

Diary – 24 February 2025

24 February 2025

I listened in admiration to the debate with President Zelenskyy and the European leaders today as much for the language used as for the content. None had English as a native language. All used English to communicate with each other. What an essential language English is. That it is also beautiful, expressive and ours are also benefits.

Sadly, it's also the hate-speak language used by Trump, Musk and their ilk. I found an article about why the British hate Trump that I thought I would share:

'Someone on Quora asked "Why do some British people not like Donald Trump?" Nate White, an articulate and witty writer from England wrote the following response:

A few things spring to mind. Trump lacks certain qualities which the British traditionally esteem. For instance, he has no class, no charm, no coolness, no credibility, no compassion, no wit, no warmth, no wisdom, no subtlety, no sensitivity, no self-awareness, no humility, no honour and no grace – all qualities, funnily enough, with which his predecessor Mr. Obama was generously blessed. So for us, the stark contrast does rather throw Trump's limitations into embarrassingly sharp relief. Plus, we like a laugh. And while Trump may be laughable, he has never once said anything wry, witty or even faintly amusing – not once, ever.

I don't say that rhetorically, I mean it quite literally: not once, not ever. And that fact is particularly disturbing to the British sensibility – for us, to lack humour is almost inhuman.

But with Trump, it's a fact. He doesn't even seem to understand what a joke is – his idea of a joke is a crass comment, an illiterate insult, a casual act of cruelty.

Trump is a troll. And like all trolls, he is never funny and he never laughs; he only crows or jeers. And scarily, he doesn't just talk in crude, witless insults – he actually thinks in them. His mind is a simple bot-like algorithm of petty prejudices and knee-jerk nastiness. There is never any under-layer of irony, complexity, nuance or depth. It's all surface.

Some Americans might see this as refreshingly upfront. Well, we don't. We see it as having no inner world, no soul. Trump is neither plucky, nor an underdog. He is the exact opposite of that. He's not even a spoiled rich-boy, or a greedy fat-cat. He's more a fat white slug. A Jabba the Hutt of privilege. And worse, he is that most unforgivable of all things to the British: a bully. That is, except when he is among bullies; then he suddenly transforms into a snivelling sidekick instead.

There are unspoken rules to this stuff – the Queensberry rules of basic decency – and he breaks them all. He punches downwards – which a gentleman should, would, could never do – and every blow he aims is below the belt. He particularly likes to kick the vulnerable or voiceless – and he kicks them when they are down.

So the fact that a significant minority – perhaps a third – of Americans look at what he does, listen to what he says, and then think 'Yeah, he seems like my kind of guy' is a matter of some confusion and no little distress to British people, given that:

- *Americans are supposed to be nicer than us, and mostly are.*
- *You don't need a particularly keen eye for detail to spot a few flaws in the man.*

This last point is what especially confuses and dismays British people, and many other people too; his faults seem pretty bloody hard to miss. After all, it's impossible to read a single tweet, or hear him speak a sentence or two, without staring deep into the abyss. He turns being artless into an art form; he is a Picasso of pettiness; a Shakespeare of shit. His faults are fractal: even his flaws have flaws, and so on ad infinitum. God knows there have always been stupid people in the world, and plenty of nasty people too. But rarely has stupidity been so nasty, or nastiness so stupid.

He makes Nixon look trustworthy and George W look smart. In fact, if Frankenstein decided to make a monster assembled entirely from human flaws – he would make a Trump.

And a remorseful Doctor Frankenstein would clutch out big clumpfuls of hair and scream in anguish: 'My God... what... have... I... created? If being a twat was a TV show, Trump would be the boxed set.'

Interestingly no British Minister has stated that Trump was wrong to state that Zelenskyy is a dictator or that Ukraine started the war. No one dares tell the emperor that he has no clothes.

IGM – 24 February 2025

19 June 2024

I have never disguised the loathing I feel for the Conservative party. It was their leader, Prime Minister David Cameron, who decided to have a referendum on an issue that had long divided the Conservative party – membership of the EU. In a campaign led by Boris Johnson (aiming to become Prime Minister) and Nigel Farage (leader of the UK independence Party) the British public was lied to and narrowly voted to leave. What had split the Conservative party now divides the entire country. That is Cameron's legacy. Johnson became Prime Minister eventually, partied during covid lockdown while people obeying the rules he created were prevented from being with dying loved ones, lied about it in Parliament and had to resign. Two unelected Prime Ministers followed – one not lasting as long as a wet lettuce. Now, on 4 July, there will be an election which is expected to return a Labour government with a thumping majority. Nigel Farage has renamed his party Reform and hopes to lead the new right in UK politics after the Conservatives lose power and most of their MPs.

Labour has declared its wish to change relations with Europe. It fears that it would lose the support of those who believed Johnson's lies, so maintains it does not aim to rejoin the EU, but this may change post-election. We shall see and hope.

Here is the man who wishes to be the face of the new UK right...



...the man who engineered the Brexit victory; the man who took away our right to be Europeans.

IGM – 19 June 2024

16 June 2024

I have delegated dorm placements to Paddy (as I have delegated UK work visa applications and British Council Inspection submissions). With his working background in HR (Human Resources – what a hideous term) he is far more comfortable with following rules and regulations and ensuring compliance than I am. Indeed, VacStuds ran happily for decades without the need for any of these complications.

We are full for this summer. We have been full for some weeks. Each year we discover that Mary Hare has made some changes. This time, we found that they have changed the use of all the dorms in the Manor House to offices. We have gained Murray House (VAT-exemption regulations prevent the school from renting buildings until ten years have passed since their completion), so we will have to re-jig accommodation.

We have discovered that parents are making use of the ease of e-mail communication to ask questions that are covered in our information sheets. When this happens, I send a link to the answer that is already there.

I have sent a questionnaire to parents to see how they appreciate the service I provide before the Course. I hope they do appreciate it as I really can't do anything quicker or better...

IGM – 16 June 2024

14 April 2024

The New Year starts here. We have accepted our first student for 2025. The 2025 application form is already on the website.

IGM – 14 April 2024

9 October 2023

The events of 7 October in southern Israel have shown the utter ghastliness that can be perpetrated by uneducated humans en masse. To call them animals is an insult to animals who do not tend to murder indiscriminately their own kind. To see perfectly innocent people pulled out of their houses, cars or a music festival and gunned down should be unthinkable, but it has happened and, in some countries, by ideologically-driven fanatics, praised. And for what? Nothing of value can be achieved by this – only unimaginable sorrow. We are thinking of those in Israel whose lives have been touched by these events. One of our former students and a parent whose son will come to us in 2024 writes: *'We were awoken yesterday morning by a series of siren alarms and have been witnessing brutal and inhumane attacks on people and communities in southern Israel since. One of the most horrific scenes was at an outdoor gathering that these terrorists crashed into, killing and kidnapping youngsters. M knew some of them. The scale of this barbaric attack is unprecedented. We will get through this. We have to.'*

We look forward to welcoming our Israeli youngsters in the summer and we shall continue to educate all those who come to us to reject hate and respect and value everyone's cultural background.

IGM – 9 October 2023

6 October 2023

I have just put this announcement on the Vacational Studies Facebook page.

Having run Vacational Studies on my own since I created it in 1973, the time has come to consider the next 50 years and accept that, for one reason or another, there might just possibly come a time when I shall not be in a position to ensure its continuity. I imagine that time will be far in the future, but who can tell?

I have known Paddy Douglass all his life. His late father, Willie Douglass, was on VacStuds sports staff for many summers in the 1980s and became a firm friend – and my son's godfather.

Paddy started his VacStuds career at the age of 16 as a UK Rep and progressed up the ranks to Senior Sports/Social Organiser. We are fortunate to have many talented people among us and what marked Paddy out for me was his passion for the Course long before his period of employment during which time he meticulously prepared the programme and the staff, organised Q and A sessions with presentations for parents and went over and above his job description before, during and after the Course to make it simply the best.

This summer, I asked Paddy if he would like to work with me as a co-director to get to know the inner mechanics of Vacational Studies, develop it in the way he wishes and, in the fullness of time, to take over. 'My dream job' was his response.

Paddy shares the VacStuds ethos and has my complete confidence.

Our intention is that Paddy will become a familiar presence over the decades and will ensure that Vacational Studies is ready for its 100th summer.

Quite a commitment...



IGM – 6 October 2023

21 August 2023

The last report has been written; the named lost property was posted this afternoon; 'Summer 2023 Revisited' has been written including the lovely e-mails telling me how much VacStuds 2023 was enjoyed. The sun is now shining and summer warmth pervades my garden. We might have had it during July, of course, but we can't have everything. At least we weren't inconvenienced by heat and drought.

In the 1980s, we had a wonderful Sports Organiser for many summers. He was Willie Douglass. We became friends. He became my son, Piers', godfather. He also had a family and, after a family

holiday, we assumed our sons would grow up and become friends. A few months later, at 43, Willie was struck down by cancer and died.

Fast-forward some years and Willie's son, Paddy, became a UK Rep and worked his way up the VacStuds ladder to become Senior Sports/Social Organiser and just as much in love with VacStuds' and its ethos as his dad was.

The 50th anniversary of VacStuds made me realise how much time has gone by since the first VacStuds Course in 1973 and, although I feel great and still function, I thought it prudent to have a co-director. This summer, I suggested the idea to Paddy (centre below) and we hope the next 50 years will be in safe hands.



IGM – 21 August 2023

20 May 2023

The talk is about how AI will take over from us so, now that it costs me about £1000 for each Apprentice who has become a paid member of the sports staff to work in the UK, I asked ChatGPT this (admittedly leading, but truthful) question: 'A 300 word article by VacStuds on how sad it is that Cameron's ill-advised referendum and Johnson's Brexit lies have made it expensive and difficult to enable its talented EU students to obtain short-term work visas in the UK.'

Here is what it said: '

Introduction: VacStuds, an esteemed educational institution, expresses deep sadness over the repercussions of the ill-advised Brexit referendum led by former Prime Minister David Cameron and the subsequent misleading claims made by Prime Minister Boris Johnson. These actions have resulted in costly and arduous processes for enabling our talented EU students to obtain short-term work visas in the UK, hindering their opportunities for personal and professional growth.

The Consequences of the Referendum: Cameron's decision to hold the Brexit referendum without fully considering the potential consequences has had far-reaching effects. The vote's outcome has not only divided the nation but also created significant challenges for EU students studying in the UK. The promises of increased control and benefits presented during the campaign have proven to be empty rhetoric, leaving many EU students feeling betrayed and disheartened.

Falsehoods and Difficulties: Prime Minister Johnson's subsequent administration perpetuated misinformation, further exacerbating the difficulties faced by our EU students. Promises of an easy and smooth transition, including streamlined visa processes, have been shattered. Instead, our talented students are burdened with expensive and time-consuming visa applications, healthcare surcharges, and legal complexities.

