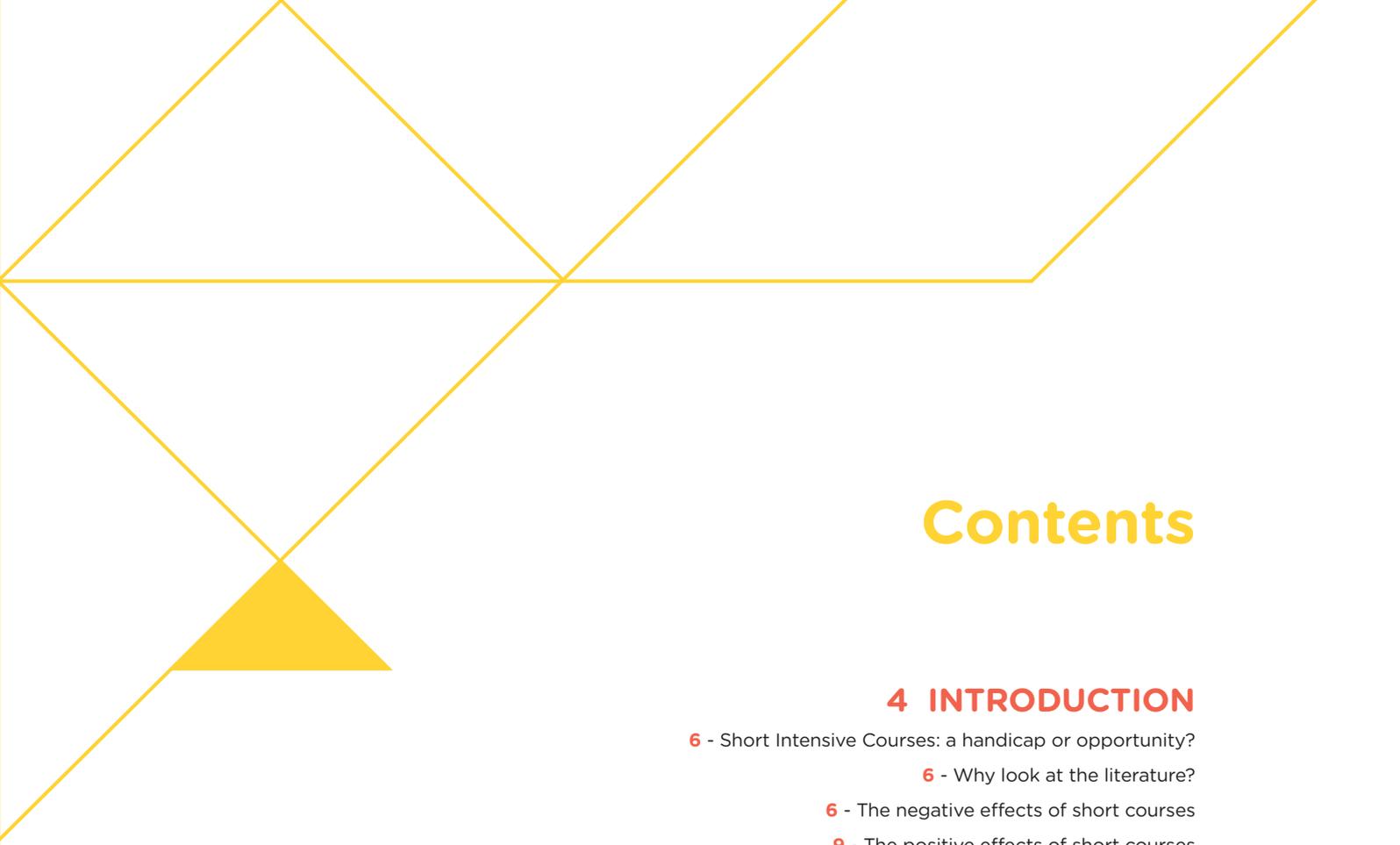


The Intensive Summer SEC Revision Classes

A handicap or
opportunity?

Best Practices for Teachers of the
Youth Guarantee - SEC Revision Classes





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Introduction

The Youth Guarantee model initially emerged in the Nordic countries in the 1980s and 1990s. In fact, Sweden established the Youth Guarantee in 1984, Norway in 1993, while both Finland and Denmark did so in 1996. The Youth Guarantee commits states to provide unemployed young people with training prospects or work. Moreover, the Youth Guarantee specifies a fixed maximum period of four months from when a young individual leaves compulsory education and/or becomes unemployed.¹

In 2012, the Commission proposed a sustainable integration of NEETs into the labour market, and highlighted the relevance of the Youth Guarantee Scheme as a means to achieve this objective.² The Youth Guarantee recommendation was formally adopted by the EU's Council of Ministers on the 22nd of April 2013.³ The Youth Guarantee obliges Member States to ensure that, within four months of enrolling on the Youth Guarantee scheme, youths can either acquire a job that suits their needs, or undergo educational courses that could improve their skills and thus acquire a job in the future.⁴

The importance of the scheme was also reflected in the 2014-2020 European fund programming period. In fact, one of the goals of the programming period (2014-2020) involves the sustainable integration of young people in the labour market (European Social Fund - ESF), in particular, those who are not in employment, education or training and those that are socially excluded.

The Maltese Youth Guarantee was first launched in 2013. The Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, which was published by the Ministry for Education and Employment, lists various priorities, including the: 1) successful reintegration of young people - who are at risk of being/are socially excluded - into education, training or employment; 2) motivating and encouraging a culture of educational achievement in addition to a sense of responsibility among youths, as opposed to dependency on social benefits and other type of welfare; and above all 3) providing youths with sustainable rather than mere short-term solutions.⁵

One of the initiatives within the Malta Youth Guarantee is the SEC Revision Classes, which aims to provide students from 16-24 who have failed their May SEC/Ordinary level examinations in **Maltese, English, Maths, Physics** - and as of 2017, **Biology** - with free revision classes, in preparation for their September resits. Throughout its three iterations spanning 2014-2016, the project has helped **over 3000 students** and has at its peak employed **over 177 teachers**. The aim of the revision lessons forms part of the commitment to reduce the number of Early School Leavers, by providing these students with a valuable opportunity to re-enter the educational path.

The classes take place during the summer period between when the results for the SEC examinations are issued, until the date of the first SEC resit examination. The SEC Revision Classes have a number of unique features that require a different approach to the more standardised preparation for the SEC examinations. The above-mentioned features are:

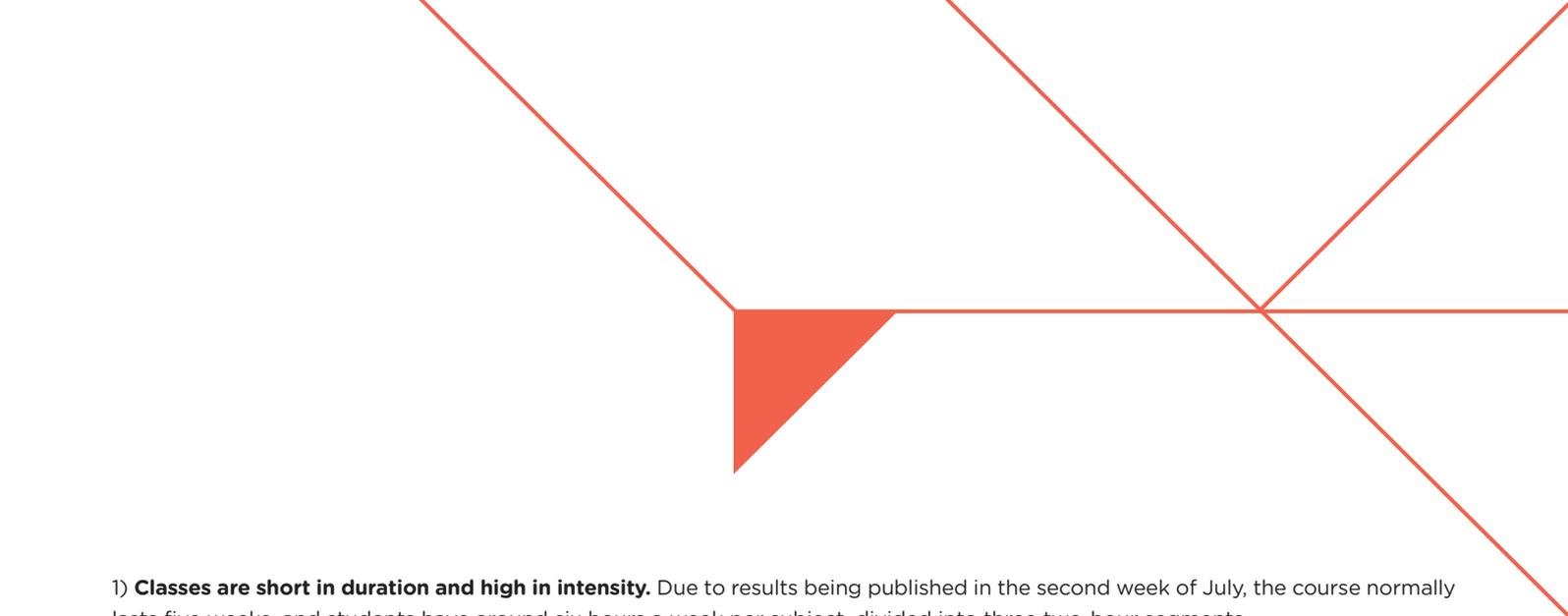
¹ Veronica Escudero and Elva Lopez Mourelo (2015), "The Youth Guarantee programme in Europe: Features, implementation and challenges", Working paper no. 4, International labour office.

