

‘Looking BAC’

As the Bedales Assessed Courses approach the end of their third year at the heart of the curriculum, Parents’ Day seems like a fitting opportunity to draw your attention to the achievements of our innovative venture so far. Today is a chance to see some of the fruits of our BAC labours around the site, in the dance display, in the galleries, in the Junior Play and in Outdoor Work.

The perceived weaknesses in content and assessment of many GCSEs, which prompted the departure of many of our departments from the conventional exam-based route, are ever more prominent in the press and in the pronouncements of wise educational voices. With an increasing number of high-profile institutions abandoning a full GCSE diet, it feels as though Bedales, once again, has acted with prescience, and set a trend amongst forward-thinking schools.

The coming pages, and the displays around school, reflect the enthusiasm and engagement that BAC courses have generated amongst students and staff alike. The shackles of narrow curricula and assessment methods have been joyfully thrown off, and broad, challenging tasks are encouraging our students to produce imaginative, independent work, which is assessed in a range of ways appropriate to the development of invaluable life skills. When future departing Bedalians are found to be confident, articulate, imaginative, creative and critically-minded, it might not be too much to claim that the BACs have played their part in preparing them for life beyond school.

Alistair McConville

Head of Bedales Assessed Courses

What our students say...

The perfect course...loved everything about it.

I loved the way there was so much to learn about techniques and equipment; once we knew how to use them there was a lot of independence; it was a great course!

I felt we were taught by people who love the subject and given more independence than in the GCSEs.

I was able to do my own thing with the guidance of a teacher, and I really learned how to work as part of a team.

We had lots of choice and were encouraged to come up with our own ideas and manage our time...with freedom came responsibility!

The teaching was stretching, detailed and inspiring. By far the most stimulating academic work I have ever undertaken.

I thought the work really encouraged me to develop my independent learning skills as it gave us freedom to choose things we were interested in.

I really enjoyed this because there was a lot of variety and interesting tasks. We were helped a lot, and learnt a lot.

We were not patronised but actually treated as adults wanting to learn!

Ancient Civilisations

The Ancient Civilisations BAC has introduced students to the history, literature and culture of a wide range of ancient civilisations. Although focused primarily on Greece and Rome, the course explores the achievements of other peoples and periods, and focuses in detail on the consequences of the interactions of different cultures. The BAC has enabled students to explore a range of ancient civilisations through their architecture, archaeology, art and written records.

For example, in our *Art and Architecture* component, we look at four major sites – Stonehenge, the Pyramids, the Athenian Acropolis (mainly the Parthenon), and the Pantheon in Rome, and examined how the technology and resources available to ancient cultures was exploited to demonstrate their religious beliefs and political values. A day trip to Stonehenge helped! For literature and material culture we chose the Babylonian Empire – partly to exploit the British Museum's *Babylon* exhibition and because it is very accessible in archaeology and through the works of Herodotus.

The opportunity to shape courses and modules and to integrate them with exhibitions and new materials as well as taking the students' interests into account is very liberating. In addition, we have been able to devise a variety of assessment methods which allow all sorts of talents to express themselves when otherwise they might go unnoticed. We incorporate short lectures and public speaking as well as art or drama as well as more traditional examinations and extended essays. We can gleefully imitate, borrow what is worth borrowing and adapt material to suit our needs – and so far we have gone well beyond anything possible using public exams, at a pace which suits all concerned.