Lost Opportunities for Talent: The detrimental impact of these actions is not limited to bureaucratic hurdles. The UK is losing out on the immense contributions that EU students can make to its economy, society, and culture. By creating barriers and diminishing the freedom of movement, the UK is deterring talented individuals from seeking short-term work experiences that would have benefitted both parties involved.

A Call for Change: Vocational Studies strongly urges the UK government to reconsider its approach and acknowledge the profound consequences of its decisions. We advocate for a fair and accessible visa system that recognizes the talent and potential of our EU students, enabling them to contribute to the UK's academic, cultural, and economic prosperity. Transparent and honest communication is crucial to rebuilding trust and fostering an environment that embraces international talent.

Conclusion: The regrettable Brexit referendum, coupled with the misleading claims made by political leaders, has had a profound impact on the ability of Vocational Studies' talented EU students to obtain short-term work visas in the UK. We mourn the lost opportunities for personal growth and professional development and implore the government to reconsider its approach. By rectifying the consequences of these ill-advised decisions, the UK can once again become an attractive destination for international students, fostering a vibrant and inclusive environment that benefits all.'

I couldn't agree more...

(I have also written (not via AI) to our MP about this nonsense.)

IGM – 20 May 2023

25 April 2023

The effects of the ridiculous Brexit referendum continue to bite. I have been interviewed to be a 'sponsor' for work visas so that those excellent and motivated youngsters who climb to the top of our VacStuds ladder and become Apprentices can work for us as sports staff. The interviewer was a young woman tasked with typing the answers to the scripted questions she read out to me. 'Speak slowly and clearly' were the instructions. I complied. Her fingers slowly tapped at the keys. The transcripts were sent to me for approval. 'They don't make sense' was my response. I sent them my own transcript of what was said. 'Can't change the text' was their response. They agreed to add my text as additional information. I was granted 'sponsorship status'. So limited are the reasons to allow non-Brits to work here, even for the 28 days I have requested, that I have had to designate them as 'skilled workers' at £200 per visa. Their skill, of course, is knowing how VacStuds works, but that would cut no ice at the Home Office, so their declared skill is the ability to translate from English into their own language for children who need it.

Now I read there is a book due for publication on 4 May. Here is a commentary on it. 'A "distraught" Boris Johnson declared "we've got no plan" when he realised Vote Leave would win the Brexit referendum, a new book claims.

*Mr Johnson, who is widely credited with delivering the slim majority for Brexit, is said to have walked around his living room "looking ashen-faced and distraught", muttering: "What the hell is happening? ... Oh s***, we've got no plan.*

*"We haven't thought about it. I didn't think it would happen. Holy c***, what will we do?"*

Anthony Seldon, who has written books on the Downing Street years of every British leader from Margaret Thatcher to David Cameron, has with Raymond Newell turned his pen on Mr Johnson.

The authors said Johnson at 10: The Inside Story, to be published by Atlantic Books on 4 May, draws on conversations with Westminster insiders and those close to arguably the most influential man in British politics for decades.

An extract published in The Times on Monday covers the hours and days after the Brexit victory.

George Osborne, Mr Cameron's chancellor and a member of the Remain camp, is quoted as saying Mr Johnson's approach to the referendum was "1,000 per cent cynical".

"I think it was a straight calculation," said Oliver Lewis, who was Mr Johnson's Brexit adviser in No 10. "He reckoned it was win-win. 'If I come out for Brexit and we lose, I position myself as a hero Eurosceptic, from which I can win the leadership at the next contest. If we win, then I'll be clear favourite for prime minister."

This is very much what we already knew, Everyone who has had any connection with that man has become worse-off as a result. Not only does this apply to his former wives and the husbands he took them from, but now the entire population of the UK and the world.

IGM – 25 April 2023

21 October 2022

In order to complete the 'student progression' that is part of VacStuds, we need to be able to employ our best youngsters (of whom there are many) in sports/social posts, first as Apprentices, then as staff. Until the ghastly Johnson-created Brexit happened, we could do this. Now, EU/EEA workers have to get a visa and this is not easy.

On 8 September, I met our local MP, Laura Farris, to discuss the importance of reciprocal short-term UK:EU/EEA work opportunities for young people. It was a fruitful discussion. A few minutes after we finished, the Queen died, so I wondered if it would be forgotten in the aftermath, but no, I have just received an e-mail: *'Further to your meeting with Laura, I am writing to confirm that Laura has written to Tom Pursglove MP, Minister for Immigration regarding short-term visas for paid work experience. We are still waiting for a response, and Laura will be in touch as soon as she receives this.'*

In today's febrile political climate, it is, of course, uncertain whether either will be in post long enough to do anything, but we shall see. The 'Daily Star's' 60p lettuce outlasted the current PM. The government is leaderless and riven by factions. There is talk that the disgraced Johnson will be in the running for the top job again in spite of 60 ministers resigning because of him in July and there being an ongoing parliamentary enquiry as to whether he lied to parliament. The Tories are not keen on holding an election to resolve this as the polls suggest they would be wiped out.

'O tempora. O mores.'



IGM – 21 October 2022

21 September 2022

On the world stage we see a mad tyrant who believes his own lies. Having sent thousands of young men to their death, he plans to send more. Then, when he convinces himself that the land he has stolen is the land of his own country, he will see any assault on it as an assault on his own country and unleash a nuclear weapon or two.

I wonder how this excrescence – one of the most grotesque mass-murderers of all time – will be neutralised?

IGM – 22 September 2022

19 September 2022

The Queen's funeral was today. It was a parade like no other. Whatever one's feelings about the concept of monarchy, it touched on duty and discipline with the pomp and ceremony that the British do best.

IGM – 19 September 2022

14 September 2022

The Queen's funeral will be on 19 September. 'As a mark of respect' local crematoria will be closing for the day. The wheelie-bin collection on 19 September in this area will happen as usual. I suppose there are alternatives to crematoria.

IGM – 14 September 2022

10 September 2022

Today Charles was proclaimed King Charles III. Although the succession passes seamlessly on the monarch's death and these days becomes known immediately, the tradition is for it to be proclaimed by a committee and this happened this morning.

Since 1689, the UK has been a constitutional monarchy. The change from EIR to CIIR on everything from uniforms to coinage and postage stamps will take time as it will for us to become used to the government being the King's government and to hearing the words 'God save the King'. Q will change to K and we must get used to it.

The King has a Queen Consort, Camilla. Public opinion has shifted in their favour and the King was warmly applauded when he met the crowds at Buckingham Palace yesterday. His speech to the nation in the evening was well-received and struck a note of humility. Few now think back twenty-five years to why Diana was travelling through Paris at high speed in a black Mercedes when she could have been at home with her husband and children.

The impact of the death of the sovereign on the UK is described succinctly and well by a 'Guardian' columnist: 'Do not underestimate the upheaval in British life that this dynastic moment will trigger. Elizabeth II spent 70 years as a low-key but extremely effective unifying force in a nation that is visibly pulling itself apart. Her passing will remove that force, which her heirs cannot assume they will be able to replicate. In its way, this succession will be one of the biggest tests to face modern Britain.'

For me, it's salutary to know that there comes a point in life at which one can be getting on with doing one's job and less than 48 hours later be dead.



IGM – 10 September 2022

8 September 2022

Today the Queen died. It's a sad event we knew would happen yet, at the same time, couldn't imagine. Now the reality is upon us. We, along with the rest of the world, felt we knew her. Her image and her voice were instantly recognisable. She was part of the fabric of our lives and of the nation. Neither we nor anyone else knew her at all, of course. We had no idea what she thought about anything and this mystique was the secret of her success. Her views were unknown and so she upset no one. Her grandson, William, said that the purpose of the monarchy was to set an example and this she did – at least an example of stoicism and duty. She was always there. Few can remember a time when she wasn't.

And now she isn't there any longer. We have the King. It is the monarch's prerogative to choose what name he wishes. We assume he will be King Charles III. From a Queen who never put a foot wrong, we shall have a King the vicissitudes of whose private life are well-known. Will he be seen as

an example? Will he be seen as flawed as the rest of us? We now become his subjects. Will there be a point in the monarchy any longer? The history that is yet to be written will give us the answer.

Whether one is a monarchist or not, the death of Queen Elizabeth II is a seismic event for the United Kingdom. The photo below is when she appointed our new Prime Minister just the day before yesterday. She carried out her duties until the end. Change can happen so very quickly. We shall not see the like of her again - ever.

Her husband, Philip, was asked how long he thought the monarchy would survive. 'As long as people want us' was his reply. The Queen succeeded to the throne in 1952. I wonder how different the UK of 2022 really is.



IGM – 8 September 2022

15 August 2022

Just me at Mary Hare. Still basking in the heatwave, but the school is silent.

All the reports are written and posted except for those with Trinity certificates to be included. These are delayed, but expected any day.

What a joy it was to get back to doing what has become my *raison d'être*. And what a joy it is to know that it was such a success. Here is what people are telling me:

'I have had a life-changing experience on the course. My own mother, who attended the school several years, had told me about the wonders of *Vacational Studies*, but I could have never imagined how astonishing the experience was until I took part in it. I believe that the main aspect that motivates me to write this letter is the love I have for the whole place, experience and people.' (A student)

'It was my first time and it was truly the experience of a lifetime. It showed me how to be more mature, independent, and to be able to connect through my English with people that now I couldn't imagine not forming part of my life. I loved every moment being in *Vacational Studies*.' (A student)

'I wanted to thank you very much for the incredible experience that (my children) have had at *Vacational Studies* this summer. They really enjoyed it very much! And this is the first time after a camp that they already asked us to repeat next year. Thank you again! (A parent)

'I really enjoyed my time at *Vacstuds*, way more than I would've ever expected.' (A student)

'I think I have significantly developed in many ways. My leadership skills have improved throughout the course, but more importantly, I feel I have been able to support others in their work and self-development in various ways. The ability to work out issues both within yourself and others at the course is a skill I find essential, and it is one of the most difficult skills to develop. However, I think this year has led me to truly appreciate the challenge and reward that comes with putting on an event for fellow youths, supporting ungdom finding it difficult to adjust, as well as being a part of a winning team dynamic. With the encouragement and support I have received at VacStuds this summer, I hope to further develop them in the future. This year has been like no other, I have never once been left with this much self reflection, joy and awe as I have after this month at Vacation Studies.' (A student)

'Both (my children) had a magnificent time - it was for them a fantastic month meeting so many positive-energy people from so many countries, great activities, staff, and on a fantastic place. Epic. They are still intensely in contact with their international friends now.' (A parent – and former student)

'T has had the most incredible experience at VacStuds 2022. He has surprised us all and most certainly himself. He hasn't stopped talking about all sorts of experiences and the wonderful people he met.' (A parent)

'V came back enthusiastic, grown up, matured, happy. Not that I had any doubts but...one never knows: we are all different. His first phrases when back were: "it was the best month of my life" and "I want to go back". As parents I cannot think we could ask for more. This is the Magic of VacStuds all over again.' (A parent – and former student and staff member)

'He is absolutely happy and his English has clearly improved. He has already decided that he is going to return next year, so you can count on him.' (A parent)

'We would like to let you know that I came back very happy from Vacation Studies. She enjoyed very much the activities, the trips, the friends, the hot chocolate. And says she wishes to come again next year. Thank you for having taking care of her. It was not easy for her to be away from home but the experience was very good. She progressed a lot in English. The note in the parent's page about homesick was VERY useful for us. You have used the perfect words. In fact, everything is perfect in Vacation Studies. Since the first email to the last document we just received about I. You are doing an amazing job - The stamps are just beautiful. We are very impressed by the way everything is organised. Tomorrow we are going to Monaco and will have dinner with F. It will be the occasion for I to share this fantastic experience she had in Mary Hare with a former student...' (A parent – and friend of a former student)

'Thank you so much for the best summer ever, friends for life, experiences, knowledge and important lessons.' (A parent)

I could go on. This is what makes it all so worthwhile.