² Ibid.

³ European Commission (2014), 'The EU Youth Guarantee', European Commission Memo.

⁴ EuroFound (2015), 'Beyond the Youth Guarantee: Lessons learned in the first year of implementation', European Foundation for the improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

⁵ Ministry for Education and Employment (2016), "Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan Malta", Available on: <<https://education.gov.mt/en/resources/News/Documents/Youth%20Guarantee%20Implementation%20Plan%20-%20Malta.pdf>>



1) **Classes are short in duration and high in intensity.** Due to results being published in the second week of July, the course normally lasts five weeks, and students have around six hours a week per subject, divided into three two-hour segments.

2) **Classes tend to be smaller in number** (maximum 15 students).

3) The student cohort is **entirely made up of those who have failed their May SEC examinations** (as this is a criterion for eligibility) and therefore students tend to be weaker than normal classrooms.

4) Students tend to be **demotivated due to a sense of failure** because of their May results.

5) The revision classes take place in summer usually **between the last week of July and the end of August** which can result in higher absenteeism and more commitments taken up by students, such as family vacations abroad or part time jobs.

These differences have spurred the Youth Guarantee team into taking a closer look at the dynamics and circumstances that result during the SEC Revision Classes, and initially a number of questionnaires were distributed to both teachers and students. The questionnaires⁶ were mostly structured in a quantitative manner, as the population of teachers and students cumulatively totalled over 1,300; however a strong insight that was gained was that certain issues required further qualitative investigation, particularly when the teachers' perspectives were concerned. The drive to investigate more deeply is what willed this document into being; the main intention of which is to understand, in greater depth, the challenges teachers faced and the strategies they employed to overcome the challenges.

This toolkit is not intended to be read with the rigour of academic literature, despite making recourse to such literature; nor does it attempt to provide formulaic and rigid pedagogic methodologies. Instead, it should be interpreted as the focused reflections of a number of teachers who have taught the SEC Revision classes across different years and subjects, and combining the sum of those insights with a look at the literature. It is intended as an investigation of the various facets of teaching the Revision Classes, as well as providing some useful points to consider; particularly for teachers who may choose to teach the Revision Classes in the future.

⁶ The questionnaires will be made accessible in a report which will be uploaded on www.youthguarantee.edu.mt.

SHORT INTENSIVE COURSES: A HANDICAP OR OPPORTUNITY?

WHY LOOK AT THE LITERATURE?

Throughout all the interviews and focus groups that were undertaken to develop this toolkit, the first and most pressing concern that every teacher expressed was the length of time available, and the underlying assumption was that this was in fact hampering the learning process. Teachers claimed that the brevity and intensity of the course meant that students had objectively less time to assimilate the concepts, and that they were in general more stressed out due to pressure. All of the teachers agreed that students would be better off if they had more time to revise, and in some cases develop the skills they would need to pass their SEC level examinations.

These claims formed the basis of what would be the research question asked when an investigation was made into the literature relating to short courses. Was the fact that the revision classes were both brief and intense an inherent disadvantage to the intended result of the revision classes; that of students obtaining a pass in their resit examination/s?

The answer that the research has provided is interestingly nuanced. Some research studies affirmed the position taken by the teachers during the interviews, namely that the brevity and intensity of short courses negatively impacted the intended outcomes. Surprisingly, many research studies claimed short courses do not negatively impact learners, while some stated that on the contrary, the format of short courses - particularly summer courses - could have a positive effect on learning outcomes. Others claimed that what affected the outcomes depended to a greater degree on how the educator approached the short courses, rather than the format in and of itself. Throughout this chapter, we will explore these three positions, and discuss some ideas that can help an educator tasked with teaching students during the Revision Classes.

THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF SHORT COURSES

Describing the negative side effects of short courses is not difficult. How can one expect the same level of success as per more traditional courses, when the time spent on material in the classroom setting is reduced to half or, even, quartered? In a normal setting, students have three years to prepare for their SEC Revision classes with the last few months being dedicated exclusively to revising and strengthening core concepts. This is made even harder when the courses occur during the summer time, which is normally dedicated to employment, leisure and family obligations, and which cut into their available outside study time.⁷

The length of time required to absorb content has been commented on in the field of educational psychology, where Carrington (2010)⁸ suggests that learning is enhanced when new subjects are presented in spaced out sessions rather than compressed into fewer, longer sessions. This would suggest that students learn better when taking courses that are scheduled over longer time periods. This is confirmed in a study by Bateson⁹, wherein students in traditional schools scored significantly higher than those attending compressed classes. Henbery¹⁰ also believes that since students have to move on to new material without having the time to review or reread old material has a detrimental effect on their educational outcomes.¹¹

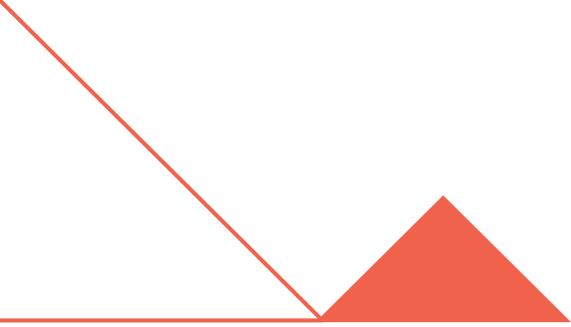
⁷ Giordano, G. (2011). *A Quasi-qualitative Analysis of Time-compressed Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Course Pedagogy* (Doctoral dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University).

⁸ Carrington, L. Sam Houston state University 2010 IABR & ITLC Conference proceedings Orlando, FL, USA "The Impact of Course Scheduling on Student Success in Intermediate Accounting".

⁹ Bateson, D. (1990). Science achievement in semester and all-year courses. *Journal Research in Science Teaching* 27: 23-40.

¹⁰ Henbery, K. (1997). "The impact of class schedule on student performance in a financial management course." *Journal of Education for Business*. 73(2), p.114.

¹¹ Nasiri, E., & Shokrpour, N. (2012). Comparison of intensive and non-intensive English courses and their effects on the student's performance in an EFL university context. *European Scientific Journal*, 8(8).



Educators have also held wary views of intensive courses, and have claimed in several studies that they are critical of the fatigue which such courses cause; the lack of time for students to digest concepts; the lack of opportunities for extensive coverage; and too rapid assignments (Scott & Conrad, 1991).¹² One particular study required instructors to determine whether or not class format affected their class preparation or the students' ability to learn the material. According to the author, educators rated students in intensive classes higher in motivation, though they reported that time-shortened formats had a negative impact on learning.¹³ A similar study conducted by Tracey, Sedlacek, and Patterson (1980)¹⁴ surveyed educators teaching during a time-shortened summer session at a large state research university. The educators felt that there were several disadvantages associated with intense courses; including fatigue, inadequate time to properly prepare for courses, and the students' inability to synthesize information. Educators also tended to disapprove of courses lasting less than five weeks. O'Mara (1996)¹⁵ found that while nursing students in an eight-week accelerated program were highly enthusiastic of the time savings, educators complained that the students couldn't keep up with the work load.¹⁶

The time limitation imposed during a short summer course influences other aspects of the course. In an effort to strain out any superfluous content, many educators agree with Scott's (1996)¹⁷ findings that their primary concern, after lack of time, is the sacrifice of the breadth of the course and the lack of rigor during in-class deductive reasoning; tools which are essential for SEC exams. Daniel (2000)¹⁸ further points out that with such a limited amount of time, both in class and out of class, our concerns also include lack of time to actually reflect and absorb the material that educators present. They are thus stuck with a course that does not seem to be as useful as a normal course, cannot possibly cover the same amount of content, and does not seem to allow for information up-take.¹⁹

In a study conducted by Petrowsky (1996)²⁰, it was found that business students following a time-shortened summer course had lower comprehensive test scores than students taking the courses in a traditional length semester.²¹

These concerns have also been reflected by students who have complained that despite convenience, short courses tend to be more stressful (Daniel, 2000)²² with too much work and material (Scott & Conrad, 1991) to cover in too short a time period.²³

¹² Scott, P. A. & Conrad, C. F. (1991). "A Critique of Intensive Courses and Agenda for Research." Madison WI: Division of Summer Sessions and inter-college programs, university of Wisconsin. ERIC ND. ED 337097.

¹³ Nasiri, E., & Shokrpour, N. (2012). Comparison of intensive and non-intensive English courses and their effects on the student's performance in an EFL university context. *European Scientific Journal*, 8(8).

¹⁴ Tracey, T.J., Sedlacek, W.E., & Patterson, A.M. (1980). Perceptions of summer school faculty at a large university.

¹⁵ O'Mara, L. (1996). Fast-tracking in baccalaureate nursing education: One Canadian response to students with advanced standing. *Nurse Education Today*, 16. 108-114.

¹⁶ Daniel, E. L. (2000). A review of time-shortened courses across disciplines. *College Student Journal*, 34, 298-308.

