

# WINTER 2025



SUCCESS FOR EVERYONE

TRUST NEWSLETTER ISSUE 5



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**Growing Together, Learning for Life**



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# OUR SHARED VISION



Our vision is “Success for Everyone”. We aspire for every member of our community, regardless of circumstances or background, to be the best version of themselves - confident, successful students, committed, successful staff, who are committed to growing and developing as practitioners, and engaged stakeholders who unite in celebration. We achieve our Vision through our two core values of CARE and UNITY.

## 01 CARE

The overriding feel within our Trust is that we care more than anyone else could expect. We care for all aspects of our practice and, in particular, we care for:

- Everyone’s safety and happiness
- Everyone’s personal development and growth
- Everyone’s outcomes
- Everyone’s standards
- Everyone’s learning
- Everyone’s well-being
- Everyone’s relationships

This is reflected by the fact that we call ourselves the Poly Family and we are an organisation based on relationships above all else – we are individual people first and students, staff and parents second.

## 02 UNITY

The value that ensures that our impact is greater than it ever could be if we worked alone. This means that our schools, teams and individuals are always pulled together in ways which share the workload and create solutions from which everyone benefits. We are determined that nothing can divide us when we put the needs of our community before everything else.

# MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

**Mr T Plumb**



## **Welcome to the Winter 2025 edition of the PolyMAT Newsletter**

As we come to the end of another busy and rewarding term, I want to take a moment to reflect on the incredible achievements across our Trust. This summer, we celebrated some excellent SATs, GCSE and A-Level results - a testament to the hard work and dedication of our students and staff. These successes set a positive tone as we began the autumn term with renewed energy and enthusiasm.

This term has been filled with memorable events that showcase the spirit of our community. From fundraising initiatives such as Wear It Pink for breast cancer awareness and Movember, to the remarkable efforts supporting the Jamaica Hurricane Melissa Relief Fund, our staff and students have gone above and beyond. Your generosity, whether through time, energy, or donations - continues to make a real difference. Alongside these efforts, our schools have celebrated creativity and culture with the spectacular student production of SIX: Teen Edition, vibrant Black History Month activities, and joyful Diwali dance workshops. We've also enjoyed school discos and a host of other events that brought our communities together, making this term one to remember.

Autumn is always a particularly busy period, with numerous open events taking place across our schools. It was a pleasure to welcome so many prospective families and share the values and opportunities that make PolyMAT schools special. These events remind us of the importance of teamwork and the dedication of our staff, who work so hard to ensure everything runs smoothly.

In this edition, we're also diving into a topic that affects every school community: smartphones.

Our headteachers have each reflected on the growing role of smartphones in the lives of young people. While these devices bring clear benefits - keeping families connected, supporting learning, and offering access to information - they also present challenges around distraction, wellbeing, and social interaction.

In the following three pieces, our school leaders share their perspectives on how smartphones affect students both inside and outside the classroom. They explore the balance between opportunity and risk, the importance of clear boundaries, and the steps our schools are taking to guide responsible use. Together, their reflections highlight a shared commitment: ensuring that technology enhances, rather than hinders, the learning and development of our students.

As we approach the holiday period, I want to express my heartfelt thanks to all our staff for their commitment and hard work throughout this term. Your efforts underpin everything we achieve as a Trust.

I wish you all a restful and enjoyable break. Here's to a successful and inspiring 2026.

Tim Plumb  
CEO, PolyMAT

# FREE SUPPORT SERVICES WHEN SCHOOLS ARE CLOSED



Here's a helpful roundup of free support services available to students and parents/carers across the UK during the holidays when schools are closed but needs still arise:

## Food & Essentials

- Holiday Activities & Food (HAF) Programme - Free clubs with meals for children on free school meals.
- Royal Greenwich Holiday Food & Fun - Free meals and activities across Woolwich, Plumstead, Eltham, Thamesmead.
- Trussell Trust Food Banks - Emergency food parcels nationwide.
- Family Action FOOD Clubs - Affordable food boxes and holiday support.

## Mental Health & Emotional Support

- Childline - Free confidential help for under-19s (0800 1111).
- Shout - Text CONNECT to 85258 for 24/7 mental health support.
- ThinkNinja App - Free mental health tools for ages 10-18.