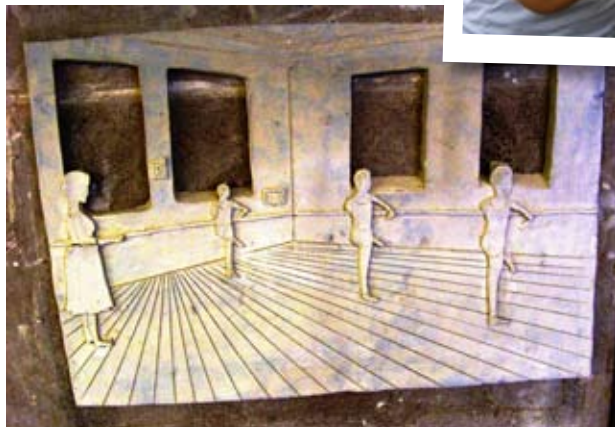
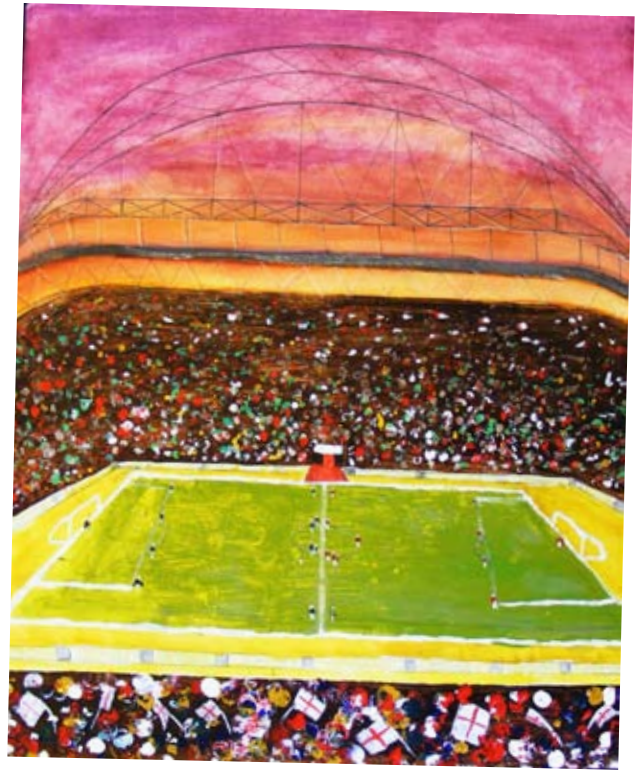
Christopher Grocock
Acting Head of Classics



Art

Freedom, individuality, confidence and a respect for the achievements of the past are the key elements that we aim to encourage during the BAC art course. That is the freedom to use materials and techniques in an imaginative way relevant to the concepts that might underpin any piece of work. Also important is the development of the individual style and visual language of the students and the confidence to express themselves without fear. Recognising the achievements of artists and craftspeople of the past and of other cultures is also of vital significance. The richness of the sketchbooks viewed this year are evidence of just how successful the BAC course has been in raising the sights of the students and allowing them to see what they are capable of. The exhibition in the main art rooms is a celebration of just how much the current BAC students have achieved.

George Hatton
Head of Art



Classical Music

The BAC in Classical Music has restored to our curriculum the development of important academic skills which ambitious musicians require, and which, more appropriately, equate to the higher level of practical skill-development to which each candidate must necessarily aspire.

The ability to analyse set works of appreciable length and in considerable depth; the ability to compose *pastiche* eighteenth-century harmony and counterpoint; the skill to see what one hears and to hear what one sees (aural perception); the ability to appreciate genre and historical context: all of these are fundamentally important to a young musician's ability to understand how music is constructed and how it might be performed. They are pre-requisites, as well as perpetual adjuncts, to any serious involvement with music, whether professionally or as an amateur.



Nicholas Gleed
Director of Music

Dance

This year sees the third cohort of dance students embarking on the BAC course. The work they have created has once again demonstrated a really exciting level of creativity, dedication and independent learning.

The Block 4 group delivered their first performance as part of the Youth Dance Platform in the theatre based on the work of L.S. Lowry. They rose to the challenge and made a really strong and well received contribution to the evening.

Block 5 clearly enjoyed the independence and versatility open to them for the Individual Study Area unit. The range of work was diverse and interesting. Charleston, Punk Rock, lyrical, The Car Man, Balinese, Cats, Samba, West Side Story, and 1930 Musical movies were just a few of the study areas.

This term has been very productive. We have had our first designated evening of Dance in the Olivier Theatre and launched Bedales Dance Performs as an annual event. Students were given the freedom of creativity to compose and choreograph a dance from the initial idea and stimulus through to the final delivery in the Theatre. Topics varied from Long-tailed Lemur, Elegy to Dunkirk, Urban Dance film, Let's jive, Dancing in the Rain film, Claire de Lune, Stress, Alice in Wonderland and many more!

Today's Dance Display in the quad is an opportunity to see some of the Block 4 and 5 BAC work joined with A level students and pupils who take Ballet, Tap and Modern classes. I hope you are able to come and join us to enjoy and celebrate the fruits of their hard work.