¹⁷ Scott, P.A. (1996). Attributes of high-quality intensive course learning experiences: Student voices and experiences. *College Student Journal*, 30, 69-77

¹⁸ Daniel, E. L. (2000). A review of time-shortened courses across disciplines. *College Student Journal*, 34, 298-308.

¹⁹ Giordano, G. (2011). *A Quasi-qualitative Analysis of Time-compressed Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Course Pedagogy* (Doctoral dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University).

²⁰ Petrowsky, M. C. (1996). The two week summer macroeconomics course: Success or failure?

²¹ Daniel, E. L. (2000). A review of time-shortened courses across disciplines. *College Student Journal*, 34, 298-308.

²² Daniel, E. L. (2000). A review of time-shortened courses across disciplines. *College Student Journal*, 34, 298-308.

²³ Scott, P. A. & Conrad, C. F. (1991). "A Critique of Intensive Courses and Agenda for Research." Madison WI: Division of Summer Sessions and inter-college programs, University of Wisconsin. ERIC ND. ED 337097.

In summary, short courses present a number of concerns:

- 1) They “stress convenience over substance and rigor” (Wolfe, 1998)²⁴.
- 2) They do not allow for the necessary reflection and analysis of the material being taught (Traub, 1997; Wolfe, 1998)^{25 26}. This is particularly important in areas where learning discursive material is required. Many of the studies that support the formats of a short course tended to be in academic areas where skill acquisition is critical (e.g. language teaching, mathematics). Clearly, more time for discussion is needed in more discursive academic subjects (such as literature).
- 3) Those critical of short courses argue that the compressed nature of the courses do not produce learning outcomes of consistent educational value, resulting in cramming by students (Shafer, 1995).²⁷
- 4) They can lower grades (Petrowsky 1996).²⁸
- 5) It is argued that lecturers cannot cover sufficient content in a shortened timeframe, resulting in superficial content coverage (Wlodkowski, 2003b).
- 6) It is also claimed that short courses tacitly endorse the ‘commodification’ of education focusing on output of students, and catering for customer satisfaction (short and convenient courses), or a McEducation approach instead of meeting the intrinsic learning needs of students (Traub, 1997).^{29 30}

²⁴ Wolfe, A. (1998). How a for-profit university can be invaluable to the traditional liberal arts. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December (4), B4-B5.

²⁵ Traub, J. (1997). Drive-thru U: Higher education for people who mean business. *New Yorker*, October, 114-123.

²⁶ Wolfe, A. (1998). How a for-profit university can be invaluable to the traditional liberal arts. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December (4), B4-B5.

²⁷ Shafer, D. W. (1995). *A qualitative study of adult and traditional college students' perceptions of a compressed and traditional length college course*. PhD, Boston University.

²⁸ Petrowsky, M. C. (1996). The two week summer macroeconomics course: Success or failure?

²⁹ Traub, J. (1997). Drive-thru U: Higher education for people who mean business. *New Yorker*, October, 114-123.

³⁰ Davies, W. M. (2006). Intensive teaching formats: A review. *Issues in Educational Research*, 16(1), 1-20.

THE POSITIVE EFFECTS OF SHORT COURSES

The next position that will be examined in this toolkit is that of researchers, who throughout their research have found that short courses are actually beneficial and do in fact produce positive outcomes for learners.

Prior to engaging in this exercise it is prudent to note that many short courses are rarely ever intended to replace traditional longer format structures. Short courses are instead borne out of a need to educate those with limited or little time to devote to formal classroom experiences; and enhancing the existing curriculum with integrative and supplementary, course topics.³¹ Similarly, SEC Revision classes students are provided with such a short time to sit for their resit, they need to utilize the five weeks they have available to their maximum benefit in order to obtain a pass.

One of the benefits of short courses is the ease with which they can be developed to supplement areas in the curriculum that students would need further revision in. This can be done by asking students curricular areas they feel they are weak in within the particular subject, and focus on topics that have perhaps not been explored enough throughout the year.³² Short courses should be seen as being complementary to traditional courses instead of their replacement, and have been transposed to various disciplines.³³

Another positive effect that has been reported in several studies is that some students' motivation, commitment and engagement increase during courses conducted in short formats, and students perceive intensive programs as much more intense, stimulating, exciting, efficient, integrated, challenging, and on occasion more enjoyable (Burton & Nesible, 2002; Scott and Conrad, 1991; Daniel, 2000).^{34 35 36} Jacques-Bilodeau (2010)³⁷ conducted a study on the long term effects of intensive English programs on secondary school students. The findings of their study revealed that the intensive English program is a strong source of motivation for students to continue learning English at school and at home on a long-term basis. The majority of the participants felt that their oral competencies were better than other students who had not participated in intensive English programs. They also reported that they really enjoyed the intensive English classes.³⁸ In a study interviewing 114 students in a variety of disciplines at Australia's Swinburne University, Nicolette Lee and Briony Horsfall found that overall, students reported positive experiences of short courses. They found that short courses allowed an "increased sense of community with and responsibility to their peers, frequency of feedback, and the ability to immerse themselves in a single topic led to benefits that were characteristic of short courses [21]."³⁹

This has also been found to be the case with educators who have reported that intensive sessions are more enjoyable, encouraging intense working relationships between instructors and students. (Grant, 2001)⁴⁰ Instructional time is also believed to increase (Henbery, 1997)⁴¹. Moreover, better attendance is encouraged, better student concentration is achieved, and students participate in a more engaged manner (Grant, 2001; Daniel, 2000)^{42 43}.

³¹ Bentley, A. M., Artavanis-Tsakonas, S., & Stanford, J. S. (2008). Nanocourses: a short course format as an educational tool in a biological sciences graduate curriculum. *CBE-Life Sciences Education*, 7(2), 175-183.

³² Ibid.

³³ Bentley, A. M., Artavanis-Tsakonas, S., & Stanford, J. S. (2008). Nanocourses: a short course format as an educational tool in a biological sciences graduate curriculum. *CBE-Life Sciences Education*, 7(2), 175-183.

³⁴ Burton, S., & Nesbit, P. (2002). An analysis of student and faculty attitude to intensive teaching. Paper presented at the celebrating teaching and Macquarie, Macquarie University.

³⁵ Nasiri, E., & Shokrpour, N. (2012). Comparison of intensive and non-intensive English courses and their effects on the student's performance in an EFL university context. *European Scientific Journal*, 8(8).

³⁶ Daniel, E. L. (2000). A review of time-shortened courses across disciplines. *College Student Journal*, 34, 298-308.

³⁷ Jacques-Bilodeau, M. (2010). Research project: A study of the long term effects of Intensive English programs on secondary school ESL students. Retrieved on July 27, 2012, from www.csbe.qc.ca/projetrd/doc_projet/marie_jac_bil_2010.pdf

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Lee, N., & Horsfall, B. (2010). Accelerated learning: A study of faculty and student experiences. *Innovative Higher Education*, 35(3), 191-202.

⁴⁰ Grant, B. (2001). Using block courses for teaching logistics. *International Journal of Physical Distribution and Logistics management*, 31(7/8), p. 574. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09600030110402987>

⁴¹ Henbery, K. (1997). "The impact of class schedule on student performance in a financial management course." *Journal of Education for Business*. 73(2), p.114

⁴² Grant, B. (2001). Using block courses for teaching logistics. *International Journal of Physical Distribution and Logistics management*, 31(7/8), p. 574. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/09600030110402987>

⁴³ Daniel, E. L. (2000). A review of time-shortened courses across disciplines. *College Student Journal*, 34, 298-308.

With regards to the results obtained, a study conducted by Waechter (1967)⁴⁴ which looked at two groups of students in an earth science class offered in two formats; nine weeks and eighteen weeks; found no significant differences in the short-term or long-term scores between the two groups. He concluded that the two formats produced equivalent results.⁴⁵ These results were replicated in a similar study that compared students' learning experiences in a set of courses in British literature, and a set of courses in marketing in which each set included a course taught in an intensive format and a semester-long format with the same instructor; and the same content achieved similar results (Scott, 1994).⁴⁶ Another study conducted by Messina (1996)⁴⁷ collected data from 91 students who took weekend courses in a community college. In response to questions regarding the academic validity of these alternative courses, the author determined that the end of semester grades were comparable to similar classes taught during the regular academic year.⁴⁸

A critique offered by researchers with negative views of short courses is that this format might suit certain subjects but not others. However, short courses have been offered in a variety of disciplines; including education, business, mathematics, English, foreign languages, and psychology. Researchers compared the test scores of three sections of a health psychology class with the same instructor, content, readings, contact hours, and exams. Two of the sections were taught during a ten-week quarter, while the third was during a five-week summer session. The authors found no significant differences in achievement among the three groups that concurred with findings of a pilot study that they had conducted the previous year. They concluded that the intense course was as effective as the traditional quarter class related to student achievement (Kanun, Ziebarth and Abrahams, 1963)⁴⁹.

In another finding, psychology educators Ray and Kirkpatrick (1983)⁵⁰ studied the impact of different time formats on both learning and attitudinal change. The authors measured students' knowledge, attitudes and anxiety regarding human sexuality after completing either a three-week intense course, or a 15-week traditional semester-long class in human sexuality. Though both courses had the same instructor, the time-shortened course met for three hours a day, five days a week for three weeks, while the semester-length course met three hours a week for 15 weeks. Ray and Kirkpatrick found that both groups showed significant increases in sexual knowledge, decreases in anxiety, and significant changes in attitude, as measured by the Sex Knowledge and Attitude Test and the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory administered as pre- and post-tests. Students in the time-shortened course also showed significantly higher pre- to post-test gain scores in sexual knowledge than students in the traditional format section. The study also demonstrated that significant changes in attitudes and behaviours could occur in a time-shortened class.