IGM – 15 August 2022

9 August 2022

A message from one of the teaching staff: *'Just wanted to say thanks for another great month at Mary Hare. With the enforced break meaning returning students were at a minimum, I wasn't entirely sure how this year would compare with the previous ones but it was incredible. The young people seemed to absolutely love it, and almost every single one of them that I spoke to told me they plan to come back again next year. I also felt this was the most cohesive and unified the teachers and sports/social staff have been in any year since I started in 2013. Having a group of teachers who were so willing to be involved in the sports and evening events was fantastic - not just as extra help for the staff team but for the perception the students had of the course. It created a sense of community between everyone, regardless of who they were or what their role was.'*

As you've pointed out, 2023 is already up and running online and as always, I'm already looking forward to it. So thanks again, and see you back at Mary Hare in 11 months.'

The last of our young visitors have now returned home. Several were delayed for two days with a cancelled flight, but they were looked after and had, I hope, a great extended Course nevertheless. How an airline can take payment for a service and then not provide it leaving young passengers stranded is not part of my business model.

The last to return home was, in fact, the one who drew the tiny 3" x 4" pencil sketch of the Mary Hare conservatory (below) which, exceptionally, she took out of her notebook for us. I have framed it and it will take a place on the boardroom mantelpiece.

Tom Goodwin and I are working through the 90 or so remaining reports.

VacStuds 23 will then be the priority. Applications have already started to come in.



IGM – 9 August 2022

20 July 2022

This is the time when what I say about booking for less than the full Course is like taking a child away from a party that is in full swing really applies. For us to extend a child's stay involves issuing an extension invoice and altering the insurance and involves the parent in either changing (often not possible) or replacing (at cost) the return ticket as well as the complexities of changing domestic arrangements.

It is happening for five families right now.

My message is please just book for the full Course. It's far better value.

IGM – 20 July 2022

16 July 2022

The Course has been running for nearly a week and it's all good. We have wonderful young people and great staff. This has become the norm and is because of VacStuds' remarkable continuity. Most of our young people have family members who were with us way back. The disadvantage for me is one I realised years ago – that I have stopped being a person and am now an institution so I can neither retire nor die. That's OK by me.

We shall shortly have what the newspapers are calling the hottest day ever and the first time a red-alert for heat has been issued. Don't worry, it's the first time such an alert has been issued because these alerts were only started last year. Time was, we'd have happy suns with the temperature. Now there is the blood-red of the apocalypse. It's all part of the culture of fear. We shall take normal, sensible precautions.

IGM – 16 July 2022

8 July 2022

Today, Joe Wallis and I take equipment into Mary Hare.

Although forced to resign as 60 or so Ministers left his Government, the loathsome PM offered not one word of apology for his disgraceful behaviour in his self-serving resignation speech. In 'Macbeth' are the words describing a traitor's confession at the end of his life: 'Nothing in his life became him like the leaving it.' No such approach from the disgraced ex-PM. It was 'eccentric' of MPs to do what they did in a 'herd mentality'. As one decent MP said, 'let's hope we don't see the like of him again in British politics.' In the meantime, he says he will carry on until a replacement is found. It would be better if Larry, the Downing Street cat, would stand in.

IGM – 8 July 2022

7 July 2022

Today sees the arrival of the vanguard of VacStuds 2022. Our Academic Manager, Joe Wallis, arrives to prepare the assessment group lists.

The calm preparations for VacStuds 2022 contrast with the turmoil in the UK Government. 50+ Ministers and MPs with Government jobs have resigned while the incumbent PM declares he will stay on. Even the MP for Newbury has declared she cannot support the PM – a view I suggested she might adopt two years ago when it became clear to me that a serial liar who has fathered five children with other people's wives shouldn't run the country. As Lady Macbeth said (and if anything is worth saying, Shakespeare has already said it): 'Stand not upon the order of your going, but GO at once.'

IGM – 7 July 2022

6 July 2022

A message from Mary Hare: 'Ahead of the weekend I just wanted to welcome you back to Mary Hare for the summer school after two years. I was really pleased to hear that you have grown the numbers beyond those expected when we met earlier in the year, I'm sure it will be a real success.'

Our teams are excited to see you and the students return and I hope all goes well, looking at the weather it certainly looks like you will have a great start to the four weeks. I will be around during

the period at times as we see the finalisation of the new primary school build and so will no doubt catch up at some point.

Welcome again and have a great summer.'

And my reply: 'Thank you.

I can't tell you how thrilled I am to get back to near-normal after all this time, to do what I love and what has become my life. VacStuds and Mary Hare will become part of the life-experience of a new generation of youngsters and it will, they all tell me decades later, shape their future.

I am hugely aware and appreciative of the support you, Louise and Kevin are providing.'

Such a pity that we shall not see our young people from Russia while the grotesque tyrant remains in power. In the meantime, our own lying, philandering PM for the time-being continues in office while two of his most senior and several junior ministers resign. This is a man whose sense of entitlement is more important than what is good for the country. It and he can't last...

IGM – 6 July 2022

10 May 2022

Just two months to go and it's just like old times. I have posted ['Last Minute Information'](#) on the website.

IGM – 10 May 2022

13 April 2022

Throughout the pandemic, I stuck to all the restrictions imposed by our Prime Minister at considerable personal and professional cost. Yesterday that same Prime Minister was fined by the police for breaking these laws – as were 50 people he worked with. One might imagine he would resign in shame. One would be wrong.

This man has been sacked from every job he has had – for lying. He told Parliament he had broken no laws. Only his MPs can sack him.

Now the message is that because there's a war in Europe, he has to stay on.

I have written to our Conservative MP – 'I know there is tribal loyalty, but I do hope you won't take the view that a man who presides over a culture of law-breaking in Downing Street, who lies to Parliament and breaks the rules he himself has made is the only person in your party who can stand up to Putin and support the side of right in a war against tyranny.'

IGM – 13 April 2022

11 April 2022

The sky this morning is criss-crossed with the vapour trails that signify the return to normal international travel. In the UK, we are adjusting to living with Covid + vaccinations and reflecting on the damage that this interruption to the normality of our lives has caused.

This seems to be the case with almost all European countries.

We are also having to confront the horrors of a war in Europe. I know that those who have come to us over the decades from Russia are as appalled as are the rest of us by the actions of the dictator

and frustrated at their inability to do anything about it. It has always struck me that what unites us is far greater than anything that divides us. When they were growing up, I would tell my sons: 'Imagine that men from Mars were coming to take us over. Do you think that any countries on Earth wouldn't stick together to defeat them? Well, here we are without any men from Mars to worry about.'

If it weren't so unutterably tragic, what is being done to Ukraine would be ridiculous.

IGM – 11 April 2022

25 January 2022

Major changes to travel regulations for those coming into England: no tests required as well as no vaccine requirements for under-18s.

There are no restrictions at all.

I have changed Insurers. My memo explaining everything is [here](#).

IGM – 25 January 2022

5 January 2022

No more restrictions in England. VacStuds 2022 is on. [Here](#) is my memo to parents.

IGM – 5 January 2022

30 December 2021

The guilty verdict in the Maxwell trial in New York shows that power corrupts. The activities of the self-declared ruler of a central European state shows that absolute power corrupts absolutely. Our former student, Jesús Silva, now Spanish Consul in Capetown, South Africa, writes: 'I attend today the tribute ceremony to Archbishop Desmond Tutu at Cape Town Mayor's office. A moral giant, tolerant, integrity and free from sectarianism. A person who bravely opposed tyranny and arbitrariness. Great example for all.' My reply: 'If only some of the political 'leaders' you have encountered could take a leaf out of this man's book.'

Those who come to us will achieve connections and the power that comes from them. Everything we do to shape young minds embraces the tolerance and open-mindedness to which Jesús refers.

IGM – 30 December 2021

8 December 2021

Today is the anniversary of the first vaccination against Covid. The UK was the first in the world to administer this and the Health Secretary was billed to celebrate this achievement on the UK news channels this morning. He has been pulled from all programmes. No Government minister is available this morning.

For some weeks, the Prime Minister has denied that there was a breach of rules that he had created prohibiting social gatherings at the time a Christmas party was rumoured to have taken place at 10 Downing Street last year. Last night, a video emerged showing his spokesperson and aides laughing about that party and the rule breaking. The public who obeyed the rules, which also prevented visiting dying relatives, are expressing their feelings.

One wonders how long a leader with only a nodding acquaintance with the truth can hang on.

IGM – 8 December 2021

24 November 2021

My latest memo to parents is [here](#).

IGM – 24 November 2021

22 November 2021

A German minister says people will be ‘vaccinated, recovered or dead’ by spring. Powerful language.

While anti-vaxxers are wrong-headed and it’s clear everyone should be vaccinated, things have reached a pretty pass when another western European democratic government decides every citizen must accept chemicals in their bodies whether they want them or not. One wonders what will happen to those who decide they don’t.

‘Vaccine hesitancy’ is very low in the UK with over 90% doubly vaccinated and most of those eligible having received their booster shots.

VacStuds 2022 is on...

IGM – 22 November 2021

14 October 2021

The 2022 brochure has been published. The emphasis is on ‘fun, friends, freedom and fresh air’ and ‘free at last’. 2022 is starting to take shape. As I say in the brochure, this is ‘for our mental and physical well-being’. We cannot continue to have everything that makes being human so great taken away from us. Never has a VacStuds summer been so important and we will do our very best to deliver an experience worth a two-year wait.



IGM – 14 October 2021

17 September 2021

No more traffic light system. Countries are either open or closed. All Europe and most of the rest of the world is open. Mask-wearing is now optional. Back to normal.

IGM – 17 September 2021

8 August 2021

From 04.00 this morning, there are no travel restrictions to stop our students from mainland Europe entering and leaving the UK.

Everything is clear for VacStuds 2022 on 10 August. At last!

IGM – 8 August 2021

5 August 2021

Just in time for the day after the 2021 Course would have ended, the Government has lifted all travel restrictions in Europe.

The 2022 Course is now clear for take-off.