## Helplines Open on Christmas Day

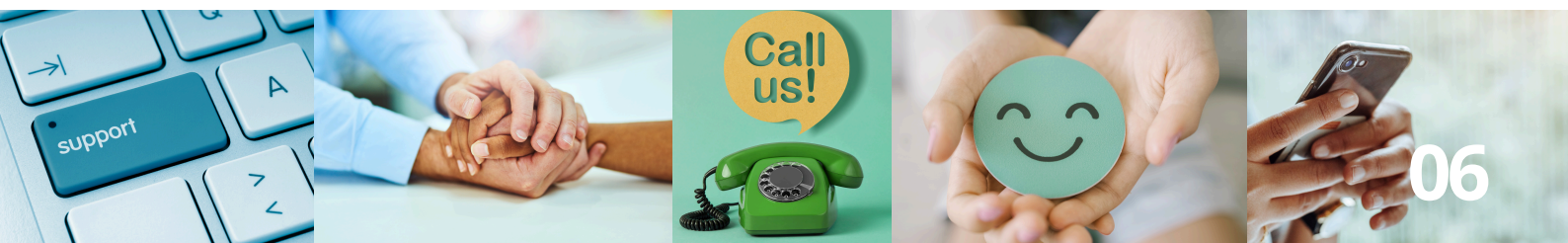
- Samaritans: 116 123 (24/7)
- Papyrus (Suicide Prevention for Young People): 0800 068 4141
- NHS Mental Health Crisis Line: Call 111 (Option 2)
- Refuge (Domestic Abuse): 0808 2000 247
- Shout Text Service: Text 85258

## Family & Parenting Support

- Family Hubs & Start for Life - Parenting advice and early years support.
- FamilyLine by Family Action - Emotional support for parents.
- YoungMinds Parent Helpline - Advice for children's mental health (0808 802 5544).
- Parenting Smart by Place2Be - Practical wellbeing tips.

## Extra Christmas Help

- Grants & Appeals - Turn2Us, Family Action Welfare Grants, Cash for Kids, Salvation Army Toy Appeal.
- Family Action Christmas Toy Appeal - Gifts for children in need.



# FREE WINTER ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS



Here's a list of fun, free activities for all ages that can keep students engaged, active, and creative over the winter break:



## Winter Photography Challenge

Students can capture the beauty of the season - frosty mornings, festive lights, and cozy indoor scenes and share their best photos in a virtual gallery.



## DIY Craft Projects

Using recycled materials, students can create winter decorations, greeting cards, or homemade gifts, combining creativity with sustainability.



## Nature Walk & Scavenger Hunt

Students can explore local parks and search for winter items like pinecones, holly, or frost patterns, promoting mindfulness and outdoor activity.



## Free Online Workshops

There are many free sessions available online for coding, art, or creative writing, giving students the chance to learn new skills from home.



## Journaling or Blogging

Students can start a "Winter Break Journal" or blog about holiday traditions, goals for the new year, or reflections on the past term.



## Virtual Museum Tours

Exploring famous museums online such as the British Museum offers a cultural experience from home. Students can write a short review of their favourite exhibit.



## Community Kindness Challenge

Students can complete small acts of kindness, such as writing thank-you notes or helping a neighbour, to spread positivity during the season.



## Winter-Themed Creative Writing

Prompts like "A magical snow day," "The secret behind the first snowfall," or "A winter adventure" encourage imagination and storytelling.



## **CONNECTED OR DISTRACTED? SMARTPHONES IN OUR SCHOOLS – PERSPECTIVES FROM ACROSS THE TRUST**

This term, our headteachers have each reflected on the growing role of smartphones in the lives of young people. While these devices bring clear benefits - keeping families connected, supporting learning, and offering access to information - they also present challenges around distraction, well being, and social interaction.

In the following three pieces, our school leaders share their perspectives on how smartphones affect students both inside and outside the classroom. They explore the balance between opportunity and risk, the importance of clear boundaries, and the steps our schools are taking to guide responsible use. Together, their reflections highlight a shared commitment: ensuring that technology enhances, rather than hinders, the learning and development of our pupils.