Other researchers have also confirmed this, such as in a study conducted by Brackenbury (1978)⁵¹ which reviewed final exam grades in eight sections of an educational philosophy class. All sections had the same instructor, text, course requirements and exams. There were three 15-week sections, two eight-week sections, and three weekend classes that took place over the course of four consecutive weekends. While the author believed that students in the traditional sections would out-perform those in the intensive sections, there were no significant differences between the exam grades. Boddy (1986)⁵² also found that students in intensive classes compared to traditional length education courses scored higher in semester and final exams. Austin, Fennell & Yeager (1988)⁵³ found no significant differences in exam scores between students in a time-shortened summer course in research methods compared to

⁴⁴ Waechter, R.F. (1967). A comparison of achievement and retention by college junior students in an earth science course after learning under massed and spaced conditions. Doctoral dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1967). Dissertation Abstracts International. 27, 11-A

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Scott, P.A. (1994). A comparative study of students, learning experiences in intensive and semester-length courses and of the attributes of high-quality intensive and -semester course learning. Paper presented at the Meeting of the North American Association of Summer Sessions, Portland,

⁴⁷ Messina, R.C. (1996). Power package: An alternative to traditional course scheduling. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 396787).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Kanun, C. Ziebarth, E.W. and Abrahams, N. (1963). Comparison of student achievement in the summer term and regular quarter. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 32, 123-132.

⁵⁰ Ray, R.E. and Kirkpatrick, D.R. (1983). Two time formats for teaching human sexuality. *Teaching of Psychology*. 10, 84-88.

⁵¹ Brackenbury, R.L. (1987, Summer). What is more elusive than the learning of philosophy? *Educational Research Quarterly*, 93-96.

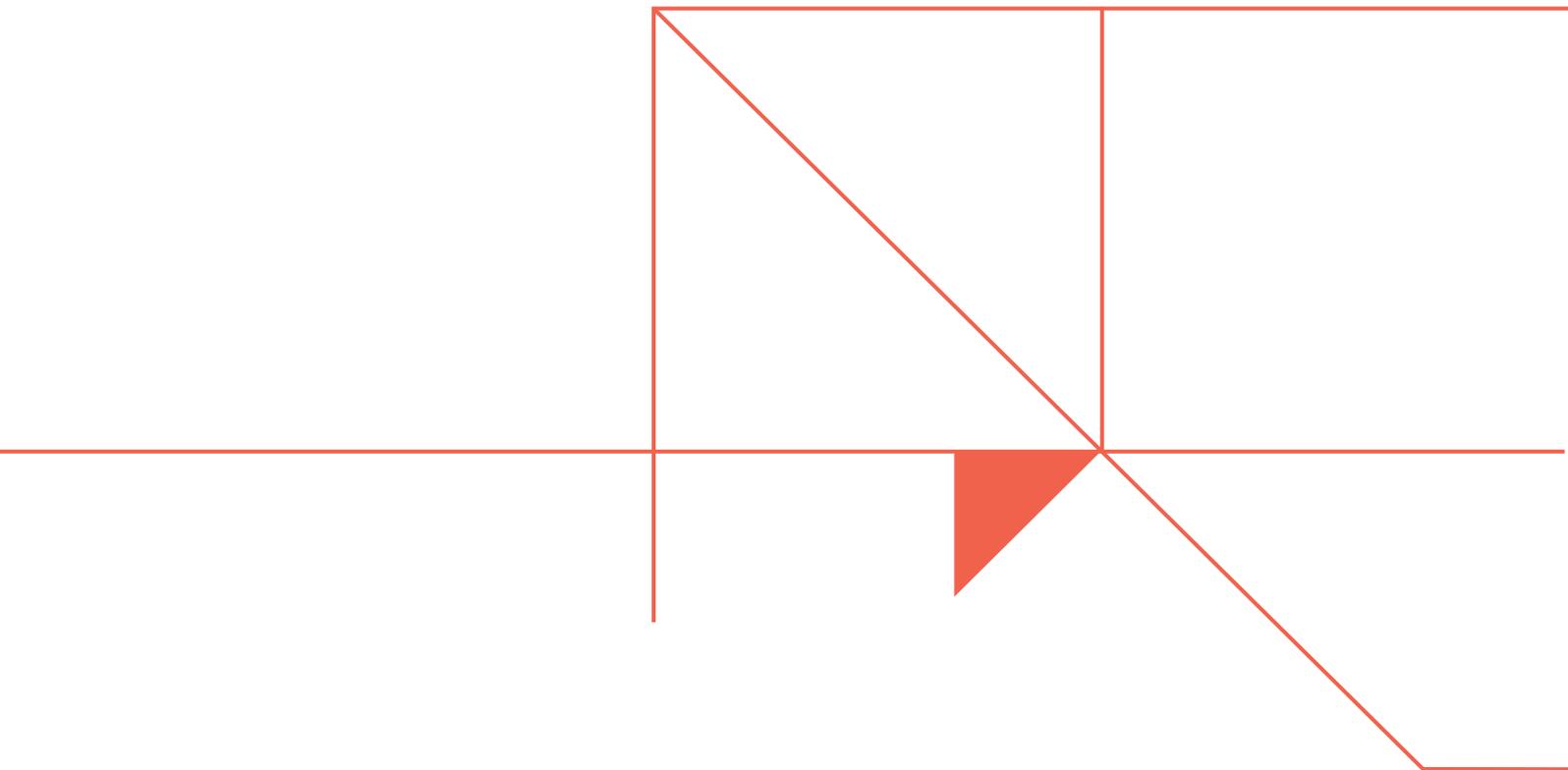
⁵² Boddy, G.W. (1986). Regular vs. compressed semester: A comparison of effectiveness for teaching in higher education. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 1986). Dissertation Abstracts International, 47, 1-A.

⁵³ Austin, T.L., Fennell, R.R., and Yeager, C.R. (1988). Class scheduling and academic achievement in a non-traditional graduate program. *Innovative Higher Education*. 12.79-90.

those in a semester length session. Similarly, in Lombardi et. al⁵⁴, Austin et. al⁵⁵, Caskey (1994)⁵⁶, Doyle et al. (as cited in Scott 1991), Van Scyoc and Gleason (1993)⁵⁷, Geltner and Logan (2000)⁵⁸, researchers found similar test scores between short and long courses.

Throughout this section, we have examined how short courses are not intrinsically a recipe for failure, and that in many studies, students and educators found the short course format to be a useful and effective teaching vehicle across multiple disciplines.

While the studies mentioned looked at whether the short course format was in itself a stumbling block to educational success and found it not to be so, few would argue that the format itself is responsible for its success. Indeed, the success of a short course is dependent on the preparation of the educator; in fact Scott (1991)⁵⁹ also determined that if courses were to be a success, they need to be presented using active learning techniques and peer collaboration, which leads to an experience that facilitates focused, memorable and uninterrupted learning experiences. In the next section, we will in fact be reviewing which other factors involving educators can influence the outcome of a short course.



⁵⁴ Lombardi, T.P., Meikamp, J.A., & Wienke, W.D. (1992). Learning gains and course time format in special education. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 15, 33-38.
⁵⁵ Austin, T.L., Fennell, R.R., and Yeager, C.R. (1988). Class scheduling and academic achievement in a non-traditional graduate program. *Innovative Higher Education*, 12, 79-90.
⁵⁶ Caskey, S.R. (1994). Learning outcomes in intensive courses. *Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 42, 23-27.
⁵⁷ Van Scyoc, L.J. and Gleason, J. (1993). Traditional or intensive course lengths? A comparison of outcomes in economics learning. *Journal of Economics Education*, 24, 15-22.
⁵⁸ Geltner, Peter and Ruth Logan. (2000). 'The influence of session length on student success'. Research report 2000.4.1.0. Santa Monica College. <http://www.smc.edu/research/T20000410.htm>
⁵⁹ Scott, P.A. & Conrad, C.E. (1991). A critique of intensive courses and an agenda for research. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 337 087).

OTHER FACTORS AFFECTING SUCCESS OF SHORT COURSES

Several authors have expressed the view that the difference in positive educational outcomes between short and long courses is in fact the educator themselves. Scott (1995)⁶⁰ found that instructors may need to modify their instructional approaches to maximize students' learning experiences in intensive courses, based on research involving 29 undergraduates enrolled in one of two sets of matched intensive and semester-length -classes.⁶¹

In a later study, the author found that in order for short courses to be a positive academic experience, educators must employ a variety of teaching methods and establish a comfortable classroom environment (Scott, 1996)⁶². Educators must exhibit these attributes in greater numbers and to a greater degree in intensive courses. Scott's data indicated that when these attributes are present, time-shortened courses produce a better quality learning experience for students than equitable semester length classes. Scott also asserted that instructors of intensive courses must employ a variety of teaching techniques, actively involve students, and establish a comfortable classroom environment.

