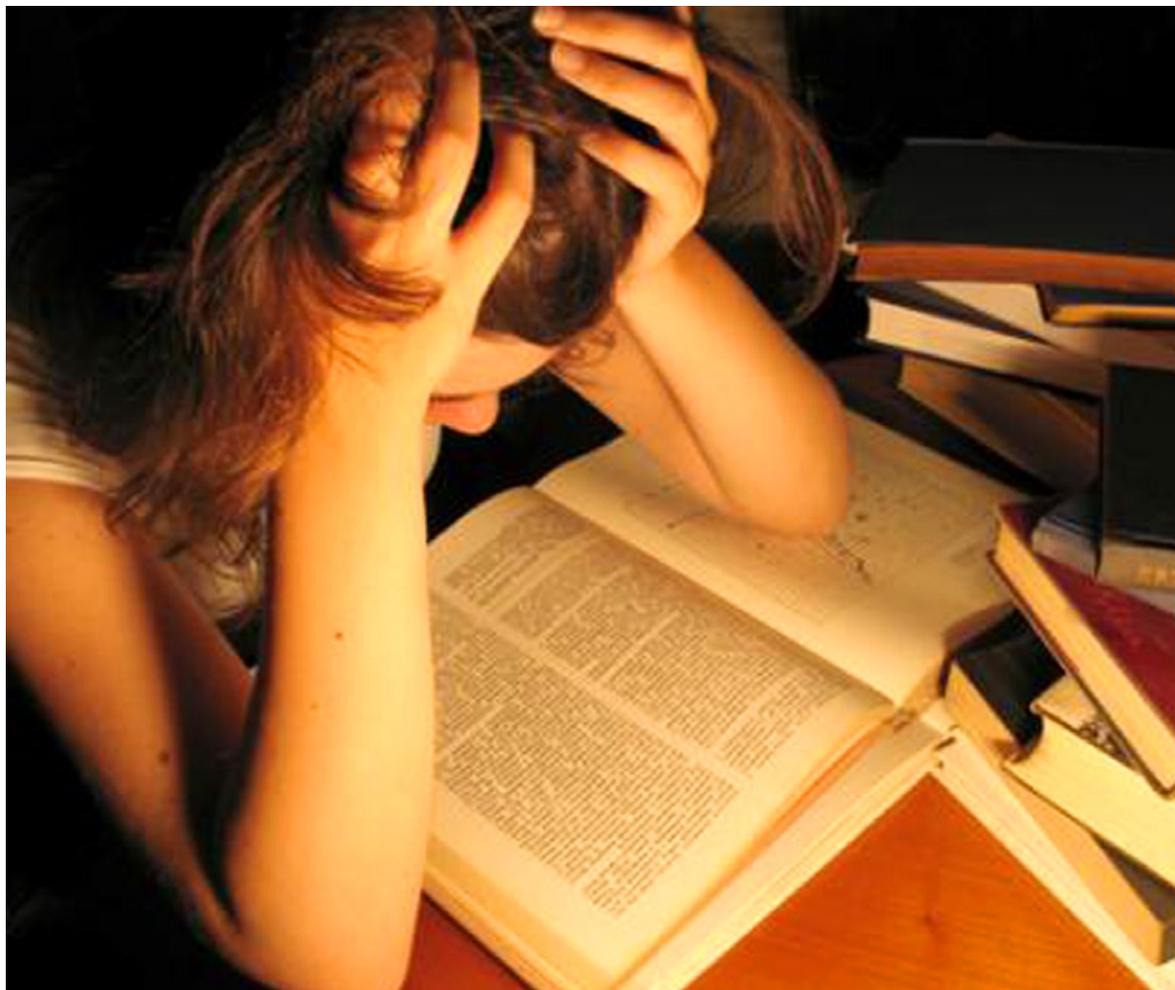


It may be the beginning of a new year, but there's no better time to revamp your revision strategies. **Anna Pedroza** shares the research findings that explore what works, potential missed opportunities and the evidence that proves it's never too early to start.