IGM – 5 August 2021

19 July 2021

‘Freedom Day’ – with no more legal restrictions on any activity except international inbound travel. When this is lifted we shall really be ‘normal’ again.

IGM – 19 July 2021

16 July 2021

We have beautifully sunny days, warm temperatures, lush green grass and no one to take advantage of what we do so well.

Such a pity.

IGM – 16 July 2021

12 July 2021

The first full day of the Course is the day we place our young people in assessment groups and they start making new friends.

Today all I can do is wait for 10 July 2022. This isn’t me...

IGM – 12 July 2021

11 July 2021

Today I should be welcoming many young people from all over to have the time of their lives.

Instead – I am doing nothing at all. OK – cooking, cleaning and writing books.

These are terrible times and I wish them finished, preferably when all Europe is vaccinated.

IGM – 11 July 2021

10 July 2021

From the head at Mary Hare:

‘We are all packing up and the pupils are leaving today and I remember years when you and your team would be waiting to get in!’

I just wanted to drop you a quick note to say that I know you would now be preparing for the arrivals from so many countries and the buzz there always was at this time of year.

Whilst not a massive fan of Euro-disco, I always loved the sound of these children and young people having such great fun on our campus. It will be another very quiet July.

Here's to next year.'

IGM – 10 July 2021

2 July 2021

The Health Secretary made the rule that we couldn't hug our dying relative. He was filmed kissing his mistress in his office. The mistress was employed by him at the taxpayers' expense. The co-chair of the Conservative Party has said on TV today that there will be no enquiry and the matter is closed.

IGM – 2 July 2021

1 July 2021

With its slow vaccine rollout, other countries are rightly concerned not to let virus variants in. They will occur as long as the virus is in circulation and the UK is good at spotting these. The link between the virus and hospitalisations is broken in the UK, so 'Terminus Day' (as 'Freedom Day' has been renamed so we can forget it) on 19 July is realisable.

IGM – 1 July 2021

27 June 2021

The entire nation took the view that there was something wrong in that the man who had made the laws we have had to obey broke them and the man eventually resigned. The man who told the nation it was OK for him to stay remains in post.

IGM – 27 June 2021

26 June 2021

The health minister who created our 'social-distancing' rules is filmed breaking them with someone else's wife and the PM (who has had his own affairs) says 'the matter is closed'. 'This murderous shaft that's shot hath not yet lighted'... Again, today's 'Daily Star' has a great headline:



IGM – 26 June 2021

18 June 2021

Amersham – a ‘safe’ Conservative seat – has just been won by the Lib Dems with a 35% increase in their vote share. Is it possible that the electorate is realizing that the bloke in charge is hopeless and that the vaccine success isn’t his?

IGM – 18 June 2021

17 June 2021

The PM’s former chief aide, Dominic Cummings, reveals whatsapp messages from Boris Johnson about the Health Secretary, Matt Hancock, saying he’s ‘hopeless’. Today’s ‘Daily Star’ has a great headline:



IGM – 17 June 2021

14 June 2021

19 July is the new 21 June.

IGM – 14 July 2021

11 June 2021

As no one in our field is operating his summer, I have now formally applied to the Accreditation section of The British Council for a two-year extension to our Accreditation so that we are Accredited by The British Council until 31 March 2026.

IGM – 11 June 2021

10 June 2021

A parent who decided not to roll forward has contacted me: ‘Just for your info: the attached extracts are the ones of the money transfer to you and the amount you reimbursed. A “tiny” difference of EUR 356.92, which the banks have earned without neither you nor me benefitting from it. Really sad

that they earn money with Covid-related cancellations. And on top of it this money goes into the British and Spanish GNP, which supposedly reflects a country's "productivity".'

Nothing much I can add, except that a few parents have told me their children will come in 2022, but have asked for a refund in the meantime. This has been at no cost to us but, I assume, considerable cost to them...

I have now dispensed with the hated 'C word'.

IGM – 10 June 2021

8 June 2021

I thought I would have a chat with a young man who has received our services – is second-generation and has climbed the VacStuds ladder from student to prefect to apprentice-to-be. I wanted to get his ideas on how to make the Course fun for those coming to us as 'older students'. It was a useful conversation. The results are on IGM's Page and here.

Older students (18+) will be considered as an 'OS' group. They will

- not have bedtimes like the others
- have free access to staff
- have thought-provoking discursive lessons encouraging the development of ideas and vocabulary
- have the opportunity to use their organisational skills for parties and the club
- have the freedom to be who they want to be

all within the constraints of the norms of the Course.

The 2022 Course is starting to take shape.

IGM – 8 June 2021

4 June 2021

The day I have dreaded. I have written to all parents – [here](#). My thanks to everyone for their support during these dark days. I can offer only a period of waiting – with, of course, Masterclasses and Meetings which will be announced [here](#).

This diary will be updated from time-to-time, but no longer daily.

I promise that Vacational Studies will go from strength to strength and overcome this setback.

IGM – 4 June 2021

3 June 2021

The UK Government has decided to put all European countries on the 'amber' list based on its view of other countries' case numbers and vaccination rollouts. Our own situation is good. The UK Government considers that other countries have not performed well enough.

We cannot have all our young people isolated for 10 days.

Eventually, other countries will catch us up and unrestricted international travel will return. Not yet, however.

I have prepared a memo for parents to say that VacStuds will start on 10 July 2022. I have told all the staff today what the situation is.

This has been a desperately sad decision for me – but an unavoidable one.

IGM – 3 June 2021

2 June 2021

75% of the population is now vaccinated. All the variants are able to be dealt with by the vaccines. 'Freedom Day' is still on for 21 June. Still the international travel restrictions remain.

IGM – 2 June 2021

1 June 2021

We in the UK are now banned from travelling to France even though our vaccination numbers are higher, cases lower and deaths almost non-existent because we test more than almost any country and therefore find more cases and more variants. As Shakespeare says: 'Full oft we see cold wisdom waiting on superfluous folly.'

The UK will put a few more countries on the 'green' list this week. They will be small islands mainly and not the countries our students come from. These countries may or may not be added later in June. I cannot go ahead on such possibilities. It is only a matter of days before I say that we cannot go ahead with VacStuds 2021 in the face of such uncertainty and current restrictions.

In the meantime, thousands travel to Spain - which lets in UK travellers - knowing that the UK authorities will not be able to enforce the 10-day isolation they must all undergo on their return. 'That way madness lies' – Shakespeare again.

IGM – 1 June 2021

31 May 2021

'Women-only' queues and vaccinations have been set up in an attempt to encourage the unvaccinated to protect themselves from the 'Indian variant'. The UK finds variants because it tests so many people. Nevertheless, the PM is being blamed for letting it in by not red-listing India earlier and it may encourage him to be cautious about opening up international travel and our own 21 June 'freedom day'. As spring ends and meteorological summer begins, VacStuds 2021 is increasingly doubtful.

IGM – 31 May 2021

30 May 2021

The 'Indian variant' has become a matter of concern in the UK and internationally has led to travellers from the UK either being banned or having to isolate for 10 days or so on arrival. That it has affected quite a small number who have, in the main, chosen to be unvaccinated has not resonated, it seems.

IGM – 30 May 2021

29 May 2021

No changes to international inbound travel restrictions were announced on 28 May, so the 2021 Course is very much in doubt. [Here](#) is my latest memo.

IGM – 29 May 2021

28 May 2021

With travel into the UK from almost all of Europe still subject to 10-day isolation requirements and several countries placing new isolation requirements on travellers from the UK – in spite of our 74% vaccination figures – it is by no means certain that the Course this summer will go ahead, so please do not book flights yet.

IGM – 28 May 2021

27 May 2021

Spain welcomes us with no restrictions. But we are still told not to go there and anyone coming in from Spain faces 10 days of isolation. We are told not to go anywhere in Europe (except Portugal) or face 10 days isolation on re-entry. Now France has decided to impose the same isolation on us. Health concerns and politics seem interchangeable and will, it seems, continue until the mass-vaccination that the UK has almost achieved gets us out of this.

IGM – 27 May 2021

26 May 2021

The PM's former senior advisor has stated publicly at a Parliamentary enquiry that the PM is unfit to hold office, that the government had no policy for the pandemic and that the Health Secretary lied on many occasions, is incompetent and should be sacked. The PM states he has 'full confidence in the Health Secretary. How can one have confidence in how the government is handling this?

IGM – 26 May 2021

25 May 2021

70%+ of the population vaccinated. Anyone over 30 is now eligible for a shot.

IGM – 25 May 2021

24 May 2021

The UK has its rules governing entry from different countries. Each country has its own rules governing entry from the UK. These rules change from time to time and are unpredictable. Until full vaccination is achieved, I fear the travelling situation will remain precarious.

IGM – 24 May 2021

23 May 2021

I have had a conversation with Mary Hare. They and I have agreed that I shall decide on the basis of what we know on that day about international travel regulations whether or not the Course will go ahead this summer. I have slightly amended my memo about this – [here](#) - to make it clear that parents can roll forward to 2022 at the fee they have already paid with any unpaid part at the 2022 fee, or cancel for a refund.

IGM – 23 May 2021

22 May 2021

There is Spain announcing that anyone from the UK can enter the country freely. And there is Germany saying anyone from the UK must quarantine for two weeks. As Shakespeare writes in 'Macbeth': 'Such welcome and unwelcome things at once 'Tis hard to reconcile.' Those who know me know that I think that if something is worth saying, Shakespeare has already said it. Shakespeare did, of course, know all about political machinations – and nonsense... The fact remains that our situation is far better than in other European countries.

IGM – 22 May 2021

21 May 2021

I am receiving questions about how we will arrange quarantine on the Course if there are still these requirements. I have referred my questioners to my [20 May Covid Update](#). We shall not be able to arrange quarantine as this involves isolation. We would not imagine parents would want this. Unless a country is on the 'green' list, we cannot receive people from that country.

IGM – 21 May 2021

20 May 2021

Whether or not there will be free international access to the UK in July depends on the thinking of a man who has proved to be dithering and capricious and whose decisions are more to do with what is politically expedient than what is right.

At a time when the increase in the latest variant appears so closely related to the government's earlier failures to control borders, it may be politically expedient not to open them much more widely.

I have just over two weeks in which to anticipate what this man will do. So do parents who may well decide the uncertainty is too much.

IGM – 20 May 2021

19 May 2021

Although it is now legal, the PM has pointedly warned against travel to 'amber' countries. He has made a point of stressing the 10-day isolation rule for anyone entering from these countries. I am no longer optimistic that those countries our young people will travel from will be considered vaccinated enough by this summer.

Those who look at the lists will see that there have been a number of parents not committing to 2021 or deciding to roll forward to 2022 before a decision is made on 2021. The Course is still viable, however.