Similarly, Brown (1992)⁶³ claims that the three key elements necessary to any intensive course are: (1) careful organization by the instructor; (2) varied approaches and teaching techniques; and (3) unique outcomes perceived by the students. The author also states that a syllabus should be prepared and distributed to all registered students well before the semester begins.

Watson (1998)⁶⁴ encourages instructors of intensive classes to utilize alternative forms of assessment, particularly those that use student performances and demonstrations. While these techniques are part of a traditional semester-long course, they are essential in time-shortened classes.

Studies conducted by Allen, Miller, Fisher & Moriarty (1982)⁶⁵ indicate that educators teaching intensive courses were less likely to lecture, use a standard text, assign an assignment, and cover as much material. These authors, who surveyed winter intersession educators from 36 colleges nationwide, also found these educators were not as likely to grade students through the use of tests and quizzes. Instructors were more likely to utilize more applied learning specified to the educational outcome and home learning.

⁶⁰ Scott, P.A. (1995). Learning experiences in intensive and semester-length classes. *College Student Journal*, 29, 207-213.

⁶¹ Daniel, E. L. (2000). A review of time-shortened courses across disciplines. *College Student Journal*, 34, 298-308.

⁶² Scott, P.A. (1996). Attributes of high-quality intensive course learning experiences: Student voices and experiences. *College Student Journal*, 30, 69-77.

⁶³ Brown, D.H. (1992). Teaching literature in the intensive weekend format. Paper presented at the meeting of the College English Association, Pittsburgh, PA (ERIC Document Reproduction service No. ED 354 519).

⁶⁴ Watson, C. (1998). Instructional ideas for teaching in block schedules. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 34, 94-97.

⁶⁵ Allen, J.L., Miller, T.A., Fisher, B., & Moriarty, D.D. (1982). A survey of January interim psychology courses. *Teaching of Psychology*, 9, 320-321.

In a study by Giordano⁶⁶, students on short courses had several expectations from their educators. Some of these expectations included:

- a. Enthusiasm - A passion for both the subject matter and teaching... it's infectious.
- b. Knowledge and Experience - A demonstration of a deep understanding of the material and the familiarity that can only come from living it.
- c. Good Communication - The ability to take that vast store of knowledge and experience and present it to them clearly at their level of understanding.
- d. Willingness to learn from and consult with students - The readiness to stop being the expert, and learn with them and from them.
- e. Student Orientation - A demonstration that student learning is the true mark of course success and that we care.⁶⁷

Students unanimously identified active learning as essential to intensive courses, and wanted to engage with the material actively⁶⁸. Cultivating each of these aspects is by no means easy, but there are a few ways which the small classroom format of short courses facilitates; namely learning a person's name, asking for information and desired outcomes allows students to have some control over the course. This has the effect of giving students ownership over the learning process and making them feel heard.⁶⁹

Another method suggested by McKeachie et al⁷⁰ is to allow many opportunities for feedback during the course, and follow through accordingly. This is also in line with Scott's⁷¹ findings that students want "a connection to the teaching and learning process itself", and they want a teacher who is sensitive to their needs.⁷²

In this section, the authors have all agreed that the determining factor in the success or otherwise of a short course format is educators themselves. Multiple studies noted pedagogical adjustments were required in order to accommodate the changes created by a condensed timeframe. In the following sections, we will discuss recommendations from teachers who have taught the SEC Revision Classes, and put forward the factors that could facilitate the education outcomes while always being mindful of the difficulties.

⁶⁶ Giordano, G. (2011). A Quasi-qualitative Analysis of Time-compressed Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Course Pedagogy (Doctoral dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University).

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ McKeachie, W. and Svinicki, M. (2011). *McKeachie's teaching tips: Strategies, research, and theory for college and university teachers*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

⁷¹ Scott, P. A. (1993, Nov). A Comparative study of students' learning experiences in intensive and semester-length courses and of the attributes of high-quality intensive and semester course learning experiences.

⁷² Giordano, G. (2011). A Quasi-qualitative Analysis of Time-compressed Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Course Pedagogy (Doctoral dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University).

MOVING FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

While further research is still needed to investigate both quantitatively as well as qualitatively the impact of short courses, the surprising take away from the literature is that despite time constraints in short courses; whether during summer session, intersession, weekend, or regular semester; they are not inherently deficient at producing positive learner outcomes. Research also shows that this claim can be found to be applicable across a number of disciplines and therefore no one subject is at an advantage or disadvantage when it comes to short courses.

This is particularly applicable when short courses are combined with careful content preparation which takes into account the needs of the students; well organized and structured activities; and adapting the content to suit the outcome desired within the time frame allotted. Overall, successful short courses require good planning, a multitude of teaching strategies, a focus on learning objectives, and accurate assessment.

While the advantages of short courses may include convenience, better results, and creative teaching techniques, one must not ignore the disadvantages. The absence of time creates extra pressure on students to learn certain skills within a short time-frame whose assimilation would be more successful over a longer period of time. Students also generally come into short courses, particularly in summer expecting that the course load will be lighter when in actual fact it is heavier as more material is covered in a shorter time. Absenteeism in short courses also has a more detrimental effect since more material is covered with each session. These gaps in knowledge will then be more difficult to cover given the time format of the short course leading to inferior absorption of subsequent material particularly if key concepts are missed.

Understanding both the opportunities and the handicaps that short courses provide allows educators to prepare and make use of the revision classes; adopting an optimistic mindset eager to exploit any opportunity for greater learning, while being aware of the limitations available and attempting to offset such limitations whenever possible.

In the following chapter, we will look at the collective experiences of teachers from all the subjects taught, and try to combine the insights gained from the literature with the practical experience of several teachers into a set of tangible recommendations which will aid educators in their experiences within the SEC Revision classes.

⁷³ Daniel, E. L. (2000). A review of time-shortened courses across disciplines. *College Student Journal*, 34, 298-308.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

Toolkit

The next section is a result of a series of interviews and focus groups with teachers from various subjects who have taught within the SEC Revision Classes over the years. Their views and ideas on how to prepare and deliver these sessions have been synthesized and amalgamated to provide practitioners with some insights and understanding into achieving the most effective educational outcomes for the students.

1) UNDERSTANDING THE BACKGROUND

The SEC Revision Classes take place during the summer months; in the short time available between the publication of the results of the SEC examinations by MATSEC, and the resit examinations. This normally allows for a period of five weeks for the Revision Classes to take place.

The first obstacle to learning is due to the timing of the courses, which tends to take place during some of the hottest months of the year. During this time, students have many possibilities for distractions due to highly anticipated leisure activities; such as cultural events (like the village festa) or a family vacation. The heat during the morning and afternoon hours is also unhelpful when one is to conduct serious study and learning, and students can be felt to absorb information more slowly, and are more likely to lose concentration as the time passes by.

KEY TAKEAWAY 1:

The fact that the Revision Classes take place in summer can hamper the learning process due to the heat and cultural events which take place in summer.

Despite literature findings, attempting to cover so much material over five weeks is a stressful and intense experience, and not all students have the resilience to follow through the entire experience with the same level of determination and commitment that they might have started off with. This is amplified by the fact that students themselves have different needs. Students who come to the revision classes having failed the Paper A variant and obtained a 6, might only require some brief revision and working on some weak topics. However, those who have failed paper B tend to be much weaker students who might have missed entire chunks of lessons and school, and will be very difficult to motivate given their gaps in knowledge. The gaps in knowledge may also be due to linguistic or scientific deficiencies in other subjects (such as English or Maths) which can in turn affect other subjects taken.

KEY TAKEAWAY 2:

Students tend to be of mixed levels of proficiency and commitment, which also results from whether they have failed the Paper A or B variants.

At other times, students enter into the classroom (as with other classrooms throughout the year) bringing with them a heavy baggage of social and mental health issues. The reason why they would have failed would be due to the difficult environment as well as internal difficulties they might be passing through, amongst others, and therefore one needs to continuously assess if there are any deeper issues as to why there is lack of educational performance.

KEY TAKEAWAY 3:

The reason why some students fail their exams might relate to personal and social issues they might be facing.

One common factor to all students is that they are all discouraged by the fact they have not passed their SEC exam, particularly if they have friends who have passed their examinations and are now enjoying the summer break. Students therefore enter into the classroom with pre-conceived ideas of who they are and are not able to do. While in certain cases their self-perception might be true and is actually based on realistic assessments of their abilities, many enter into the classroom disheartened having lost faith in their abilities. It is of paramount importance that throughout the sessions, teachers identify and address this sense of failure, and help students not to give up, and on the contrary try their utmost to pass the re-sit.

KEY TAKEAWAY 4:

Students enter the SEC Revision classes demotivated and disheartened, and this will require constant encouragement.

Another opportunity for distraction is due to the fact that some of the students have part-time jobs that last until the early hours of the morning. The lack of sleep combined with exhaustion can result in difficult morning sessions, during which students take more time to become concentrated and alert. Other students start the Revision classes and then drop out, or never attend in the first place. This could be due to a variety of reasons such as the fact that whenever something is offered for free, we are more likely to take it for granted and not give our utmost. Other reasons could be that parents were in fact the reason why the students applied for the revision classes, and the students themselves have no desire or motivation to attend, while others prefer to attend private lessons.

KEY TAKEAWAY 5:

Part-time jobs and lack of motivation from the students' side can contribute to absenteeism and dropout rate.

