

## Summer 2025 Revisited

*'First of all, I would like to thank you again for giving me once more, the opportunity of having the best summer of my life.'*

*This past month, as you know, has been my first time being part of the Sports and Social team and I don't have words to describe how incredible it has been. This summer, my dream of being a member of the staff at Mary Hare has become true. I didn't have expectations before this month, because I wasn't sure about how everything was going to happen, but after all I have experienced, I would never change a single thing about it. I had the chance to organize events, work as a team with the rest of my team-mates, help the kids to have a great time, build up new friendships and get to know incredible people.*

*This is why I would like to apply again to be an assistant next summer. I consider that I worked hard during the whole month in order to make things go well and I would love to have the opportunity to live this experience next year again. I really enjoyed taking part in the social media of Vacation Studies with Adriana, and if I have the chance to work at VacStuds next summer again I would like to keep doing this role.'* (A Spanish staff member)

*'Our son returned home with a big smile and a quick decision to apply for next year's course - what I have happily done right now. The magic of VacStuds is still there...'* (A German parent and former student)

*'T thoroughly enjoyed her time this summer at Vacation Studies and formed many new friendships.'* (A Norwegian parent and former student)

*'We just wanted to express our sincerest thank you for H at VacStuds this summer. He came home with so much excitement about everything he had experienced: new friends, meeting old friends, all the activities, trips to London and Newbury, the friendly and fun staff, and the beauty of just spending time with people from all over the world.'*

*Thank you so much for all your efforts in organising everything from start to end in a seamless manner and for providing an environment for such growth, fun, and unforgettable memories. Life changing experiences! We are so grateful - thank you!'* (A Norwegian parent and former student)

*'When I was on my way to vacstuds I didn't know what to expect. On the plane trip to the UK I was worried, nervous and uncertain. I was immediately greeted with a warm welcome when I arrived at the airport in London. She introduced me to some of the students that had been before. Suddenly a friendly looking person came and greeted me. He asked my name and asked how old I was. So I answered.*

*The person I met was a young man from Angola. Then while waiting for the bus I met another young man from Slovakia. Never in my life had I imagined meeting people from such countries. The bus arrived and we then drove to VacStuds. When we arrived there were people who were waiting to welcome us. As I stepped out of the bus I lost this feeling of nervousness and the worries in my mind and I was filled with excitement and curiosity. I was excited to see what the coming month had to offer. I met wonderful people from a number of countries.*

*Now I am sitting at home and all I can think about is what a month I have had. My English has improved a lot. I have met a lot of new people. And I have learnt a lot of new life skills.'* (A Faroese student)

*'Once again, thank you for inviting us to be part of the Vacstuds Family :) It means a lot to all of us. I am particularly happy about the change Natasza has undergone since she first came to Mary Hare :) But she was not the only one who was transformed by the experience. I certainly feel that being able to join the young, enthusiastic and creative young people every year makes me happy and younger at heart.'*

*'What I want to say is that the four weeks are about more than just learning English; bonds are formed, special friendships develop between people from different cultures and countries, and that is simply brilliant. L enjoyed his time there again, and he asked me if he could go a third time.'* (A Belgian parent)

*'Noam came back depressed from having to leave the camp! He enjoyed himself so much and misses all of his new friends. Thank you for the amazing organization, it is indeed a remarkable experience.'* (An Israeli parent)

*'We wanted to thank you for all the care and affection that you and your team have given to J. Please extend our thanks to Paddy, Tom and all the staff. It has been an amazing experience.'* (A Spanish parent)

*'Once again, thank you for inviting us to be part of the VacStuds Family :) It means a lot to all of us. I am particularly happy about the change N has undergone since she first came to Mary Hare :) But she was not the only one who was transformed by the experience. I certainly feel that being able to join the young, enthusiastic and creative young people every year makes me happy and younger at heart.'* (A Polish parent and teacher)

*'I just wanted to thank all of you for giving G such a wonderful month. He came back home very happy and eager to return next year. Thanks again for everything you've done.'* (An Italian parent)

So – any number of happy people - and a VacStuds 2026 that is taking shape.

How about the summer just gone? After a horrendous (for us in the north) heatwave in the first week, the dry weather remained almost unbroken. The green grounds became straw, but the Course blossomed.

In charge again as Course Manager was Tom Goodwin in his 17<sup>th</sup> summer with us. Tom is a walking and self-confessed example of how VacStuds can change one's life.

Alongside him in the Office was Paddy Douglass now as ACM in his first year in the role, but his 7<sup>th</sup> with VacStuds.

