

MidKent College



MidKent College A-level Biology students with lecturer Alison Ackroyd (front and centre). Photographs by: Eric Baldauf.

What sort of college is this?

MidKent College is one of the largest further education and training providers in the South East, running courses from three separate campuses across Maidstone and Medway. It has approximately 15,000 students aged 16 and upwards. The latest Ofsted report said that the college had brought about ‘considerable improvement’ for students. Its main concern is to give students a second chance. Its current principal and chief executive is Stephen Grix, a former student, who left school at 15 with no qualifications and enrolled as a day-release brick-laying student.

When did we visit?

The Day’s team visited MidKent College’s campus in Gillingham on November 15th 2011. We first sat in on Emma Wilkinson’s double Politics lesson and then attended Dr Alison Ackroyd’s Biology lesson, meeting many other lecturers including Stephen Bachelor, Head of Faculty for Creative and Visual Arts, during break.

What do they say about ‘The Day’?

When Stephen first came across *The Day* he agreed to buy it instantly. He said: “We have many high performing students here and it is frustrating when they don’t get into the top-ranked universities when we know they should. One thing that they struggle with is recognising the place of their own programme of study within the context of contemporary issues. *The Day* is extremely useful. It gives students the confidence to discuss and debate contempo-

rary events and interact with the broader media world in a more confident way.”

Emma dropped out of school at 16 and got a job as a packer in a pot pourri factory. She says: “I see myself in so many of my students. You have got to tap into and inspire their interests and arouse their curiosity. I have got to make politics come alive for them. There is no way you can do this by using text books alone.” When she first saw *The Day* it was just the kind of programme she was looking for to inspire her students.

News of the online newspaper has spread to other departments including Media Studies where one of the tutors, Steve

the core syllabus. We saw two concrete examples of this. First, Emma used articles in *The Day* as a background to a politics class. Students had clearly been inspired by reading articles on 16-year-old Rori Weal’s speech to the Labour Party conference and on Ed Miliband’s plan for Britain. Her classroom was divided into three main political party groups. Each made their own party political broadcast which the students themselves filmed in the wider corridors outside the classroom.

Second, Alison showed her A Level students how science is influenced by religion, economics and politics, and is not just concerned with laboratory experiments. *The Day’s* article headlined: ‘Crowded world to face a hungry future’ was shown on the white board. Students also had an A4 sheet of the article in front of them. They read it for 5 minutes. Then for 15 minutes the class divided into groups and discussed the world’s growing population, contrasting waste and obesity in the developed world with malnutrition in the undeveloped.

Alison led the groups into 20 minutes of plenary discussion. Each group fed back. Could birth control be made mandatory? How could the rich area of the world share food with the poor? Alison concluded: not much could be done scientifically for the Third World until those countries had more economic and political stability.

“THE DAY GIVES STUDENTS CONFIDENCE”

STEPHEN BACHELOR
HEAD OF FACULTY FOR CREATIVE AND VISUAL ARTS

Keevil, is already a convert. He said: “No longer do families discuss things in a meaningful way. In so many of our homes if it is printed in the *Daily Mail* it must be true. *The Day* will counter this, enabling our students to think critically and to talk with knowledge and confidence so that the art of conversation is not lost.”

And how do they use it?

At MidKent, *The Day* is used as part of the mainstream curriculum in order to provoke discussion and debate around

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