Joanna Alldridge
Dance Teacher

Design

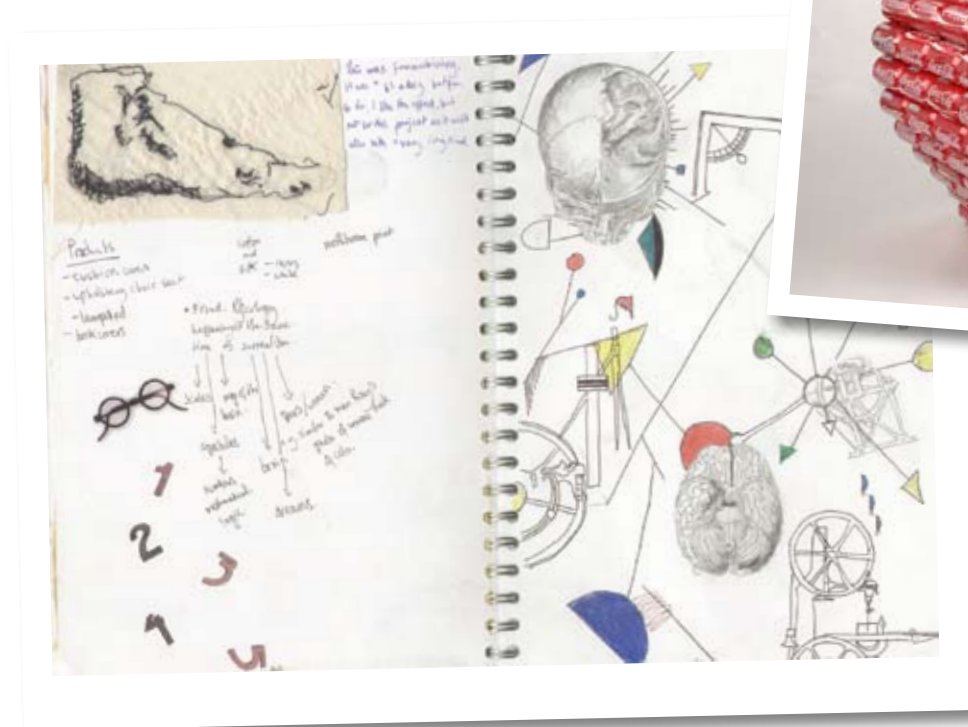
When I started at Bedales in September 2006 I had the daunting but exciting prospect of initiating a new course for Design. The experience has been thought-provoking and inspiring for the teaching staff and I hope for the students too.

We started the process by not only dissecting which elements of the traditional GCSE were worthy of inclusion but also analysing where we wanted our students to be at the end of the course. From the outset we have tried to challenge the preconceptions of Design being materials specific and embraced a holistic approach to the subject in which students can indulge in the elements of making that inspire them but can also work on projects that cross the traditional materials divides. We have persuaded our students that they are designers first and foremost who just happen to work in wood, metal or textile and that their sources of inspiration can be just as broad.

As teachers we had become rather good at chasing GCSE marks by developing fail safe processes of working that had very little to do with creativity but more to do with evidence gathering and formulaic process following. We felt we had lost sight of the prime object which should be to inspire young minds in the love of making and individuality. Our BAC course focuses on exactly those elements of the work. Gone are the prescribed folders of work and in their place are sketchbooks full of creative musings, diverse thoughts and personal design focussed dialogue. We have cut out as much of the evidence gathering based tasks as we dare to give more time for making and creating. Knowing the students and their work as well as we do we are able to use rigorous but more dynamic assessment methods unavailable to large exam boards marking the work away from the centre and unable to have direct contact with the students.

The proof of our work is ultimately in the outcomes our students make and their readiness for the next stage of the educational journey. We certainly are not the finished product and like any good set of designers we hope to continue to make iterative improvements to the course over the years. At this stage I am not sure any of us could face going back to the bad old days!

Ben Shaw
Head of Design



English Literature

When we abandoned English literature at GCSE we lost, from the core curriculum, one twentieth century novel, one twentieth century play and a somewhat eccentric selection of prescribed poems. Those who took up the BAC course gained the detailed study of ten texts, almost as many as would be found on an A level course.

Some of these ten were texts which might have been studied at this level in the past: plays by Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams, novels by Hardy and Forster. Others ventured into virtually untried territory with this age group, in particular with plays like *Dr Faustus*, *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *The Duchess of Malfi*. The more unusual choices have included Truman Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and Dario Fo's *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*.

By the end of the course, having written essays on four novels, four plays and two collections of poems, many students have come a long way in terms of critical technique and quite a few of the essays written late in the course would fare well at A level.

Preparation for A level is an important consideration behind the course, but preparation for lifelong appreciation of literature is a greater one. When a sixth form student who studied George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* during the BAC course mentions that she has just read *Middlemarch* in her own time one gets the sense that the course has worked.

