

# On course for success?

As exams loom, could extra tuition improve pupils' chances, asks  
**Catherine Paver**

With the Easter holiday approaching, a short revision course may seem a good idea for those facing important exams in the summer. Yet is this just an expensive quick fix or can it set a student on track for the next crucial months?

Professionally run intensive programmes lasting up to a week are offered by educational institutions and tutorial agencies all over the country, on a day or residential basis, but before paying for a course check whether your child's school or sixth-form college provides revision days.

It may be worth considering a short course if your child is weak in a certain subject, as additional tuition may help to

pinpoint the problem areas and strengthen them. Children who have missed a lot of lessons, been poorly taught or need support in planning revision and practising exam techniques may also benefit.

However, for students who have simply not put in enough work, a revision course is likely to be a waste of money. Jane Desmidt, assistant head of Sixth Form at Salesian College in Farnborough, Hampshire, says she once taught a student on a course who "used it as a substitute for working, so it made no difference". It can only help a student apply knowledge that has been acquired over time and boost confidence by filling specific gaps.

Revision courses may also prove counterproductive. "We hear mixed views about them from students," says Jamie O'Connell, marketing director of online student community The Student Room. "A short course can be great for locking yourself away from distractions and consolidating specific areas." But, he adds,

**Study strategy:**  
a course with a small group of other students can help boost confidence

*"Solitary revision can make a student feel jaded, just when they need to take a fresh approach to the material"*

"there can be a great deal of expectation on a child and that may be stressful and unpleasant for them". Being surrounded by people who know more than you do can knock your confidence, too.

"If students have been taught well, they should be able to revise independently," says Desmidt. "They need to be independent and perhaps these courses support the spoon-feeding theory."

Janette Wallis, senior editor of the *Good Schools Guide*, also warns against becoming too dependent on courses and tutors. "If a student's time becomes too structured, they will find it more difficult to cope when they go to university. Education is not only about exam results – it's also about learning how to learn," says Wallis.

If you're not sure whether a course would benefit your child, consider employing a private tutor instead. A residential revision course can cost £900, while tutors charge, on average, £30 an hour.

On the plus side, a good course can provide structured

study, detailed feedback and the chance to hone exam technique. Exams require students to answer unfamiliar questions on what they have learnt and solitary revision can make a diligent student feel jaded just when they need to take a fresh approach to the course material. "A good short course gives them a teacher on tap if they get stuck," says Wallis.

If you opt for a short course, find an accredited one that matches your child's exam board and syllabus. Ask about the teachers' qualifications and experience and how many teaching hours are provided. Also enquire about group size and cancellation policies if the course fails to attract the minimum number of students.

You should ensure that tuition is delivered on the specific content required by the syllabus followed in your child's school and not only on general study skills. The right course can make a real difference, but it is best to proceed with caution in what is still an unregulated field.

## » A BETTER GRADE Toby Bonnell, 16



Last Easter, to help him with his geography and chemistry GCSEs, Toby enrolled on a five-day residential revision course at Wellington College.

"You could choose the topics you wanted to focus on. The tutor analysed our answers in detail, which gave me a lot of confidence," says Toby, who passed with Bs in both these subjects, improving his standard by at least one grade.

"I don't think weekly tuition would have given me the intensive approach I needed. I was able to study without distractions like Facebook, and I still use some of the writing techniques I learned."

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