**PRESS RELEASE April 24, 2015**

**Parents of students must allow them to fail says psychologist**

***With exams on horizon, parents urged to give children more responsibility***

Performance psychologist Miranda Banks, who specialises in working with youngsters struggling to cope with exams, says it’s vital for parents to let their children take responsibility for their exam revision, even if it means failing.

Former Olympic performance coach Banks, who has developed an exam preparation programme “SmartivateTM”, said: “However hard it is, after creating a supportive learning environment, parents have to step back and let their child make their own mistakes. Sometimes failure is the best lesson and children have to learn self-discipline and drive before they enter the workplace, so it’s better to do it now rather than in 10 years’ time.”

She says parents “bending over backwards” to try and ensure exam success is a common mistake, but insists it does the child more harm than good in the long-term, often leading to them struggling later to cope with the demands of life.

“At some point children have to learn to stand on their own two feet and to take responsibility for their actions – or lack of them” says Banks. “Not preparing enough for their GCSEs or ‘A’ Levels is often the first time a child will be faced with significant responsibility. Although it is difficult, parents who acknowledge the child has to become independent is helping them to develop.”

Banks speaks from personal experience after circumstances forced her to become independent at a young age. After having a privileged start, she faced financial hardship after her father died when she was nine, resulting in her starting a bed-making ‘business’ at boarding school to make ends meet. “Duvets were extra”, she jokes.

She later funded her years at university in Australia, by working on cotton farms and as a gardener, as well as accessing state grants for low-income families.

“Being poor taught me that you can achieve what you want if you really want it enough. That is what our students need to learn – that they have to put in a lot of effort and hard work to achieve something worthwhile.”

The psychologist, who has worked with a host of Olympic athletes, world-class sports teams and business leaders to enable them to win and succeed, says doing exercise or playing sport when preparing for exams can mean the difference between success and failure.

Recent research published in the New Scientist magazine backs her approach of encouraging students to maintain an active social life to achieve exam success.

The study, (published at the end of March), showed that students who took time out from revision by playing sport, helped consolidate their memories by using a different part of the brain – something Miranda has always advocated.

She said: “In the run-up to peak exam season, it’s the news that all students have been waiting to hear – endless swotting and cramming is bad for you. Forget cancelling nights out with friends and hanging up your trainers to hibernate for weeks on end with only your text books and past papers for company; instead fit your revision around your life and you can achieve better results in your exams.

“Having fun and being active are crucial to performance levels because anyone going into a pressured environment where they need to perform to their highest potential needs to be fresh and feeling good,” she said. “Students who are fresh and feel good do better in exams – it’s that simple.”

Her results speak for themselves with 80% of the challenging students she works with each year achieving their target grades or higher and she has already partnered with Seaford College school, in Petworth, which plans to offer her newly-developed exam preparation programme “SmartivateTM” to their students.

She said: “Seaford liked the programme because it is completely different and the strategies have been proven to work. School resources are stretched too thin to teach students the ‘how’ of preparing for exams and are limited to teaching the ‘what’. Yet successful exam preparation is about so much more.”

Bank’s programme has already been well-received by senior figures in higher education. Adam Sutcliffe, a Senior Lecturer in Product Design at Queen Mary University of London, said: “The system that Miranda has developed is effective, elegant and exceptionally easy to use. I believe that, once followed and learnt, it will be of immense benefit to students.”

Miranda developed the online coaching programme for youngsters from Year 7 to ‘A’ Level after working extensively with students, both in the UK and abroad. She said: “I wanted to reach far more children than I ever could with one-to-one sessions and ultimately help students who would not normally be able to access this extra support.”

Acknowledging that in today’s society it is harder than ever for parents to “let go” Miranda has advice for those with children facing exams this summer:

* Ensure that there is structure (a revision schedule) and a quiet place to revise with no interruptions.
* Encourage focus, but don’t enforce it.  For example, offer to “look after” your child’s phone while they are studying, but make it clear that they are making that decision.  Again, offer to help by quizzing on information learned in the revision session – but leave that entirely up to your child.
* Encourage sleep by switching off the internet at a pre-set time such as 11pm.
* Set clear expectations beforehand for how things are expected to run within the house (such as set meals times). Only provide the meal at that time.
* Set clear expectations for getting-up times.  For example, explain that you will help by making one wake-up call, but then it is up to your child to get up.
* Stay low on emotion:  set parameters and provide support.  If parameters are overstepped, then implement the consequence (punishment) with low emotion – but stick to it firmly.
* Finally, focus needs to be on your child taking responsibility for their own behaviour – which is perfectly possible at GCSE and ‘A’ Level ages.  They understand that the support is there, but ultimately, if they choose not to work, then there are consequences for that behaviour.

Miranda’s top tips for students:

* Learn how your brain processes information
* Make sure you factor in time for rest, fun and exercise
* Get plenty of fresh air – our brains need oxygen to work effectively
* Don’t be afraid to ask for help – approach teachers, parents and friends for extra support – learning in small groups with friends as well as individual revision is effective
* Study the mark schemes and use the key phrases examiners look for to gain marks.

[ends]

**Note to Editors:**

For more information on the Smartivate™ programme visit [www.excelinexams.com](http://www.excelinexams.com)

**Who is Miranda Banks?**

Miranda Banks is a performance psychologist with an extensive background in sports psychology as well as clinical and neuropsychology.

Having worked extensively with Olympic and professional sport in Australia, Miranda realised that applying the principles of sports psychology for performance worked well, not just for athletes and business leaders, but for students too. Not only that, students prefer the coaching style and down-to-earth approach that is typical of the sporting field.

Miranda lectured in performance psychology at universities in Brisbane and Melbourne, Australia for several years, as well as guest lecturing at universities in Canada and the UK. It was during this time that she realised the challenges faced by students and started to develop her [essay planning strategy](http://www.excelinexams.com/essay-planning.htm).

Her book, "[Fitter, Faster, Stronger, Smarter: Training for the performance of life](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Fitter-Faster-Stronger-Smarter-Performance/dp/073140663X/ref=sr_1_10?ie=UTF8&qid=1423817863&sr=8-10&keywords=miranda+banks)", was published by Wiley in 2007. She had a weekly radio talk-back segment on Australia’s 4BC and was a regular contributor to Brisbane’s Courier-Mail and Sunday Mail newspapers.

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