Revision – too little too late?

Recent research by O2 Learn and Edcoms reveals GCSE students across the UK are falling short of teachers' recommended time to be spent on revision. The research, which included three surveys (one with students, one with parents and one with teachers), found that 76 per cent of young people start revision four weeks or less in advance of exams, and of those a significant 20 per cent wait until seven days or less before exams, to start. This was in contrast to teachers' advice to start at least six weeks in advance.

Is there a case to start earlier? Research on memory suggests that spacing out smaller chunks of learning over time, and interleaving with different topics can be more effective than 'massing' learning together, or cramming. Spacing out revision may make students concerned that they'll not recall information

but it's actually the effort that is made to recall information that facilitates true learning. So, this suggests that embedding revision right through the school year from the autumn term could be a more effective approach.

Interestingly, the research highlighted the limited formal guidance that teachers receive in relation to supporting students in their revision (54 per cent said they had never received any training around revision) and it isn't covered during initial teacher training. Desk research also drew a blank in terms of existing research into best practice for revision. In light of this, school leaders may need to think about whether staff need support, or training, to ensure students get sufficient revision support.

Surprisingly, the research didn't find that students were relying heavily on the Internet. In fact it highlighted that students' main approach to revision is to review notes from class and undertake past exam papers. Just one in three (32 per cent) of young people use online study guides and only one in ten (12 per cent) are using online video to support study. Is this a missed opportunity? Sites such as GCSE Bitesize or O2 Learn have thousands of resources to support students but it appears that only a fraction currently make full use of them and other revision resources.

Moving with the generations

There is evidence to suggest that young people growing up today are developing different learning styles from previous generations, due to their greater use of technology. Technology designed for learning, such as video, can capitalise on this not only because many young people simply prefer technological to traditional media, but because they may actually have a heightened ability to process information that is presented in different forms (such as graphics, sound and text) in a parallel rather than a linear fashion. The use of familiar technology for learning can also provide a helpful link – particularly, perhaps, for young people who are less interested in traditional, academic learning – between their home and school cultures.

Specifically, video can be used to model content or skills: visualising or illustrating abstract concepts, working through scientific investigations or sounding out words in a foreign language. Online video is easily accessed, unthreatening, suited to use alone or in a group, and can be repeated as many times as is desired. It also brings particular advantages for memory, in that it offers the opportunity to make use of text, visual images and audio simultaneously. It therefore clearly has characteristics that are unique among revision tools, including practice papers, textbooks and class notes.

Sir Mark Grundy, Executive Principal of Shireland Collegiate Academy, supports this thinking and believes that technologies such as learning platforms can help to facilitate it: "There has been research for a number of years highlighting how people learn in a multi-faceted way. The multiple intelligences models have existed for some time, but the resources to support this blend of styles have not been available until now.

"In the last few years Learning Platforms have evolved and are now capable of acting as the glue to stick resources together and, as importantly, to present them at precisely the right time. Most students need a framework to support their revision and resources which present the same ideas in many different ways."

Online video also presents visual and audio information which research suggests has the potential to be useful to a range of students. Some students naturally 'hold onto' information they receive verbally while others process visual information more easily. Indeed, young people seem to recognise this audio-visual benefit of videos for revision with 59 per cent of those who think videos are useful citing being able to see things being explained as a key reason for this, and 56 per cent citing being able to hear explanations.

The research also highlighted that parents play a greater role in their children's revision today than in previous generations. 86 per cent of parents today claim to be actively involved in their child's revision versus 39 per cent of their



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own parents. It's also the case that friends can play an important role. Peer to peer learning is increasingly recognised as an important aspect of the learning process and there is evidence that working collaboratively can improve young people's study behaviour and can even have some impact on memory. It is suggested that this is because studying together gives young people the opportunity to share their knowledge and study techniques, and to monitor their own learning.