2) DEFINING THE TEACHER'S ROLE AND MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES

Given the fact revision classes take place during the summer and teachers are free to leave the premises according to their timetables, it is easy to let down one's guard and adopt a more laissez-faire attitude in several aspects. One of the ways that this can happen is in relaxing the dress code that a teacher adopts, and donning more summer casual wear. While wearing light and summer-appropriate materials is necessary, especially given the summer heat, a teacher's clothes still need to project a professional attitude. Such attire sets the tone for the revision lessons, and helps students ease into the mindset that they are there to work hard. Proper attire is particularly important when students are not allowed all kind of summer wear themselves because it is impossible to maintain discipline if one flouts their own rules.

KEY TAKEAWAY 6:

Wearing professional attire sets boundaries and prepares students to get into a frame of mind that work needs to be done.

Given that most of the classes tend to be small in number, it is not usual that there are a lot of problems with discipline in class. However, whenever problems are encountered a change in one's tone of voice as well as spending some time speaking to the individual has been found in many instances to address the issue. It is important that a policy on mobile is rigorously maintained as many teachers have complained that they are a serious distraction to students, and with time being of the essence, teachers cannot afford not having students engaged.

KEY TAKEAWAY 7:

Discipline should not be a large problem, but mobiles can still act as a distraction and a policy should be adopted.

Some of the teachers interviewed recommended adopting a Greek theatre format (students sit in a U shape around the teacher as opposed to rows) as this gives better visibility to both the teacher and the student. When students are distracting others, changing places has been the recommended strategy by our interviewees. A caveat they mentioned is that one has to be aware that for some students, this is the first situation of a mixed environment, and therefore one ought to keep in mind that this could create some awkwardness or distraction.

KEY TAKEAWAY 8:

A Greek theatre style of seating has sometimes proven useful.

KEY TAKEAWAY 9:

It is important to note that in some cases this is the first time students are entering a mixed setting.

3) ASCERTAINING AND CATERING FOR STUDENTS' NEEDS

When students enter the SEC Revision Classes they bring with them a varied baggage of knowledge, strengths and weaknesses. The small classroom format allows for greater tweaking of the topics to be taught throughout the Revision Classes, and the amount of time and depth that should be allotted to each. It is advisable that teachers dedicate the first lesson or two to ascertain what topics will require the most attention. This has been done in a variety of ways by past cohorts of teachers; ranging from taking a more direct approach by simply asking students where they struggle the most, to administering some sort of test which will allow them to determine what topics will require the most attention throughout the five weeks.

KEY TAKEAWAY 10:

Spend the first lesson or two ascertaining which topics the students need to strengthen in their mind.

When determining which topics should be covered and which topics ought to be omitted, teachers had varying responses as is to be expected when decisions requiring professional judgement are involved. Additionally, what might work one year might require a complete re-thinking as students might have different needs. In the next few paragraphs, no attempt will be made to standardize the teaching process as this would be a contradiction in terms, instead some insights as to how to approach the task of deciding what to teach and what emphasis this should deserve will be provided.

It is very difficult to cover an entire syllabus in five weeks, particularly if other activities such as lab work or background reading need to take place in the three years leading up to the SEC examinations. Although this insight is not shared by all teachers; as some claim one should attempt to revise everything within the syllabus; most teachers agreed that a degree of selectivity is required. After having ascertained students' weaknesses and ensuring (if they are important) that these topics are covered, only the most frequent topics in the examination should be covered. This will allow for adequate time to cater for what the September paper will most likely be rather than attempt to cover everything.

KEY TAKEAWAY 11:

After determining students' needs, try and cover what is most likely to come out in the September examination.

The next shift in teaching approach is the manner topics within a teacher's subject ought to be taught. All the teachers consulted for this document agreed that teachers should move away from teaching the "knowledge" aspect within the syllabus and whenever possible help students to acquire the skills to answer questions in examination papers. Consequently, emphasis should be made on acquiring the skills to handle examination papers which, as will be mentioned in another section, may be lacking in students. While certain knowledge is necessary to handle the exam papers, the Revision classes are not a place to focus on broader educational goals within a subject, but should help students prepare for an examination they will be sitting for at the end of the five weeks.

KEY TAKEAWAY 12:

The SEC Revision Classes are aimed at helping students pass their September examination. Focus on the skills they need to increase their chances of passing the paper.

Once a plan has been established, teachers should share their roadmap with their students so as to give them a greater sense of ownership of the process. This will aid in reducing absenteeism, as students will have a clearer idea of what subjects they would be missing out on if they do not attend.

KEY TAKEAWAY 13:

Share a roadmap of what topics will be covered when, to give students a greater sense of ownership of the process.

Although teachers are not entertainers and nor should they aim to be, particularly within such a short time span, it has been noted that students engage better when subjects are taught in a fun, motivating and relevant manner. It is understood that not all topics can be taught in this manner within a subject, but incorporating this element of engagement will go a long way towards motivating students, and decreasing student absenteeism and dropouts.

KEY TAKEAWAY 14:

It is easier to engage students when lessons are interesting and relatable for students.

4) DEALING WITH MIXED LEVELS

As mentioned in the section on understanding the background, teachers ought to expect that there will be mixed levels within their class. This is due to the fact that despite all students having failed their exams, they might not have failed for the same reason. While the Youth Guarantee team acknowledges these disparate levels, it has not found a way that is logistically feasible, given the very short time spans, to stream students according to ability.

To offset this difficulty, classes have been intentionally designed to have a small teacher-to-student ratio. This allows teachers to quickly identify the levels of the students, either through a series of exercises, or asking for their grades anonymously and setting the standard accordingly.

When more than one level is present in a classroom, there are a number of strategies one can employ. One strategy that was recommended was to prepare two explanations for each concept: a standard explanation and a simplified one. Despite requiring greater preparation, the simplified explanation has the added benefit of reinforcing knowledge in even the strongest students. Another method recommended is using the time before and after lessons to dedicate some one-to-one time to the weaker students. This extra time might be enough to mitigate the weakness of certain students.

KEY TAKEAWAY 15:

If very disparate levels are found in a classroom, two explanations can be given; the standard and the simplified one. The simplified one can serve as a revision to higher level students.

5) MAXIMIZING THE USE OF SMALL GROUPS

Classes are intentionally designed to be small, so as to offset some of the difficulties mentioned previously. Normally students have between three to nine students in every class, although in certain logistical exceptions certain classes might have 11 students. Having a small group of students allows the teachers to identify the needs of the students and can help them with focusing on the areas and tasks that would need most work. Teachers are able to individualise the teaching; adapting it to the students' needs and requirements as well as learning styles and interests, while reinforcing the learning as much as wanted.

Some of the teachers complained that certain students were not always punctual. Having such a small class allows the teacher to make a personal connection with the individuals, revise certain topics until the entire class is present. Using the fact that there are a small number of students per class, and catering for their individual needs and styles can in fact go a long way in offsetting some of the previously mentioned disadvantages and issues.

KEY TAKEAWAY 16:

Use the small size of the class to offset the disparate levels found in a class.

6) MAKING USE OF AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Teachers within the SEC Revision Classes are provided with interactive whiteboards to help them with their teaching. While each year the number of resources being made available to SEC Revision classes teachers is increasing, many teachers have commented on how interactive whiteboards, as well as the use of emails, CDs and pen drives, were particularly helpful during their teaching sessions.

KEY TAKEAWAY 17:

Use all digital resources at your disposal, including the interactive whiteboards.

7) USING PAST PAPERS

Throughout the revision lessons, each student and teacher is given the past papers of the May examinations (the ones not passed by the students) and of the previous four years. It has been reported by the teachers interviewed in this study that many students do not have enough experience with past papers as they have not worked out enough past papers throughout the year. Such inexperience means that the students have not yet learned the tips and techniques that they need to tackle exam papers.

KEY TAKEAWAY 18:

Many students will not have worked out many past papers and may lack the skills and techniques required to tackle an examination paper.

KEY TAKEAWAY 19:

Past papers are provided at no cost to students and teachers. Teachers must use the past papers as the basis of the SEC Revision classes, giving only complementary notes.

While every teacher has their own preferred style and method, many of our interviewees mentioned a preference for working out all the questions in the past papers related to a particular topic. This helps students to start seeing patterns in what is asked in each of the topics. Whatever the methodology adopted, it is crucial that working out past papers is central to the revision lessons. Notes should be supplemented at the discretion of the teacher whenever a student is particularly weak in a specific topic, but should not be the main focus of the revision classes.

KEY TAKEAWAY 20:

Many teachers do not go through the past papers chronologically opting instead to work out all questions relating to a particular topic and then moving on to the next.

8) GIVING HOMEWORK

Given the tight timeframes and the amount of work to be done, it is easy for teachers to assign numerous hours of homework to attempt to cover everything sufficiently. While understandable, this approach can be hampered by the student's lack of cooperation due to the factors mentioned earlier; namely, summer cultural events, family commitments and part-time jobs. Add to this that students might have homework to see to for other subjects, and the likelihood that this is done becomes smaller and smaller. This does not mean teachers should not assign homework but should be aware of all the distractions that could impede the completion of the assigned tasks, and tailor the amount of tasks assigned to what the students can realistically handle.

KEY TAKEAWAY 21:

Students are less likely to do all their homework given the summer period. One must also be aware that students might have homework for other subjects.

