

Steve Lyon: Achieving A Level 2 Qualification

Have you ever seen the film 'Sliding Doors'? If not, I can highly recommend it. The film follows two parallel story lines, one where the main character, Helen, just manages to catch her tube train, thus arrives home early to find her boyfriend 'with' his ex-girlfriend Lydia. In the parallel story, the sliding doors of the tube train close just before Helen can board the train meaning that she arrives home just after Lydia has left the flat. The two stories follow what happened next in each case.



We talk about 'sliding door' moments. Consider the following two scenarios, both featuring Louise. We will refer to them as Louise (1) for Louise in scenario 1 and Louise (2) for Louise in scenario 2.

Louise (1) sits in her GCSE mathematics examination. The exam invigilator calls out '10 minutes left'. Louise (1) puts her head on the desk. She has done all she can. Louise (1) dreams of what life will be like next year. She is going to college to study animal husbandry. Louise (1) helps out at the local riding school, tending the horses and ponies, helping the younger riders. This is where Louise (1) feels happiest. She has already got her place at college and knows she will be spending a lot of time with the horses.

Louise (2) sits in her GCSE mathematics examination. The exam invigilator calls out '10 minutes left'. She decides to read through the paper. She adds the units to an answer, rounds an answer to two decimal places, has a guess at a question she can't do and realises she has missed out a question she can do. As the papers are collected, Louise (2) thinks of what life will be like next year. She is going to college to study animal husbandry. Louise (2) helps out at the local riding school, tending the horses and ponies, helping the younger riders. This is where Louise (2) feels happiest. She has already got her place at college and knows she will be spending a lot of time with the horses.

A few months later, at college, on a Wednesday afternoon, Louise (2) volunteers to help out with the horses and gets the chance to get a free riding lesson. On exam results day, Louise (2) just managed, by 2 marks, to scrape a grade 4 in her GCSE maths exam.

A few months later, at college, on a Wednesday afternoon, Louise (1) sits in her maths retake class wishing she was caring for the horses. On exam results day, Louise (1) just failed, by two marks, to scrape a grade 4 in her GCSE maths exam.

At a recent Maths Hub meeting, Emma Robson, Maths Lead at Bishop Burton FE College, led a session outlining the work she is doing as a Further Education Mastery Specialist (FEMS). There was an audible gasp from the audience when Emma announced that, in the two colleges where Emma oversees mathematics, in September she enrolled over eight

hundred students to the retake GCSE mathematics course. In the session, Emma gave three examples of questions which her students find challenging: a decimal, fraction, percentage question; a number properties question which required some mathematical reasoning; and an area and perimeter question. All three were quite 'wordy' and could not be answered by using a learnt routine or algorithm. Consensus was that a reasonably competent year 6 pupil could have confidently answered these questions. The remainder of the session considered why some students sitting GCSE find these questions challenging and what Emma, as a mastery specialist, is doing to help these students.

Emma is also Work Group lead for the **'Supporting Low Attainers to Achieve a L2 Qualification'** Work Group which brings together teachers of retake students in FE colleges, sixth form colleges and schools with teachers of low attaining students in years 10 and 11. In the sessions, activities used in the FEMS programme are shared and trialed.