skills element to the course, as is fitting for pupils transitioning to life at university and the world of work.

The bridging courses should engage and inspire pupils in their future subject courses and set them off on the next stage of their journey. With the long summer holiday following an unusual and different term, pupils have the chance to prepare well for their future studies. With enthusiasm ignited, pupils will be better placed to get ahead in the wider reading and exploration of their subjects, be this through reading lists, social media or research, and thus hit the ground running in the autumn.

By first focusing on past studies, and then focusing on learning through a different lens, Oakhamians can look forward with hope and confidence, prepared well for whatever challenge they choose to take on.

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