Should a teacher feel that they need to assign homework, this should never take longer than three hours throughout the week. Many teachers claimed that the most effective method they found was to start a task in class and have the students finish it at home. In this way, students can consolidate the skills they have acquired throughout the lesson. Should the homework not be done at home, the subjects should be briefly revised throughout the class.

KEY TAKEAWAY 22:

Do not give more than three hours of homework per week.

KEY TAKEAWAY 23:

Start off homework in class and have students finish it off at home.

When homework is assigned, it is important to exercise professional judgement when and how to give marks. While teachers have had varying views on whether one should give marks or not for homework, all agreed that the marks need to be carefully given not to discourage students from attempting any further, even if the quality is poor.

KEY TAKEAWAY 24:

Teachers should exercise caution when deciding when and how to give marks for corrected work, taking into account student motivation and engagement.

Another point of agreement is that returned homework must always include feedback and comments to help the students identify their mistakes, learn from them, and not repeat them. Additionally, when through homework it emerges that a student is particularly weak in a topic, some teachers have opted to complement the homework with notes that they have developed personally. Naturally, this is not mandatory but can help students overcome difficulties relating to particular topics.

KEY TAKEAWAY 25:

Always give feedback with corrections for improvement.

9) TEACHER'S PERCEPTION OF THE STUDENTS

Students who attend the SEC Revision classes have all finished their mandatory education, and are in effect post-secondary students. Indeed, the students who are in the SEC Revision classes have chosen to be there, and would need to take responsibility for the amount of effort they invest in the classes in order to gain the maximum results. Teachers need to help students achieve this mindset as quickly as possible because the short amount of time available requires students to be fully engaged.

In order to help students engage and get into the zone, it is important that teachers understand the mindset that students enter into the Revision classes with. Many students are shocked by their failure, and this could affect their self-esteem. Teachers would do well to encourage students, and look at them as more than just a student but as an individual who might be facing several obstacles to full engagement; such as peer pressure or other social and personal vulnerabilities. This can be particularly challenging when so much needs to be done in so little time, but investing in building a good relationship with the students will only serve to facilitate communication and engender engagement.

KEY TAKEAWAY 26:

Students enter into the SEC Revision Classes demotivated and at times experiencing a low self-esteem. Adopting a humane approach towards students, while encouraging them to work hard has produced the best results.

To this end, it is vital to treat the students as humanely as possible, helping them to enter into the frame of mind to achieve success in their studies by presenting topics in an interesting and engaging manner, and remembering that despite having finished mandatory schooling, they are not altogether so different from secondary school students, which they were a few months prior. Achieving this balance between respecting their new status, helping them overcome their sense of failure, and engage fully with the work that needs to be done is the hardest aspect of the Revision Classes, and there is no standard formula that will work for every class. Teachers have however shown us year after year that despite the constraint and stress that they have been able to break through, they have obtained very positive results.

10) DEALING WITH THE WEAKER STUDENTS

An inevitable reality that can be found within the Revision Classes is that some students will be too weak to obtain a grade. While one should never give up hope as some success stories are nothing short of miraculous, sometimes it will be clear that a student will not make it. This can foster in some teachers discouragement and a sense of apathy.

However, communications that the Youth Guarantee has had with some students who failed to obtain the grade as well as the experience of some of teachers interviewed, has shown that some students have used what they have learnt during the SEC Revision classes and helped them in other programs they signed up for, such as GEM 16+. In the cases of such weak students, teachers ought to see this as an opportunity to build an educational base in the subject they are teaching, and therefore planting a seed as it were. While teachers might not have the privilege of seeing their seed bear fruit, they can have the satisfaction that they have been an integral part of the process.

KEY TAKEAWAY 27:

Not all students will be academically proficient enough to pass. This should not foster discouragement in teachers, as for these students the SEC Revision Classes can serve as a base for other programmes.

11) DEALING WITH ABSENTEEISM

Throughout the Revision classes, a number of revision students will drop out or attend irregularly. This can be particularly frustrating for teachers who might have a shifting student population. Due to the circumstances mentioned relating to summer and personal commitments, there will always be a number of students who do not attend regularly or at all.

Some students, however, will attend the lessons particularly if there is some follow up. Teachers should therefore inform their Officer in Charge about regular absenteeism, so that they can follow up on the students. Despite not being in the official job description, teachers who follow up through personal communication with the students have had strong attendances throughout their classes. Teachers are therefore strongly encouraged to follow up on students, to encourage them and ascertain why they are not attending the revision classes.

KEY TAKEAWAY 28:

Following up on students and communicating with them helps decrease absenteeism and dropouts.

12) ASKING FOR SUPPORT FROM THE OFFICER IN CHARGE

Throughout both interviews and other feedback obtained from teachers, it has consistently been found that the Officers in Charge assigned have continuously provided a high level of support to teachers in all the issues encountered. Teachers are therefore highly recommended to fall back on the Officers in Charge to discuss any issues or difficulties they might face in the classroom.

KEY TAKEAWAY 29:

Do not hesitate to resort to the Officers in Charge to discuss any issues or difficulties you might be facing.

13) PERSONAL SATISFACTION

Many teachers have relayed that despite the difficulties and stress, the experience of teaching the SEC revision classes provides great personal satisfaction. Due to the fact that teachers teach small classes, it has been reported that this allows for a greater connection with students than throughout regular school hours, which is amplified by the intensity and length of the course. This connection has also been noted by the students who have rated the Revision Classes highly in questionnaires.

Every teacher interviewed has their share of success stories, and in some of them, the final positive outcome was far from guaranteed. These experiences can hopefully inspire prospective teachers that no student's result is determined from the outset, and that if the student is willing to work hard and take up the commitment - result notwithstanding - it can be a positive experience for both teacher and student.

KEY TAKEAWAY 30:

Despite being a potentially stressful experience, for many teachers the SEC Revision Classes have provided great job satisfaction.

KEY TAKEAWAY 31:

While not all students make it, some success stories were far from guaranteed at the outset. Every student has a chance if they commit themselves.

Key Takeaways

Key Takeaway 1:

The fact that the Revision Classes take place in summer can hamper the learning process due to the heat and cultural events which take place in summer

Key Takeaway 2:

Students tend to be of mixed levels of proficiency and commitment which also results from whether they have failed the paper A or B variant.

Key Takeaway 3:

The reason why some students fail their exams might relate to personal and social issues they might be facing.

Key Takeaway 4:

Students enter the SEC Revision classes demotivated and disheartened, and will require encouragement.

Key Takeaway 5:

Part-time jobs and lack of motivation from the students' side can contribute to absenteeism and dropout rate.

Key Takeaway 6:

Wearing professional attire sets boundaries and prepares students to get into a frame of mind that work needs to be done.

Key Takeaway 7:

Discipline should not be a large problem, but mobiles can still act as a distraction and a policy should be adopted.

Key Takeaway 8:

A Greek theatre style of seating has sometimes proven useful.

Key Takeaway 9:

It is important to note that in some cases this is the first time students are entering a mixed setting.

Key Takeaway 10:

Spend the first lesson or two ascertaining what topics the students need to strengthen in their mind.

Key Takeaway 11:

After determining the students' needs, try and cover what is most likely to come out in the September examination.

Key Takeaway 12:

The SEC Revision Classes is aimed at helping students pass their September examination. Focus on the skills they will need to pass the paper.

Key Takeaway 13:

Share a roadmap of what topics will be covered when, to give students a greater sense of ownership of the process.

Key Takeaway 14:

It is easier to engage students when lessons are interesting and relatable for students.

Key Takeaway 15:

If very disparate levels are found in a classroom, two explanations can be given; the standard and the simplified one. The simplified one can serve as a revision to higher level students.

Key Takeaway 16:

Use the small size of the class to offset the disparate levels found in a class.

Key Takeaway 17:

Use all digital resources at your disposal including the interactive whiteboards.

Key Takeaway 18:

Many students will not have worked out many past papers and may lack the skills and techniques to tackle an examination paper.