IGM – 19 May 2021

18 May 2021

The news is full of the 'Indian' variant mainly in the north and whether this will delay the end of all restrictions due on 21 June. It came in via travellers from India and most of those hospitalized, we are told, are those who elected not to be vaccinated. The travellers, we are told, entered at a time when India was not on the red list, but Pakistan and Bangladesh – which had lower levels of infection than India – were. The question being asked is whether there is any connection between the UK PM wanting to travel to India to sign a post-Brexit trade deal and travel to and from India being allowed.

The travel was cancelled when it became clear that the pandemic in India was out of control. The Health Secretary said in Parliament that, at the time, levels in India were not as great as in those countries red-listed. The numbers tell a different story.

When it happens, the Parliamentary Enquiry into the way the pandemic was handled will make interesting reading.

In the meantime, the numbers vaccinated in the UK shoots up.

IGM – 18 May 2021

17 May 2021

We are now allowed to travel overseas at will – but have 10 days quarantine on our return unless we have visited Portugal or Israel – and we are allowed to have people in our houses. Restaurants can open until 22.30. The government ‘can see no reason’ why all restrictions can’t end on 21 June.

The ‘Indian variant’ of the virus, we are told, has affected those who have been offered vaccination, but have not taken it. There are few ‘anti-vaxers’ in the UK. Sadly, we are told, there are far more in neighboring countries in Europe. That vaccination numbers are too low in these countries is what may stop VacStuds ’21 in spite of my best efforts.

IGM – 17 May 2021

16 May 2021

At the moment, 21 June is ‘freedom day’. With most adults now vaccinated, this should be possible. We shall see.

IGM – 16 May 2021

15 May 2021

As expected, the authorities in Portugal are now allowing UK travellers in and, from Monday, anyone entering the UK from Portugal will not have to quarantine. We wait to see which other countries will be accorded this privilege and when. If it isn’t before 4 June, the next VacStuds will be on 10 July 2022.

IGM – 15 May 2021

14 May 2021

Although Portugal is on our ‘green’ list and our UK figures are among the best in the world, Portugal has, the BBC tells me, decided not to accept travellers from overseas, including the UK. The Norwegian government made an instant decision which it overturned almost immediately, so the Portuguese government may do the same. There seems to be a madness abroad which makes our UK government look sensible.

Whether or not we can go ahead in the summer depends on how many countries are on the ‘green’ list by 4 June and how many parents decide before this to roll-forward to 2022. Mary Hare has given me until 4 June to tell them if we are coming so that they can employ their staff.

IGM – 14 May 2021

13 May 2021

The Norwegian government has belatedly seen sense and is now stating that it's treating the UK in the same way as the EU/Schengen area = 10 days quarantine, but not in expensive government-approved hotels. One wonders why it didn't come to this conclusion when drawing up its rule. One also wonders why travellers from the UK aren't treated better than travellers from the EU/Schengen area as our vaccine rollout is greater and infection rate lower than all of them.

IGM – 13 May 2021

12 May 2021

Although in the UK numbers vaccinated are higher than in the rest of Europe and Scandinavia and the number of illnesses much lower, the Norwegian government has decided that all travellers from the UK must isolate in expensive, Government approved hotels. Travellers from EU countries with a far higher level of infection are allowed to quarantine at home. Is this some sort of punishment for leaving the EU? I have always admired Norwegian good sense. This must be an aberration.

IGM – 12 May 2021

11 May 2021

While the UK soars out of the pandemic, the UK government sees that the same cannot be said yet for our neighbours. We hope that their numbers fall in time for the 28 May review. If not, it looks like 10 July 2022. As one of the teachers put it to me, if you thought 2020 was bad, with the uncertainty, 2021 is even worse. That it is all because of some self-serving politicians makes it all the more galling.

IGM – 11 May 2021

10 May 2021

From 17 May, we are told that we can meet people indoors for the first time this year and that life will return to normal on 21 June.

IGM – 10 May 2021

9 May 2021

We keep our fingers crossed that by 28 May (1) Europe will be on the green list and that (2) no more parents will decide to roll over to 2022 at this stage.

The vaccination programme and over four months' of restrictions ending on 17 May have worked so well in the UK, with hardly any deaths and falling numbers of infections, that I am disappointed other countries haven't followed our example.

IGM – 9 May 2021

8 May 2021

Of the countries our young visitors come from only Portugal and Israel are on the 'green' list. This was announced on 7 May.

The next review will come in three weeks' time – on 28 May.

The countries have been allocated by ministers according to the latest scientific data, so quarantine and testing requirements on return from those countries are appropriate to the risk of coronavirus and variants of concern.

The lists will be reviewed every 3 weeks, informed by public health advice, including the Joint Biosecurity Centre's assessment of the latest data. These regular review points will allow the government to balance helping the public to understand COVID requirements when travelling to England while allowing England to constantly evaluate the risk for different countries.

The government will also be publishing a green watchlist in the future, to provide an indication when a country is identified as a candidate for a changing country. All measures will be kept under review and further action may be taken to protect public health.

IGM – 8 May 2021

7 May 2021

The initial list of 'green' countries is likely to be published at 17.00 today.

IGM – 7 May 2021

6 May 2021

An interesting article in the news today about 'hygiene theatre'. If one touches a surface that has been infected with the virus, one had a one in ten thousand chance of catching it according to research. The Covid Risk Assessment from English UK reads like a bravura performance.

IGM – 6 May 2021

5 May 2021

Mary Hare has asked me for a list of the countries are from. I think no one is from a country in which the disease is particularly rife.

IGM – 5 May 2021

4 May 2021

A chance conversation with a medical man who tells me he advises the government and is sure that most of Europe will be on the green list. I have no idea, but have the feeling that this may not be the case. We await the list.

IGM – 4 May 2021

3 May 2021

The number of cancellations balances out the number of new applicants. I cannot see a pattern and can only assume that fear is a factor.

IGM – 3 May 2021

2 May 2021

The numbers in the UK continue to fall. We are promised to know which countries will have which colours this week.

IGM – 2 May 2021

1 May 2021

The £:€ rate today is £1 = €1.1776. This is the conversion rate used for all balance invoices. € balance invoices have been e-mailed and posted.

The list of countries and their 'colours' should have been published today. It is now to be published in 'early May', so we wait for the Government's decision. At the moment, VacStuds 2021 depends on parental resolve.

IGM – 1 May 2021

30 April 2021

As I prepare second € invoices for posting, I wonder if, no matter how infinitesimally small the danger from Covid is in the UK, the .000094% possibility will outweigh the 100% certainty of the loss of a great time making international friends and using the world's language.

IGM – 30 April 2021

29 April 2021

Several parents have written to me about their anxiety and have rolled-forward their applications to 2022. If more do this, VacStuds 2021 will not be viable. We shall see.

IGM - 29 April 2021

28 April 2021

The Deputy Chief Medical Officer says: 'My sense is that probably we are at or close to the bottom at the moment in terms of this level of disease in the UK. Most of the steady decline we have seen, the disappearance of our third wave, has been down to the efforts of the British people in following lockdown.'

A Public Health England study found a single dose of a COVID-19 vaccine can cut transmission of the virus by up to half.

IGM – 28 April 2021

27 April 2021

70% of all adults in the UK have antibodies against Covid. All the numbers are well down – 97% down since their peak.

IGM – 27 April 2021

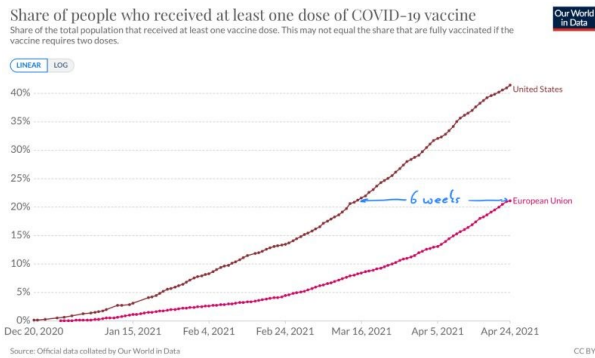
26 April 2021

After discussions with The Mary Hare School, I have written my latest update - [here](#).

IGM – 26 April 2021

25 April 2021

I received a link to the CEO of Austrian Airlines' comments: 'Vaccination progress in #Europe is just 6 weeks behind USA! I think this is much better than publicly perceived and a significant relaxation of the COVID measures can be expected over the next couple of months. This will also fuel the recovery of airtravel, as people can't wait to travel again! Looking forward to it, both professionally as well as privately.'



IGM – 25 April 2021

24 April 2021

The second injection. I shall be able to go dancing in the streets.



IGM – 24 April 2021

23 April 2021

St. George's Day – the patron saint of England. Deaths from covid are now ranked the third biggest cause in the UK – a huge change from a few weeks ago when it was the first. The vaccination programme steams ahead with 64% vaccinated. The results are clear – all the more reason for our incredulity when so many people overseas are turning it down.

IGM – 23 April 2021

22 April 2021

The Travel Correspondent of 'The Independent' writes 'a decision could be taken any time in the first two weeks of May' on which countries will be considered 'green' to travel from the UK.

Such is the ludicrous fear of the vaccine we have been using in the UK that has produced such a dramatic drop in infections that there is also a report that a neighbouring country may not list us with the counties allowed to travel there. Truth may be the first casualty in a vaccine war.

IGM – 22 April 2021

21 April 2021

While we hope that Europe will be on the 'green' list when the list is revealed, the slow roll-out of the vaccines there are a cause for great concern. That the slow roll-out is partly caused by fear is of even more concern.

IGM – 21 April 2021

20 April 2021

The media report that such is the fear of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine in a neighbouring country that there was a take-up of just 1.25% when 5000 professionals were offered it.

IGM – 20 April 2021

19 April 2021

Infection levels in the UK are now 90% less than at their peak, 60% of the population has been vaccinated and we aren't keeling over with blood clots. A huge success at last.

IGM – 19 April 2021

18 April 2021

News today that 'thousands of fans will be able to enjoy live music again next month when an outdoor gig is used to test new Covid procedures. The Festival Republic event at Sefton Park, in Liverpool, on 2 May will be the latest in a series of government pilots hoping to herald the return of mass events this summer. Researchers will monitor the movements of what is expected to be a 5,000-strong crowd who, significantly, will not be socially distanced or required to wear masks. They will have to wear face coverings when travelling to and from the venue, however, and follow other rules while they are there. Before they are allowed to enter the event, ticket holders will also have to take a rapid lateral flow Covid-19 test at a local testing centre, and prove they have received a negative result. They will also be asked to take a test after the gig and provide contact details to NHS Test and Trace, in case they have to be traced later. Culture secretary Oliver Dowden said the news meant the country was 'one step closer to a summer of live events.'

IGM – 18 April 2021

17 April 2021

In response to my diary entry of 15 April, a correspondent writes from a major European country: 'The media are mostly to blame and the politicians kowtow to public fear. For example, they interview famous people who admit that they would only receive the Pfizer jab because they have heard an anecdote or rumour rather than scientific evidence. The celebrities of course are given prime time spots whereas if you want to hear what the scientists say, you have to dig them out on the internet or read the newspaper which most people would find too taxing.' My response was 'how ridiculously dangerous to ask celebrities who, I assume, aren't celebrated for their scientific knowledge, to opine on something of which they are completely ignorant.