For the first time since 1976, all the staff returned from the previous summer. Our Academic Manager again was Joe Wallis in his 18<sup>th</sup> summer. Senior Teacher, Georgios Pardalidis, was in his 2<sup>nd</sup> and again in his element. Neal Caplin returned as Teacher/Sports Social liaison for his 10<sup>th</sup> season with us. Teacher Francesca Alsina-Reynolds. Beata Kucharska-Pik, Owen Braithwaite and Aitken Pearson came back for their 3<sup>rd</sup> summer and Jacob White and Alex Allison returned for their 2<sup>nd</sup>. Josh Gray was with us for his 1<sup>st</sup> time as a teacher and 5<sup>th</sup> summer overall and Weronika Pik was with us for her 1<sup>st</sup> as a teacher and 3<sup>rd</sup> in total

In charge of the Sports/Social programme was Louise Gogstad who has worked her way up from student days for her 8<sup>th</sup> summer.

Sports/Social Organisers were Michelle Pretka in her 8<sup>th</sup> year (Cheam), Madalena Valenta (Douai-Elstree) in her 5<sup>th</sup>, Adriana Tur Mari (Hawtreys) – also i/c photography, video and social media - in her 11<sup>th</sup> year and Felix Hunter (Mary Hare) in his 3<sup>rd</sup>. Assistants were (for Cheam) Luca Trucco in his 6<sup>th</sup> and Magnus Runuson Svenningsen in his 4<sup>th</sup>, (for Douai-

Elstree) Toby Douglass in his 4<sup>th</sup> (also as lifeguard) and Stella Haagensen in her 5<sup>th</sup>, (for Hawtreys) Haakon Lindstad in his 4<sup>th</sup>, Mario Espinola in his 4<sup>th</sup> and Max Hardy in his 1<sup>st</sup>, (for Mary Hare) Alejandra Romero Haltermann in her 4<sup>th</sup>, Valerio Bonetti, in his 4<sup>th</sup> and Lars Mucklejohn in his 13<sup>th</sup>.

Matronal affairs were in the capable hands of Sofia Martinez-Villaseñor was in her 10<sup>th</sup> summer and giving her swansong performance. Paddy Douglass was Assistant Matron.

The native-speaking 'UK Reps' were Ethan Prieur and Kieran Willis.

The prize for English speaking was won by Eder Lua and for academic excellence by Bente Meijer.

Head Mentor was Arthur Vellay who experienced his first foray into chairing a meeting.

Head Prefects were Eva Winter and Eyze Eenhorst.

Catering was in the capable hands of Nick Leith and the remarkable kitchen staff who rise each year to every special occasion from Christmas to Valentine's. Housekeeping again was overseen by Sam Worthy and Patsy Barrett.

Ian Wright was on hand to help with day-to-day issues concerning maintenance. The Business Manager Paddy has been dealing with, Louise Gore, has now left Mary Hare. Our primary year-round contacts will now be COO Peter Robson and his assistant, Amanda Checksfield. Mary Hare does not provide its services for nothing. The price rise for 2026 will reflect only part of the steep and sudden increases to us since 2023.

There were several Masterclasses. A few were run by me along traditional lines. We looked at Shakespearian sonnets and at examples of more modern works. Neal Caplin explored the more modern terminology of Rap music. Paddy Douglass with Ellen Roberts and Ben Smith looked at accents across the UK to a full boardroom. A student-led session by Benny Pacheco on rap lyrics was well attended and expertly handled. Francesca Alsina-Reynolds offered one on India and Alex Allison looked at rhetoric. It is gratifying how this idea has taken off.

This year's hoodie is in dark blue – a fashionable colour choice. Teddy bears appeared in VacStuds blue VacStuds hoodies.

As ever, the summer was largely smartphone-free for the young people who came to us. To our knowledge, two 'smuggled' a phone in. One was very homesick. This sad feeling was enhanced when he heard a familiar voice from home. Soon after the phone was removed, the black cloud of homesickness lifted and the tears at the end were for a very different reason. The other case was that a slight illness was treated by Matron, but the parental reaction was that her intervention was inadequate. A hospital visit was insisted on. The treatment was exactly what Matron had been doing. The two 'Telephone Sundays' will be from 10.00 to 13.00 only to stop such over-reactions. After 53 summers, we do know what we are doing and there are good reasons for having phones available only on occasions. There are also good reasons that Course is for four weeks. For those new to us, real progress takes place after week 1½. Those who came for a shorter period missed out on the benefit of the experience.

I have included this in the information sheet 'Incidents, illnesses, emergencies, rolling TV news and FEAR' on the Parents' Page.

On the 'Parents' Page' this year, I included an information sheet headed 'Last Minute Essential Information' with links to everything we could think of that might help facilitate

arrival and departure from packing essentials in hand-baggage in case a suitcase is lost to photographing the passport to enable the return check-in. It was easy to identify those who hadn't read it. Everything we can think of that we have ever been asked over more than half a century is on the web site. Those who prefer to send a question via e-mail rather than read the instructions tend to receive a link to where the information is.

Paddy and Lars are keen to take over and, no doubt, will in the fullness of time. In the meantime I continue to function. Having the influence over young people's lives that Vacation Studies has given me is a huge privilege. My thanks to all those who entrust their children to our care.

*Ian Mucklejohn – 25 August 2025*