When comparing current revision practices with those of the previous generation, the research noted that young people today were more likely than parents to revise with other people, including study groups (17 per cent for students vs 5 per cent for parents), friends (33 per cent vs 12 per cent) and teachers (43 per cent vs 13 per cent). Overall, girls were found to be more likely to be 'social revisors' than boys with 38 per cent revising with friends compared to 28 per cent of boys. However, boys were more likely than girls to consider the ability to share videos as a reason for their usefulness as a revision tool (9 per cent vs 4 per cent).

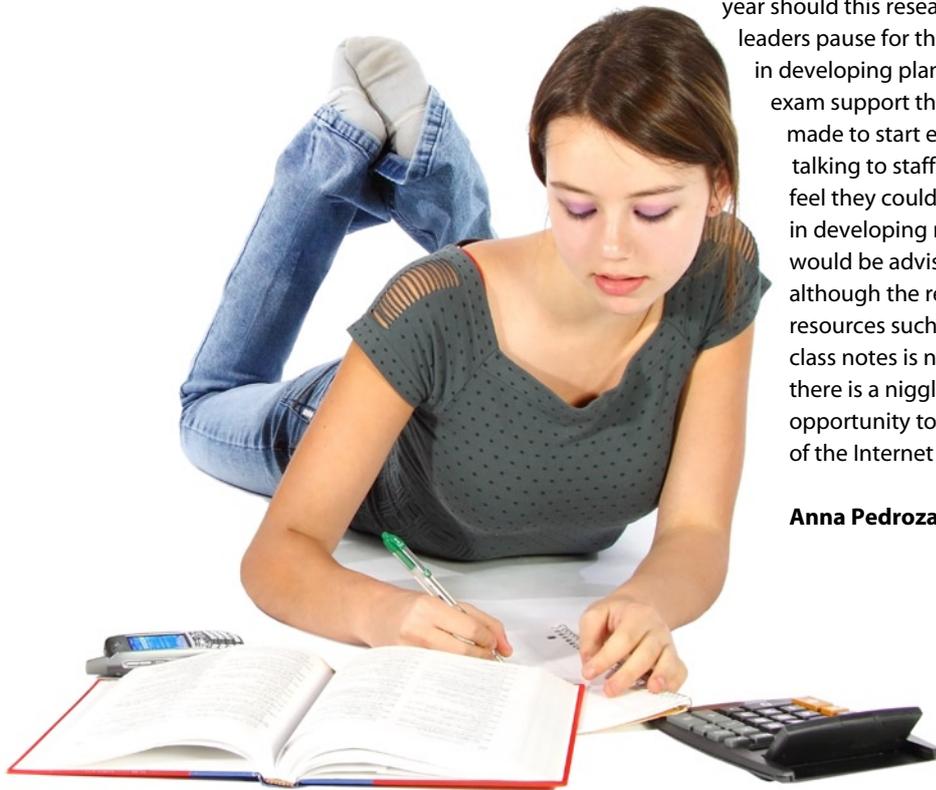
Further information

Download the research here: https://www.o2learn.co.uk/o2_news.php#revision
O2 Learn revision resources can be accessed for free at www.o2learn.co.uk

Looking ahead

So, at the beginning of a new school year should this research give senior leaders pause for thought? Certainly in developing plans for revision and exam support there is a clear case made to start early. Furthermore, talking to staff about whether they feel they could have more support in developing revision programmes would be advisable. Finally, although the reliance on traditional resources such as past papers and class notes is not in itself worrying there is a niggling issue that the opportunity to make the best use of the Internet is being missed.

Anna Pedroza



Knowledge trails

1) Top ten revision websites

<http://library.teachingtimes.com/articles/top-ten-revision-websites.htm>*

2) Revision software - For anyone in need of extra help for those important revision sessions, here is our top ten list of revision software.

<http://library.teachingtimes.com/articles/best-revision-software.htm>*

3) Revising expectations of e-learning – We investigate how e-learning works as a revision and practice tool, and whether it really helps to improve students' exam grades.

<http://library.teachingtimes.com/articles/revising-expectations-of-elearning.htm>*

*The above articles are available in e-Learning Update on the Professional Learning Community (access by subscription).