

Aimhigher - Matthew Payton

Schools: Grove Vale Primary & Stuart Bathurst.

Currently: University of Gloucestershire BA Sports Development

Background

I went to Grove Vale Primary School and although I was not unhappy there, I never loved school like some people do. I went because I had to, but like a lot of lads, given half the chance I would have preferred to stay at home and play. I had a fairly large circle of friends and we used to go to the park and play football and enjoyed riding our bikes and generally playing outside. By the end of year 5, I was looking forward to moving onto secondary school.

I left Grove Vale with the standard set of SATS results – all the national average -nothing more, nothing less, and began secondary life at Stuart Bathurst. I was a little apprehensive as no one from my old school was going and the only people I knew were my sister and her friends. Looking back, I think I took the approach of blending in with the crowd. In KS3 I think I was one of those students that teachers don't notice. I put my head down, did what was expected of me and didn't rock the boat. I enjoyed sport and was on friendly terms with both the "geeks" and the "cool guys". It was important to me not to be seen to be a geek and to be working hard by my peers, but, at the back of my head I knew I had to perform well and pass my GCSE's.

It was towards the end of year 10 that I think I began to change. I still enjoyed sport and being one of the lads, but I think I must have become more confident about who I was, and I was not so afraid of being seen to be working. It was during this period that I made some of my strongest friendships, and these are the people that I am still close friends with now.

I was always very worried about exams. I was better at coursework – and this was a major consideration to me when choosing my options in year 9. I chose subjects based on how much coursework there was and what sort of exam paper there was. (It has since come to light -in Year 13 – that I am dyslexic, and this was obviously why I didn't perform to my best at exams). Exams were very scary for me and I was very scared of failure – I wanted to perform well but was worried that I wouldn't. I think it was the fear of having to face everyone and accept their sympathy.

I was nervous on GCSE results day and dragged my feet getting to school. I didn't want to disappoint my parents and had tried to prepare myself for the worst. Surprisingly, I didn't do too badly and came out with 10 passes all at C's and B's. I was disappointed not to have got an A in PE, but relieved not to have failed.

My perception of life outside school was work. In my mind there were only 2 options, stay on at school or get a job. At 16, there was no way I felt old enough to get a job; besides, I had no idea what I wanted to do. So, I decided to stay on and do my A levels at school.

I had half-heartedly considered going to college, and had looked at a BTEC in Public Services, as I was interested in joining the fire service. However, it was not a serious consideration, I was happy at school and felt that I would be better in an environment where the staff knew me and would make sure that I worked. I was fortunate to be able to choose subjects at other sixth forms in Sandwell and ended up taking Geography at Dartmouth (now Q3), Business Studies and Science at Stuart Bathurst and Sport at Wood Green.

This was a great option for me. It was a halfway house to leaving and having the opportunity to meet new people, but with the security of Stuart Bathurst as my home base. I made a lot of new friends during my time in sixth form and I feel that I finally became happy with who I was, I no longer felt that I had to be one of the crowd and was more than happy to be an individual and stand out from the crowd. I also enjoyed the more relaxed relationships with the staff. I think perhaps this is when I began to grow up.

I had decided I wanted to go to University. I had been to stay with my older sister at Aberystwyth and from that day on, that was what I wanted. I chose sport as a subject and began looking at different universities and went through the process of visits. The first university I visited was Gloucestershire. I fell in love with the university and nothing else I looked at measured up. The pressure was now on – No matter how hard I tried to convince myself that any of the others would be fine, deep down I knew that only Gloucestershire would do.

I was fortunate enough to get an offer from them, but it was quite a tall order for me – especially as I had just been diagnosed with dyslexia. In one way this was good as it explained why I had always underachieved in exams, but on the other hand, it meant that I had an enormous amount of work to do, as I had not performed well in my AS levels. I spent the summer trying to convince myself that my second choice (Stafford) would be great – but I knew it wouldn't.

Results day was nerve racking. Despite fearing the worst, I had not really considered any other options. If I didn't get in, what would I do? I had begun telling everyone that I was going to re-sit year 13, saying that I wanted to get better grades etc.... Preparation for accepting failure. I cannot begin to tell you how scared I was the night before the results were out. On results morning, I eventually plucked up the courage to check my UCAS status. Miraculously, I was in. Nothing mattered now, and I went to collect my results without a care in the world. My results were not as good as they could have been and I am a little disappointed with them, but, I had enough to do what I wanted and that was all that mattered.

Higher Education

I have now completed 2 years at Gloucestershire (Sports Development) and have thoroughly enjoyed it. The course is quite a practical one and there are a lot of placements as well as written assignments. I am glad that I moved away from home, as I have made friends from all over the country.

To me, university is so much more than an education – it is about the friendships and life skills learnt from communal living and learning to be an adult! University has also given me opportunities to coach abroad and learn new skills as well as develop on a personal level. I wouldn't have missed it for the world.

With hindsight, I feel I should have considered other options; I never really looked at what else there was available to me, and I had no back-up plan if everything hadn't worked out. Listening to friends at university there are so many different A levels on offer and I feel that some of these may have been better alternatives for me, rather than the ones I took. I would also have worked harder at sixth form. I now realise that I didn't put as much effort in as I could have, considering it was something I really wanted - and it could all have backfired – I was lucky.

The Future

At this point in time I am focusing on finishing my degree. I still don't really know what I want to when it is all over. I have considered teaching, the police and fire service as well as working in the health industry promoting sport as part of a healthy lifestyle. However, a serious consideration is to take a year out to go travelling. University has opened my eyes to the big wide world and it is definitely an option before settling down to a career.