People should look at the UK as a case study.'

IGM – 17 April 2021

16 April 2021

Yet more fears about variants. Viruses vary. That's the nature of a virus we are told. Fear seems to be the currency of the news these days. 'Angst isst die Seele auf' as Fassbinder wrote. This is bad for society and for mental health.

IGM – 16 April 2021

15 April 2021

Highly qualified professors of medicine and epidemiologists have been on TV today talking about the (as we see it) incredible decisions made by some countries to discontinue or restrict the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine. My theory is that governments may fear the charge that they are deliberately killing people more than when a virus kills them as it's nature at work and not their actions. That so many more will die without the vaccine than with it seems to us totally obvious. As one doctor put it today, overseas governments will have to account for the high number of preventable deaths to their electorates whereas the number who die from blood clots is comparatively trivial.

I have had my first haircut this year and feel normal again. The shops are open and there is a bustle of people in town.

IGM – 15 April 2021

14 April 2021

MPs meet the airline industry today to discuss the 'traffic-light' system which will determine foreign travel. Green-light countries = no problem. Amber and red = some form of quarantine. We hope that by July Europe will be green. The (for us anyway) counterintuitive behaviour of some European leaders towards the life-saving (at least) 0.000095% safe vaccines may prevent this. In that case we would look to see that the first few days of the Course would count as quarantine. Too early to explore this possibility.

IGM – 14 April 2021

13 April 2021

One parent driven by fear cancels. Three parents driven by hope apply. People are so different.

IGM – 13 April 2021

12 April 2021

Shops and hairdressers are now open. One more step towards normality.

IGM – 12 April 2021

11 April 2021

Anyone trying to book a ticket to the UK is told there is a 10-day quarantine. This is quite likely to change over the next few weeks, so parents are asked not to book flights yet. My update memo [here](#) refers.

IGM – 11 April 2021

10 April 2021

English UK is saying: 'We are pleased that the government has maintained its aim for international travel to start from 17 May, if circumstances allow. However, we are disappointed that this framework does not provide certainty or reassurance for the UK's English language teaching sector.

Our sector relies entirely on an international market. Our customers have been cut off by Covid-19 restrictions and we cannot replace them with domestic ones.

We are particularly concerned that English language students who wish to travel to the UK in the short and critical summer season will be discouraged by the high cost of PCR tests and the threat of countries moving between categories at short notice. We call on the government to clarify the details of how countries will be categorised, commit to regular reviews of the green list, and re-consider permitting the use of cheaper lateral flow tests in place of expensive PCR tests.'

I shall keep readers of this diary posted.

IGM – 10 April 2021

9 April 2021

The Transport Secretary is now saying that it is not his advice not to book summer holidays. It is also hardly a ringing endorsement to book one. He tells us there will be a traffic-light' system soon and countries on the 'green list' will be easy to visit and have visitors from. This may be made known on 17 May.

IGM – 9 April 2021

8 April 2021

I have had the same number of new applicants from those parents who assume the Course will proceed as the number of cancellations from those parents sure that it will not. I see the power of the media to instil fear.

IGM – 8 April 2021

7 April 2021

The news media report concerns about the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine because there is an unproven risk of a 1 in 0.000095% chance of a blood clot and a far higher chance of dying from Covid if unvaccinated. I don't understand the fear.

IGM – 7 April 2021

6 April 2021

News media ramping up fears of the vaccine causing very unusual clotting in a very small number of people compared with the huge number spared from contracting the disease.

After the hottest March day since 1968, today it snowed.



IGM – 6 April 2021

5 April 2021

At a news conference today, the PM has stated that the roadmap to lockdown is on track. This means international travel can start on 17 May. The plan is that travellers from countries with a low rate of infection/high rate of vaccination will be allowed into the UK. At the moment, this excludes much of Europe, but this may change over the next few months.

In the UK, we are now entitled to two free tests per week.

Shops and hairdressers will open on 12 April.

IGM – 5 April 2021

4 April 2021

Having had a few days of summer earlier this week, snow is now forecast with winds coming from the Arctic. It will, at least, stop hoards of young people gathering in open spaces now that we are allowed to go where we please in England and meet in a group of six outside.

IGM – 4 April 2021

3 April 2021

The first noises from the Government about a 'traffic-light' system to operate inbound travel in the summer. At the moment there is no travelling. This is due to be lifted on 17 May. Countries will have a green, amber or red colour attached to them. More may emerge from the PM on Monday.

IGM – 3 April 2021

2 April 2021

The Chief Medical Officer has said: 'Lockdowns are unlikely to be needed again as Britain learns to treat coronavirus like flu. Up to 25,000 people die in a bad flu year without anyone noticing and that accepting some Covid deaths would be the price of keeping schools and business open and allowing people to live a 'whole life'. The Government would only be forced to 'pull the alarm cord' if a dangerous variant arrived, against which people had no immunity and which sparked exponential growth. Covid is not going to go away. You've got to work out what's a rational policy to this and

here I would differentiate quite a lot between a pandemic environment and what you get with seasonal flu.'

It looks like a return to normal here will happen on 21 June, but we await news on inbound and outbound travel on Monday. This may remain restricted to high infection areas during the summer.

IGM – 2 April 2021

1 April 2021

Europe's vaccination rollout has been 'unacceptably' slow and is prolonging the pandemic, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has said.

A WHO report says 'variants of concern' are continuing to spread across the continent so speeding up the vaccination rollout was 'crucial'.

'Vaccines present our best way out of this pandemic. Not only do they work, they are also highly effective in preventing infection.'

IGM – 1 April 2021

31 March 2021

With a neighbouring country going into lockdown again, the seriousness of the situation in Europe is clear. There are calls to 'red list' travellers from this and other countries so they are quarantined in government-run hotels. In the meantime, more countries stop the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine against WHO and EMA advice and in spite of its evident success in the UK.

IGM – 31 March 2021

30 March 2021

Today is the warmest March day since 1968 at 22°. The latest Covid Update is [here](#).

IGM – 30 March 2021

29 March 2021

New legislation that came into law today means overseas holidays are now illegal, with Brits facing a £5,000 fine if they attempt to travel abroad without a 'reasonable excuse'.

Also today we are allowed to travel freely within England and meet in a group of six outside. We can meet no one inside. This has been the case all year.

From my friend in Israel, I read: 'As over 75% of the adult population in IL is already fully vaccinated, things are getting back to a quasi normal state. Public gatherings are allowed again, concert halls and theatres are open (at half capacity though, with plenty of empty seats in between the audience). International travel is slowly being resumed, currently to a select list of countries where there is multilateral recognition of state vaccination certificates (for us it would be Cyprus, Greece, UAE & the Seychelles!). There is emphasis on traveling with/to fully vaccinated people. So for example, Royal Caribbean has sailings out of Haifa, where they guarantee all staff and passengers that are allowed onboard, to be vaccinated. Hotels, airlines, restaurants are all making a point that they offer social interactions with vaccinated guests and staff. I am looking forward to having the UK on this list soon.'

It's a beautiful day, trees in bud, redolent of summer with the temperature over 20°.



IGM – 29 March 2021

28 March 2021

‘Ministers will discuss whether France should be placed on the "red list" on Tuesday after Oliver Dowden signalled that the "very worrying" third Covid wave in Europe could scupper holidays abroad this summer’ – The Telegraph today. The noose may be tightening.

IGM – 28 March 2021

27 March 2021

The COVID-19 Genomics (COG-UK) Consortium has been supporting genomic surveillance efforts to identify variants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in the genome sequencing data from the UK. This is how naturally-occurring mutations have been detected and why, sadly, the name of our country has been affixed to one of these. To combat mutations, a booster-jab for the autumn is being developed for those who will have had the second jab. The work being done by scientists is just remarkable.

News of new lockdowns in Europe has highlighted how comprehensive the UK lockdown has been for many months and how efficacious it and the vaccine strategy have been. We shall be out of it in stages with haircuts from 12 April and complete freedom on 21 June. Such a contrast to the awful news from many continental countries.

IGM – 27 March 2021

26 March 2021

In today’s ‘Telegraph’: ‘There is no scientific basis for restricting overseas travel for vaccinated Britons, the head of the Covid Symptom Tracker app study at King’s College London has said. Professor Tim Spector said he thought that the UK was “in a much better place than many people are telling us” and that he was “not worried too much about what’s happening abroad”. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has hinted that international travel restrictions may not be eased as early as was first indicated, on May 17, amid concerns of a “third wave” in Europe. But Professor Spector said rising rates would make no difference to vaccinated Britons. “If you’ve been vaccinated, and many of the elderly people have, there’s no scientific rationale to stop them from travelling,” he told the Press Association.

His comments were echoed by Mark Woolhouse, professor of infectious disease epidemiology at the University of Edinburgh. “If the Government chooses to curtail travel, that will not prevent the problem, that will not prevent the next wave,” he said. “The idea that somehow bringing in extra cases from overseas tips the balance and sends us into an epidemic we wouldn’t have had without that is just simply wrong.”

These days, however, over-reaction and nonsense appear to have become the norm.

IGM – 26 March 2021

25 March 2021

The 'stay at home' rule that we have had since the beginning of January will end on Monday. Today's news is that infections are now down 94% since the peak. The risk of the NHS being overwhelmed seems to have passed, so we look forward to the gradual restoration of normality and a summer of freedom. If the summer can enable people to travel from overseas remains in doubt, however. It may be that we are looking at restarting a year later than envisaged. I am planning on making VacStuds as suitable for 18/19s as younger ones.

IGM – 25 March 2021

24 March 2021

The UK illness numbers continue to fall and vaccine numbers to rise. There is talk about putting a close neighbour on the 'red list' which means that only UK residents from that country will be allowed in and they will then have to quarantine in an hotel. It seems that the restrictions on life in the UK have been more draconian than elsewhere which, plus the superb vaccine rollout, means that we have the end in sight.

IGM – 24 March 2021

23 March 2021

The anniversary of the first lockdown. I have always wanted 23 March to be just my birthday and not famous for anything else, but here it now is – the National Day of Reflection - with a minute's silence at 12:00 GMT with people encouraged to light up their doorsteps that night. Prominent buildings and landmarks will also be illuminated across the UK. What a disaster this has been for the world and the UK has fared badly during this time. Now, at least there is hope with the vaccine.

It's a mild spring day and the garden looks glorious.



IGM – 23 March 2021

22 March 2021

The sun is shining and the daffodils are blooming. Summer is round the corner. I sense that we will be well on the way back to normality on 21 June.

Over 0.8 million were vaccinated yesterday. A new record. On our news we are told that one of our neighbours' leaders banned the vaccine saying it didn't work, then allowed it but not for the over-65s, then banned it because it was unsafe, then allowed it, then banned it for the under-55s. That country now has low confidence in the vaccine and surging case numbers. Hardly surprising with such mixed messages. Were it not so serious, it would be hilarious.