Key Takeaway 19:

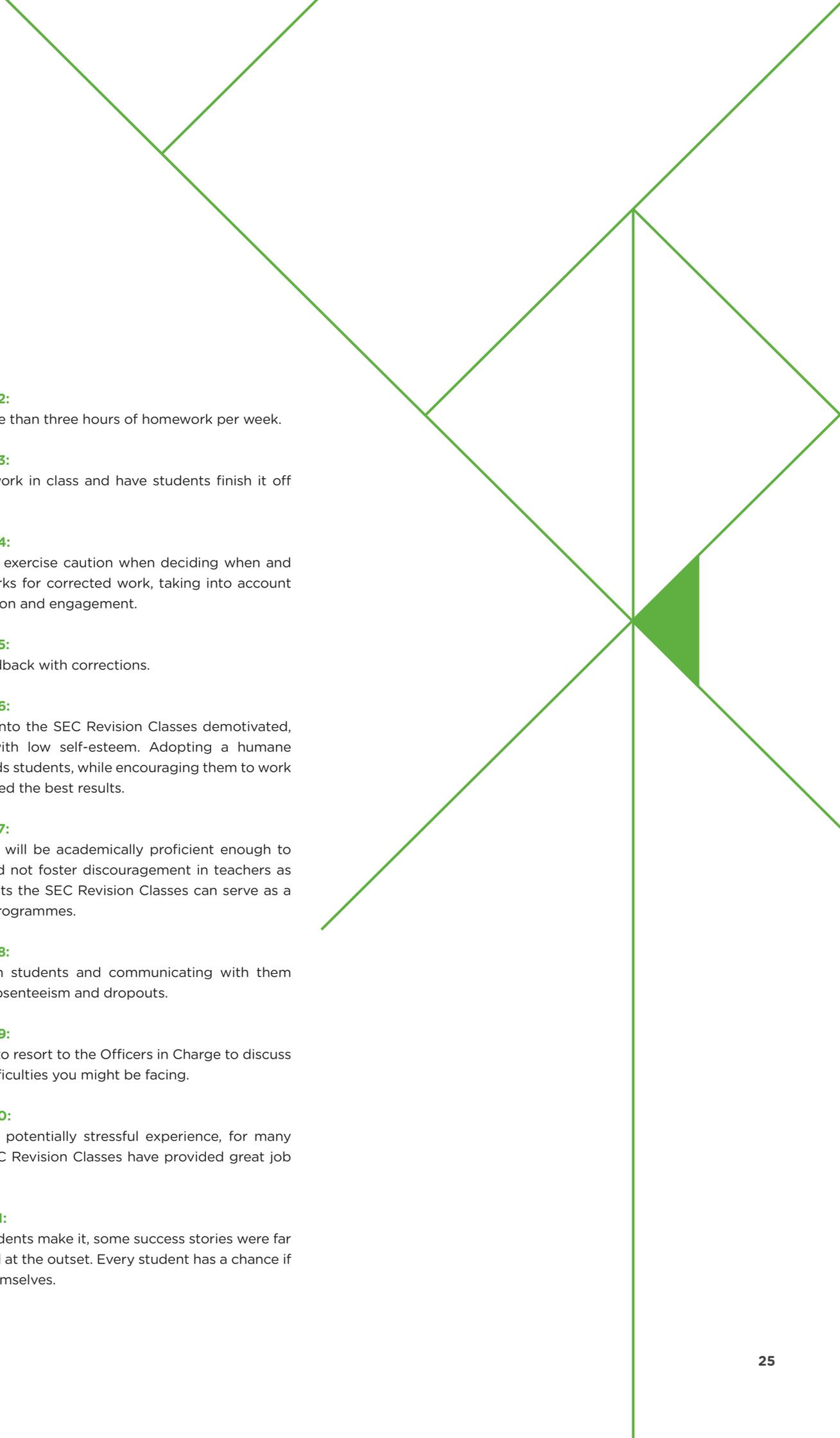
Past papers are provided at no cost to students and teachers. Teachers must use the past papers as the basis of the SEC Revision classes, giving only complementary notes.

Key Takeaway 20:

Many teachers do not go through the past papers chronologically opting instead to work out all questions relating to a particular topic and then moving on to the next.

Key Takeaway 21:

Students are less likely to do all their homework given the summer period. One must also be aware that students might have homework to see to for other subjects.



Key Takeaway 22:

Do not give more than three hours of homework per week.

Key Takeaway 23:

Start off homework in class and have students finish it off at home.

Key Takeaway 24:

Teachers should exercise caution when deciding when and how to give marks for corrected work, taking into account student motivation and engagement.

Key Takeaway 25:

Always give feedback with corrections.

Key Takeaway 26:

Students enter into the SEC Revision Classes demotivated, and at times with low self-esteem. Adopting a humane approach towards students, while encouraging them to work hard has produced the best results.

Key Takeaway 27:

Not all students will be academically proficient enough to pass. This should not foster discouragement in teachers as for these students the SEC Revision Classes can serve as a base for other programmes.

Key Takeaway 28:

Following up on students and communicating with them help decrease absenteeism and dropouts.

Key Takeaway 29:

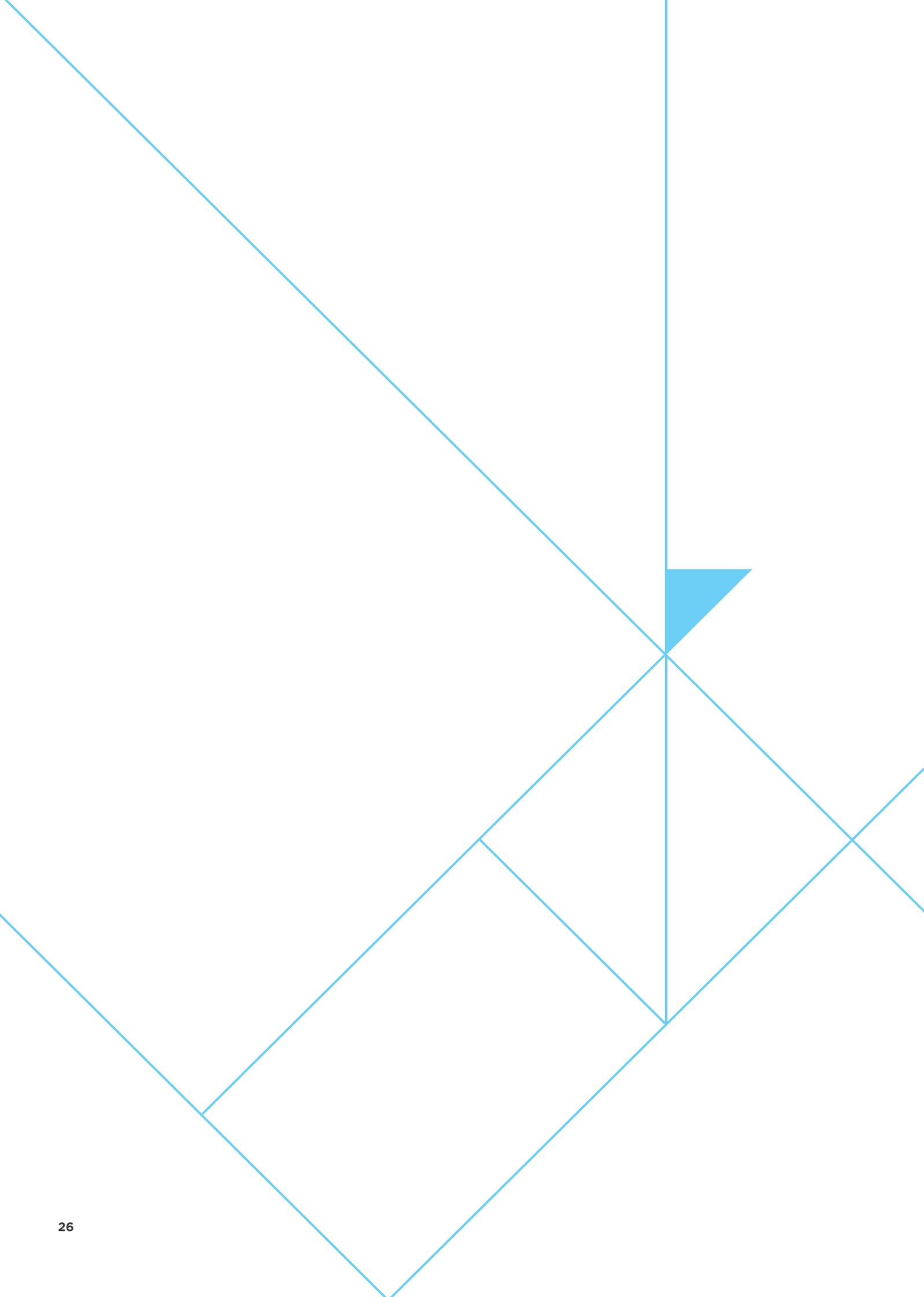
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Despite being a potentially stressful experience, for many teachers the SEC Revision Classes have provided great job satisfaction.

Key Takeaway 31:

While not all students make it, some success stories were far from guaranteed at the outset. Every student has a chance if they commit themselves.



Conclusion and Further Recommendations

The SEC Revision Classes are a crucial initiative developed within the Youth Guarantee Scheme to address the issue of Early School Leavers. It provides students who have failed their May SEC examinations with an opportunity to re-take the exams in a more prepared manner. Their brevity and intensity throughout the summer, as well as the particular nature of the student cohort, require a difference in approach when planning and delivering these revision classes.

In this document, the insights of several teachers which include their difficulties and strategies have been laid out so as to provide teachers wishing to undertake the Revision Classes with a background, and some ideas on how to tackle each class assigned to them.

Throughout the document, one particular notion and the underlying assumptions have been examined in greater detail and contrasted with existing literature. The constant worry of teachers is that there is not enough time during which to deliver the lessons, and indeed the literature has shown that their concerns relating to the uptake of information and pressure are not without merit. However, many studies do not necessarily agree with this, and have shown that short courses can indeed have equal if not better results as longer courses. A perspective which was also confirmed by teachers involved in this investigation also presents the idea that the success of short courses is not inherent to its format, but depends on how an educator should plan and deliver the short course.

The teachers who were interviewed provided invaluable insights into how to tackle these short courses, yet more can be done to provide a more structured and collective approach towards preparing and delivering short courses. It is the opinion of the Youth Guarantee team that a short preparation course ought to be delivered by education professionals; providing teachers with the tips, insights, and techniques required for the successful delivery of short courses, including but not necessarily exclusive to the SEC Revision Classes.

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