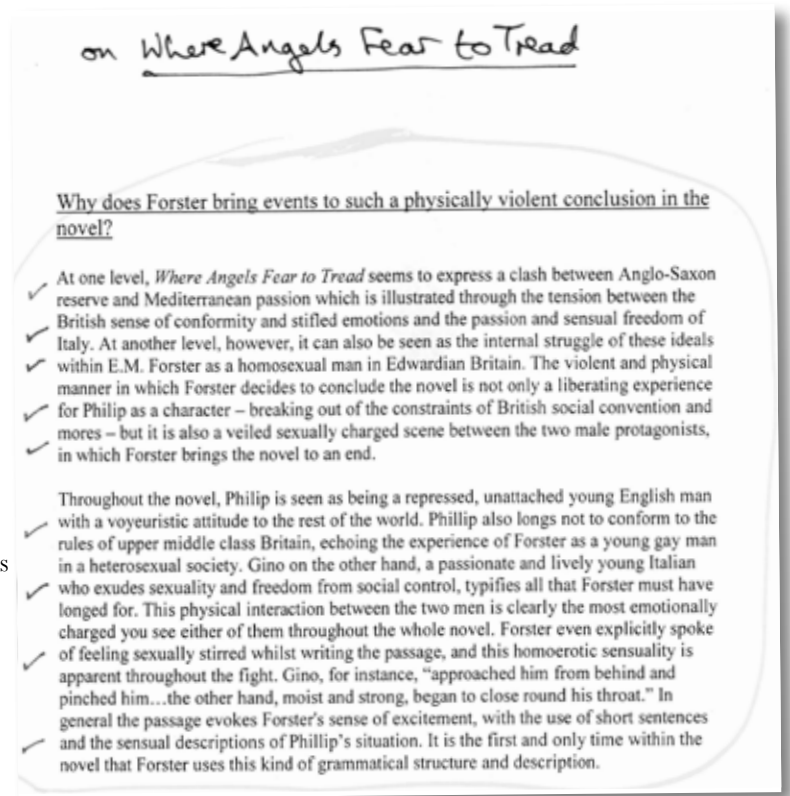
I interview applicants from other schools for our sixth form and all too often I find that all they have studied in English over the previous four terms is *Romeo and Juliet*, *Of Mice and Men* and *An Inspector Calls*. I have nothing against any of these books, in fact I teach them all to Block 3 regularly, but they constitute a meagre diet for a fifteen or sixteen year old with a taste for literary exploration. In contrast, BAC English literature offers a feast of richness and diversity.

Graham Banks
Head of English

History

Although more satisfied with the GCSE course than some departments, the History Department embarked on the BAC course for three reasons: firstly, all GCSE History courses focus exclusively on the Twentieth Century. Although there is a mass of interesting material to study, BAC provided the opportunity to move outside recent History. Thus, whilst much of the GCSE course has been maintained, a new component on The Crusades has been developed and it has been great fun to teach and to study. A second reason for joining the BAC flotilla was some concern over how effectively GCSE prepares students for A level, particularly with regard to the long essay of 3,000 words that students have to write in their last year. Although some students will produce quite long essays for their GCSE Coursework, BAC **requires** that an essay of between one and two thousand words be written. A third reason for joining BAC was simply to expose as many students as possible to the study of History (our belief being that everyone should study it for the perspective it brings). We consider the enterprise to have been a success. More students than ever have chosen to study History in the Sixth Form and we have produced students with an almost obsessive interest in the Crusades. The value of writing long essays will, we are confident, be evident next summer when the first cohort complete their A level.

Jonathan Selby
Head of History



Outdoor Work

BAC Outdoor Work is designed to be very different from any GCSE. It sets out to help students develop important skills and qualities which will help them in the work-place and at leisure. Through the medium of a practical task students learn to work together as a team, are given opportunities to learn new skills, and use their imagination, creativity and initiative.

Recent projects have been varied and ambitious. The rebuilding of a gypsy caravan is well underway, a vintage tractor, currently parked outside the Orchard Building, has been thoroughly renovated; there's a new herb garden, a chicken house, a Bronze Age style kiln, and an emerging bee centre amongst other things.

The course is designed to develop enthusiasm, motivation, leadership and social skills. Some pupils may choose to develop their business skills; others will pursue the art and craft aspects of Outdoor Work. The strength of this course is its flexibility. It enables students to work to their strengths, to follow their interests and to develop life skills. This course is designed to include the many aspects and experiences which form the basis of a rounded education and tries not to limit itself to being a purely academic exercise.

I do encourage you to come and see some of the students' work over in Outdoor Work today.