My fingers are crossed that such mishandlings don't set everything back another year.

IGM – 22 March 2021

21 March 2021

Another record day for vaccinations yesterday – 0.7 million. The prevailing mood here is one of optimism. More than half the population is now vaccinated.

Parliament will be debating the opening up of international travel from mid-May. We hope that our neighbours will see the success of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine in the UK and embrace it with our evidence-based confidence. After nearly two months, I have no adverse post-vaccination symptoms, nor has anyone I know.

IGM – 21 March 2021

20 March 2021

Half the UK population has now been vaccinated. Yesterday was a record – 0.66 million in one day. We contrast this with yesterday's zero in many neighbouring countries.

How this life-saver can be viewed as anything but escapes me.

IGM – 20 March 2021

19 March 2021

More suggestions from government ministers about freedoms dependent on *either* proof of vaccination *or* a recent negative test show awareness that not everyone can or needs to be vaccinated.

The Europeans have now been told what was obvious all along – that the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine is safe. All that has been achieved by this over-caution and the ignorant comments of some leaders is that those hesitant about having a vaccine are now more hesitant, the roll-out has been slowed down and people are dying unnecessarily. Fortunately, none of this applies to the UK. We look forward to freedom day on 21 June.

IGM – 19 March 2021

18 March 2021

As some European countries open their borders from May to those with proof of vaccination (for those who can be vaccinated) or a negative Covid test (for those who can't), a possible future for VacStuds 2021 is looking a little clearer. We await a decision from the UK government.

Since writing to all parents with links to various messages on the website, just two families have taken the view that, in the case of one, restrictions will not be lifted and, in the case of the other, that contact with foreigners may be risky. I cannot logicalize these views.

IGM – 18 March 2021

17 March 2021

In the UK, we continue to find it counterintuitive that so many European governments have decided that the definite risk of death is preferable to that of a small number of clots which the WHO and EMA have said loudly are not connected to the vaccine. This 'pause' lets the virus spread and gives ammunition to the anti-vaxers and those who are nervous all over the world. What they are doing is dangerous.

The UK total vaccinated approaches 25 million.

IGM – 17 March 2021

16 March 2021

'Baffled' – our scientists' reaction to the news that so many countries have decided to pause the life-saving Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine because of fears that have been deemed unfounded by the WHO and have not been an issue in the huge roll-out in the UK. I am minded of a quotation often attributed to Mark Twain: 'I have had many challenges in my life. Most of them have never happened.'

History will record many actions in this time as just so much hype and nonsense. In this case, it's nonsense that may cost lives.

IGM – 16 March 2021

15 March 2021

An 'International travel resumption plan' is to be given by April 12. A successor to the Global Travel Taskforce will be created by government, and report on when international travel might resume by April 12, the prime minister has announced.

It's all part of the UK gradually getting back to normal in stages.

I'm following the Covid-19 Vaccine Tracker [here](#).

IGM – 15 March 2021

14 March 2021

This from a contact in a European country: *'Bars are packed here. Restaurants have queues. The (another European country is mentioned) are coming over in droves to take advantage of the relaxed approach. And my neighbour who is 75 is still waiting for her vaccination. Watch this space!'*

Autres pays, autres moeurs.

I have created another update for parents - [here](#).

IGM – 14 March 2021

13 March 2021

The local picture here in Newbury: 'In the last 7 days we have had 44 new cases with a current weekly case rate of 27.8 per 100,000 population. We are continuing to see a decline in our case rates, with our rates now lower than both the regional and national average.'

The good news in the UK continues.

We look with sorrow and incredulity at some of our neighbours.

IGM – 13 March 2021

12 March 2021

'The problem with spontaneous reports of suspected adverse reactions to a vaccine is the enormous difficulty of distinguishing a causal effect from a coincidence.' This from a UK professor of pharmacoepidemiology. In the UK we have an abundance of people who have taken the vaccine without problems while some other countries exercise an abundance of caution in denying people a vaccine which is proven to reduce hospital admissions. The politicisation of the vaccination process exacerbates the situation for the benefit only of politicians. In the meantime, the UK powers ahead.

IGM – 12 March 2021

11 March 2021

The news today is that some European countries are halting giving the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine after 22 reports of blood clots among more than three million people who have had the dose. It's odd that they are raising concerns about a vaccine they are raising concerns about not having enough of. With getting on for 40% of the adult UK population having been vaccinated, it isn't a problem for us.

I have just finished staffing the 2021 Course. We now wait for our young people to arrive.

IGM – 11 March 2021

10 March 2021

The straightforward UK vaccine roll-out has reached nearly 24 million. It's based solely on the likelihood of death and this is fundamentally down to age. The simple system has likely helped keep numbers vaccinated high.

Restrictions on travel out of the UK are due to be lifted on 17 May.

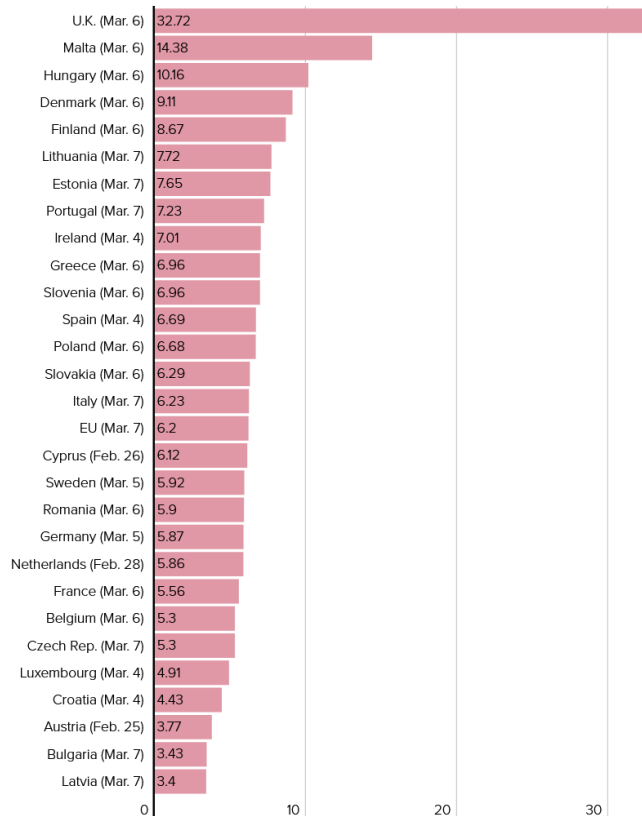
IGM – 10 March 2021

9 March 2021

With vaccination being a life-saver, it is disturbing to see how slow other European countries are in giving it to people. We are told not enough doses were ordered and that there is a legacy of mistrust left by leaders deliberately giving misinformation about them. The following table seems to say it all:

VACCINATION PROGRESS COMPARED

Number of people who have received at least one vaccine dose per 100 people in EU countries and the U.K.



IGM – 9 March 2021

8 March 2021

The schools in the UK have re-opened today. I hope the universities will re-open next term. Wonderful though it is to have had all my sons home for so long, it would be great to have some alone time for a change.

IGM – 8 March 2021

7 March 2021

I keep discovering from my contacts and friends in other countries how far behind the UK other Europeans are. With what gets us out of this crisis invented and being rolled-out, it seems remarkable that it isn't being done at greater speed.

IGM – 7 March 2021

6 March 2021

In recognition of the fact that we are Covid-secure, we have the UK 'Good to Go' kite-mark – [here](#). Our certificate is [here](#).

IGM – 6 March 2021

5 March 2021

Mary Hare have responded positively to my suggestion to offer work experience during the Course. Not only is there the charity for the deaf, but there is also the Hearing Centre, Hearing Aid Repair Shop and the Arlington Arts theatre. More later.

More than 40% of the adult UK population has now been offered vaccines. A real success story.

IGM – 5 March 2021

4 March 2021

All young people have lost out in this dreadful period. Coming to VacStuds will be a welcome return to sociability and human contact. Nevertheless, some of our young people will not be quite so young. I'd like to add an aspect to the Course that will make their stay with us even more relevant. Work-experience is something universities expect to see. I know that the VacStuds experience itself is a useful addition to a CV and an application form, but I think we can add something else. I have asked Mary Hare if they can see a way to offer work experience with their on-site national charity for the deaf. If so, I shall add this as an option (no-cost, of course) for 2021 and thereafter.

IGM – 4 March 2021

3 March 2021

I have published an update for 2021 parents [here](#).

IGM – 3 March 2021

2 March 2021

Rates of hospitalisations in the UK continue to decrease and the number vaccinated goes up. Both the Pfizer and Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines are shown to have 80% effectiveness at reducing illness, etc. after just one jab. From what we hear from the EU, there is still reluctance to have this lifesaving vaccination and the vaccination rates are still low. It's hard to imagine how this happened in the first place and why the situation is continuing.

IGM – 2 March 2021

1 March 2021

It's the 'Brazil variant' that is causing excitement in the news media today. The experts can't say yet if the vaccines will be effective against this or other variants because they haven't been tested against them as they so recent. Therefore, it can be said that the vaccines may not be so effective. It can, of course, also be said that the vaccines may be just as effective, but to maintain the tension, the media prefer to stress the negative. It's because the UK is one of the best in the world at genomes that these variants are spotted here. They are, of course, in many other places.

IGM – 1 March 2021

28 February 2021

About 33% of the UK population has now been vaccinated. A tremendous achievement.

Even the weather is great – clear blue skies and sunshine.

IGM – 28 February 2021

27 February 2021

The news is reporting that items on social media about the words of a European leader that the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine was ineffective just before it was (1) declared effective for all ages by the WHO and (2) has been shown to be incredibly effective in tests in the UK and in reducing infections and hospitalisations have resulted in some people in the UK refusing the vaccine. Words have consequences. These words were apparently uttered to stop complaints about the slow roll-out. People in power have just that – power – even when they are ignorant of the facts and just wrong.

IGM – 27 February 2021

26 February 2021

We have one of my former students staying with us for his 10-day isolation. We are having fun. He is telling us about the ‘rules’ in his country – autres pays; autres mœurs. It makes me more appreciative of the way our government is handling this.

The theatres are planning to re-open from May, but in a limited way. Too limited for us at the moment – only 6 tickets per booking allowed - so I think we may be putting on our own shows in the summer. With our talented Sports/Social crew, this will not be a problem.

IGM – 26 February 2021

25 February 2021

The news today is that five times as many people in the UK have been vaccinated than in the EU countries and that people in the EU are declining the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine although it has been declared safe and effective for all ages by the WHO. The supposition is because political leaders in certain countries for their internal purposes raised doubts about the efficacy of the vaccine before the WHO had given its verdict. Quite ridiculous and dangerous.

I have had the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine myself. All is fine. Numbers of those affected in the UK are shooting downwards thanks to the vaccine.

IGM – 25 February 2021

24 February 2021

The value of the £ against the € has shot up to pre-pandemic levels. I’m sure the reason is that we are psychologically on track to normality. We have to get over the next few months and then, at the start of summer, we are free. The boost this gives to morale cannot be underestimated. I very much hope that our neighbours in Europe are on a similar path. If we can do it, surely they can.

As the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine has been shown to prevent transmission, its effectiveness is now even greater than we had hoped. Good news all round.

IGM – 24 February 2021

23 February 2021

The Prime Minister has revealed his ‘roadmap out of lockdown’. The super speed of the vaccine roll-out, the decrease in the numbers in hospital and the acceptance by the politicians that covid is a disease that can and must be lived with has led to various target dates being set – the end date being 21 June when all restrictions will end.

This should mean that international travel into the UK is permitted. We shall see what covid tests are required.

It looks as if VacStuds 2021 is set to go.

The concern remains that the numbers vaccinated in the UK as of now is greater than the whole EU.

IGM – 23 February 2021

22 February 2021

This evening, the PM will speak to the nation about his 'roadmap to the end of lockdown'. So far we have learned that on 21 June: 'All legal limits removed on mixing will be removed and the last sectors to remain closed, such as nightclubs, will reopen. Large events can take place.'

What is of particular interest for me is what he intends to do about international travel.

18 million have now been vaccinated with all adults to be offered a vaccine by the end of July.

IGM – 22 February 2021

21 February 2021

All adults are now promised a vaccine by the end of July 2021. This is great news as all the vulnerable will have been given their second vaccines by April and all those not so vulnerable by the summer. Unless the government wants to go for zero covid which will mean permanent lockdown, the risks will have been minimized.

This, at least, will be the case in this country which leaves the fear of possible infection from those countries where the disease is still rife. I hope it will be possible to reinstate travel corridors. If not, we shall have a problem.

IGM – 21 February 2021

20 February 2021

It seems that our political leader is dropping us some crumbs of comfort. Care Home residents will be allowed one nominated visitor. It also seems that we may be allowed to meet another person outside, sitting down. No doubt when all this is over, these arbitrary restrictions will be seen to have been of no benefit and their lifting another example of how we have been treated as children. All this follows years of neglect of public health and health education.

A 'roadmap' out of lockdown is promised for 22 February.

IGM – 20 February 2021

19 February 2021

An epidemiologist has stated this morning that TV reports last summer that crowded beaches would lead to 'super-spreading' of the virus have been found to have no basis. I have the feeling that the same will be said of the sledgehammer of hotel quarantine being used to crack a walnut. Time will tell.

The vultures are circling. I have received a letter – clearly not sent to me alone – asking if I would like to sell Vacation Studies. They tell me ‘our criteria is simple’. Even if they had realized that ‘criteria’ is the plural of ‘criterion’ and needs a plural verb, I wouldn’t have been interested. Vacation Studies won’t be sold...

IGM – 19 February 2021

18 February 2021

I woke to birdsong this morning. The sudden mild spell has created a false spring.

I had an e-mail, too, from a parent with photos of her daughter and her VacStuds friends with stunning Venetian backdrops telling me how much they are looking forward to the Course and asking me to confirm that it is still on. I was happy to reply that, as far as I am concerned, it is. I cannot predict if the airlines will be flying but, whatever tests or precautions we have to take, we will be on top of it. I also assured her that – no matter what happens – Vacation Studies will continue. If the authorities prevent 2021 from happening, I shall ask everyone to roll forward to 2022. Let’s hope this won’t be necessary.

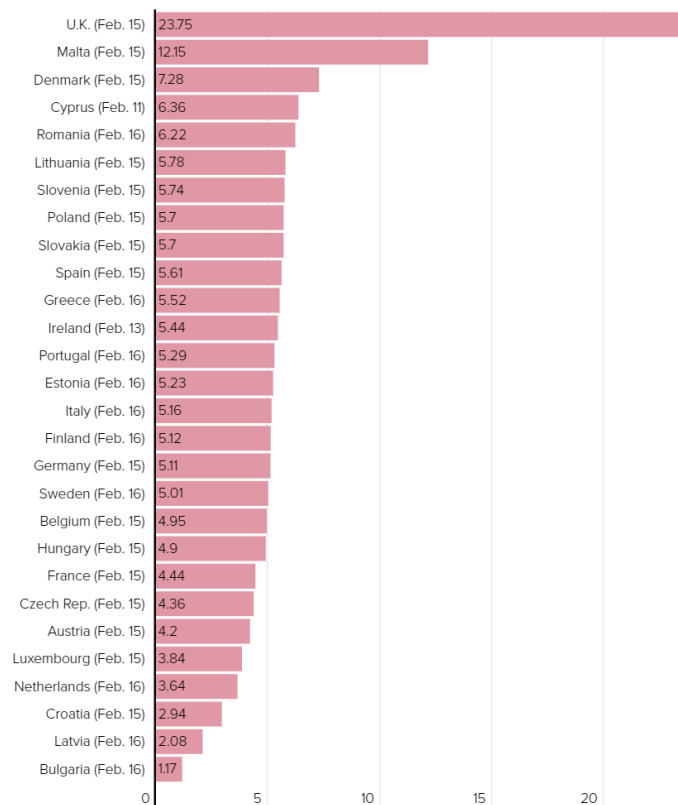
IGM – 18 February 2021

17 February 2021

As our way out of the crisis is the vaccines, it is really concerning to see how slow the roll-out is. This is a comparative chart for 15 February:

VACCINATION PROGRESS COMPARED

Total number of doses administered per 100 people in EU countries and the U.K. since the beginning of the vaccine rollout in each country until today*.



IGM – 17 February 2021

16 February 2021

The news in the UK remains positive. The vaccine graphs show the UK way out in front of the rest of Europe. This is a concern. While it's true that no one's safe until we're all safe, the object has always been to keep hospitals from being overwhelmed and this aim will soon be achieved in the UK. Having zero covid will be an impossibility unless we close our borders and keep to ourselves for a prolonged period. During this time, we become poor and mad. So it's a balance. Already vaccines are in development to deal with variants.

Although the UK may be on top of the crisis in a few months, fingers are crossed that the government won't look at the rest of Europe and see danger.

IGM – 16 February 2021

15 February 2021

Suddenly – and temporarily – we have spring with sunshine and a temperature of +13C.

So far, 15 million of us in the UK have been vaccinated. The vaccine roll-out is going very well. I still have no side-effects whatsoever and have a card showing that I have been vaccinated.

Today, 11 nights hotel room quarantine for those coming from high-infection countries begins.

A group of 60 Conservative MPs are demanding an end to all restrictions from the end of April.

I am struck by how many people now see other people as a source of danger. Even when masked in a supermarket, some look fearful as other shoppers approach at the 2m distance. I sense that this behaviour may take time to unlearn.

IGM – 15 February 2021

14 February 2021

A biting cold day again with just the brave snowdrops and crocus in the rock-hard soil adding colour to the garden.

A scientist on the news today was positive about the UK figures and sees the end of our lockdown as imminent. He said that the numbers of dead are misleading as 1500 die each day and the 600 covid-related include many who would sadly have died anyway. Hospital admissions are way down.

The most vulnerable have now all been offered the vaccine and most have taken it up. The next group will be offered the vaccine tomorrow and all over-50s and vulnerable should be jabbed by the end of April.

The situation in the UK looks optimistic. The PM will announce a 'roadmap' out of lockdown on 22 February.



IGM – 14 February 2021

13 February 2021

'If 70% are vaccinated, population immunity is established' a prominent epidemiologist stated today. The UK's vaccine roll-out continues apace with nearly 15 million already vaccinated. The Government's target of vaccinating all those vulnerable by 15 February was reached two days early. The NHS is doing a brilliant job. The light at the end of the tunnel shines brighter.

On the news, there is talk about a 'national day of remembrance' for those who lost their lives in this pandemic. The suggestion is that it should be 23 March. I have always wanted my birthday to be special for me and, since childhood, hoped that some national event would not happen on the same day. In 2019, it was the day of the march through London against Brexit and my first experience of being in a peaceful protest with a million others. Last year it was the start of the first-ever national lockdown. Quite what 23 March 2021 will be, I wait and see.

Today is biting cold and way below zero. My fountain this morning tells the story...



IGM – 13 February 2021

12 February 2021

Messages from far-flung countries have made me realise that I have become blasé about having had the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab. It's fine. I'm great. No side-effects whatsoever.

And it didn't hurt a bit. I look forward to my next in April.

Maybe knowing since last spring that it was coming (my neighbour works on its distribution) has helped keep me buoyant. This is what is getting us out of this crisis. The UK vaccine roll-out is super-efficient. 1 in 5 of us are already jabbed and we will all be jabbed by May. Excess vaccine will go to other countries.

I'm told that the Australians were waiting to see what happened to us Poms. Now everyone knows that the vaccine is safe, that it's having a huge effect on numbers and that the WHO approves, let's hope our friends elsewhere catch up.

The news today is that UK mental health referrals for young people are up 240%. This is going to be a lasting legacy of lockdown. I hope that VacStuds and Masterclass will, in a small way, help.

IGM – 12 February 2021

11 February 2021

The World Health Organisation (who presumably know more about these matters than certain European leaders) have said that the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine is safe for all adults, including those over 65.

Great news. The UK's rollout of this vaccine is fast and efficient. This is our way out of the crisis.

The Health Secretary was on the news this morning assuring us that his summer holiday is booked. The caveat was that he might have to cancel it. It strikes me that life as normal continues for these politicians. They are paid the same, get out and about, use their skills, meet people and have absolutely no conception of what life is like for the rest of us.

Those of us who take care not to be expectorated on have, by and large, escaped the disease. What none of us can escape from are the mental and economic repercussions of the actions of politicians. This is what will haunt society for generations. This is why I am convinced that the work we do is the very best experience a young person can have at any time and especially at this time.

Parents need to keep their nerve and see how the politicians reconcile what is right with what looks right for the inevitable public enquiry that will follow.

IGM – 11 February 2021

10 February 2021

Today the news is full of the 10-day quarantine for people entering the UK. If they come in from 33 'red' countries with high infection, they have to be transported to a hotel and remain there for 10 days with two tests in this time – at their own expense. Anyone not revealing they are from one of these countries will get 10 years in prison.

Unbelievable.

10 years is the maximum sentence for threats to kill, non-fatal poisoning or indecent assault.

We have the expression 'shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted.' This is exactly that.

Whatever variants people may have brought in are already here and the virus mutates constantly anyway. The scientists say the vaccines work against these variants. That we find is because the UK is world-leading in Genomics.

Politicians must think it makes people feel safer to keep foreigners and their variants out.

[Here](#) is the brilliant Tom Peck in today's Independent.

Meanwhile, the vaccine rollout continues at speed. I saw for myself at Newbury Racecourse, hundreds of people, like me, getting vaccinated. A fantastic effort by the National Health Service.

IGM – 10 February 2021