Peter Coates

Head of Outdoor Work



Philosophy, Religion and Ethics

Developing and delivering the BAC in Philosophy, Religion and Ethics has been a liberating and stimulating venture. My previous experience of teaching Religious Studies GCSE was somewhere short of satisfactory, since the potential to really make the subject alive and relevant was all too often dulled by narrow, unrepresentative schemes of assessment and the restrictiveness of a syllabus that allowed for very little digression, leading to formulaic, unimaginative work. The freedom afforded by the BAC has enabled a course that is broader, richer and more capable of allowing students to engage with areas that genuinely spark their own interests. Rather than merely assessing our students' ability to perform under pressure on a given day in an exam room, we are now able to offer credit for the far more useful skills of developing a considered argument in a piece of coursework, for their oral presentation skills, for the originality of their thinking, and for collecting evidence of their sustained reflections on their own interests in the exciting new 'Thinking Journal'. Instead of working systematically through a bite-size textbook, we have been able to read and review whole books, compare them with documentaries, visit monasteries (two so far), cathedrals, and even Rome! We have been able to consider everything from aesthetics, monastic life and Cartesian dualism, to nihilism, metaphysical poetry and the philosophy of science. Students respond with enthusiasm and imagination to such a stimulating diet and I am convinced that they are developing into more effective learners and acquiring invaluable life skills as a result.

Alistair McConville

Head of PRE

An extract from an essay examining the different ways in which art can deliver judgements about the human condition:

"... and so, Turner's shipwreck of the Minotaur presents a contrasting judgement on the alleged sophistication of humans to that depicted in Raphael's School of Athens. It shows humans as pitiful, hopeless, debauched creatures, overpowered by the fearful dominance of God, or Nature. This can be explained by the different periods in which the paintings were produced. It is typical of artists of the Romantic period, such as Turner, to emphasise the divinity of nature, whereas it is characteristic of Renaissance artists, such as Raphael, to focus on the glorification of humans, to the point where the human form becomes semi-divine. I am more inclined to agree with the former perspective, as I find that Renaissance painting is flawed in its emphasis on the positive aspects of human achievements, overlooking the many faults of human nature. These, in my opinion, ought to be addressed before glorifying the supposed feats of humanity. In addition, especially with the increasing threat of global warming and extreme natural disasters, it seems that we have grossly underestimated the power and importance of the natural world, which is rightly given prominence in the shipwreck..."

An extract from an essay examining a debate between Professors Alister McGrath and Richard Dawkins:

"...the irrationality of faith is particularly dangerous, as it gives terrorists and other extremist believers the idea that questioning one's religion is failure, so any rational criticism of your faith is thought to reflect a lack of trust in God, and therefore a lack of goodness. This may be a minority position, but it represents religion at its worst, the effects of which, in my opinion, outweigh the benefits of religion at its best. As Steven Weinberg writes, "Religion is an insult to human dignity; without it you would have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things, but for good people to do evil things, it takes religion." The downsides of extremist religion do not only affect the religious, but everyone else too. Alternatively, if you look at religion's best effects: happiness, contentment, high culture, "the capacity to transform, creating a deep sense of personal identity and value and bringing social cohesion" (McGrath) then, in my view, these are all things that can be achieved without religion...and surely independence of thought, so often lost in religion, would benefit humanity in the long run..."

Theatre Arts

The BAC in Theatre Arts is allowing us to explore a far greater range of theatre, in much more depth than previously. Our new Portfolio approach encourages a really individual approach to our students experience of drama and theatre-going across the BAC and does away with the rather arid essays expected by GCSE.

The foundation year enables a more detailed approach to script-work. Small groups rehearse - under their teacher's directorial eye - to perfect an accessible but challenging script on a variety of themes. Students might go on to create a piece of mime and music (such as the "Birth to Death Project"). This year's Block 5 students also had the benefit of, amongst other things, a mask workshop from Forte Theatre Company.

Block 4 concludes the year performed with a performance in and outside our very own barn: the Sothington Barn, which is the central and much-prized building of our Outdoor Work Department, a perfect setting for this play.

Block 5 BAC students have been able to work on a Brechtian piece with a great deal of creative freedom, visit the National Theatre and performed in the Bedales Olivier Theatre, as well as working on a script of their choice for performance in The Studio. These pieces have included plays by such diverse and challenging writers such as Chaucer, Yasmin Reza and Steven Berkoff.

The Portfolio approach to assessment has been really successful. It is a highly personalised way of assessing student's work. It includes a large collection of essays, reflections and reviews, from which four key Assignments are selected to represent their strongest work. The most fascinating, colourful, considered and engaged Portfolios have started to come our way, which is really exciting to see and confirms our sense that the BAC has been an excellent venture.

There are many BAC students performing in the Junior Play, so come and see the quality of our work for yourselves.

Jo Murphy
Head of Drama