# SAFE, SMART & SUPPORTED: DIGITAL LEARNING AT BANNOCKBURN

Growing Together, Learning for Life



**BANNOCKBURN**  
Primary School

At Bannockburn Primary School, the safety and wellbeing of our pupils, both online and offline, remain at the heart of our curriculum and wider school practice. We recognise that digital literacy, responsible use of technology and the management of online risks are essential skills for children growing up in an increasingly connected world. To support this, we have embedded comprehensive online safety teaching throughout all year groups. Online safety is not limited to one off lessons; instead, it is woven through the curriculum including computing, PSHE, Personal Development, assemblies and project work to ensure pupils revisit and deepen their understanding of safe digital behaviour across the year.

To strengthen our safeguarding systems, we have added a dedicated Online Safety tab to CPOMS. This allows staff to record concerns promptly and consistently, ensuring that online issues, whether related to messaging, social media, inappropriate content or personal devices, are monitored with the same rigour as all other safeguarding matters. Patterns can be reviewed easily and timely intervention plans can be put in place for pupils who need additional support.

Supporting families is equally important. Bannockburn offers accredited e safety training for staff, parents and carers, ensuring that adults feel equipped to navigate the fast changing digital landscape. In addition, the school runs a weekly drop in service where our staff help parents set up parental controls, understand app specific risks and explore the hidden dangers on devices that children may access without adult knowledge. These sessions have become a valued space for practical and non-judgemental support.

Our expectations around mobile phones are clear and consistently reinforced. Children must turn off their phones at the school gate, meaning no devices are switched on anywhere along the school perimeter. This forms part of our Home Alone policy, which supports children travelling independently and ensures their devices are managed safely. Upon entering the site, pupils place their phones, switched off, into a secure class box, where they remain for the entire school day. Phones are returned by staff at home time.

Staff also model exemplary behaviour. Adults keep their own phones away, using them only when required for school communication, safeguarding or emergencies. This reinforces the message that focus, safety and professional boundaries come first.

To further empower pupils, children worked with staff to create a "What Happens Next" poster, which sets out in clear, child friendly steps what to do if they feel unsafe online or have a worry about digital behaviour for themselves or others the poster is displayed in every classroom and shared during assemblies.

Throughout the year, assemblies and newsletters highlight age appropriate permissions, app guidance and device expectations. At the start of each academic year, all teams discuss mobile phone and digital use expectations as part of their parent introductions. During Safer Internet Week, the school builds on this foundation with workshops, themed lessons and community events.

Finally, signage at parent entrances reminds adults to turn off their mobiles and greet their children with a smile, reinforcing the message that relationships, attention and presence matter most at pick up time. Together, these measures create a culture where pupils, families and staff work collectively to keep children safe in the digital world.

# SMARTPHONE USAGE SURVEY - KEY INSIGHTS



Woolwich Polytechnic  
School for Girls

This term, we invited parents and carers to share their views on smartphone use among students. The survey, with over 600 responses from families across Years 7–11, has provided valuable insights that will help shape a new Smartphone Code of Conduct and guide future educational initiatives.

Smartphones bring many benefits, from keeping students connected to supporting learning. However, parents and carers also highlighted concerns about distraction, sleep disruption, and exposure to harmful content. Our aim is not to ban smartphones, but to ensure they are used responsibly, supporting well-being and learning.

## What We Learned

- Ownership: Over 90% of students own a smartphone, with many starting between ages 8–11.
- Social Media: Most students use apps such as TikTok, Snapchat, and WhatsApp, mainly for messaging, gaming, and socialising.
- Parental Controls: Confidence varies - some parents feel equipped to manage usage, while others struggle. Controls are not consistently applied.
- Concerns: Families expressed strong worries about screen time, sleep loss, attention, social isolation, phone dependency, and low mood.
- Impact on Family Life: While some noted positives (safety, communication), many felt smartphones disrupt concentration and family interaction.
- Suggestions for Schools: Parents called for stricter in-school policies, education programmes on safe use, workshops for parents, awareness campaigns, and a balanced approach to homework.

## What This Means

The findings highlight a clear tension: families value smartphones for safety and communication, but are deeply concerned about their impact on wellbeing and learning. There is strong support for schools to take a leading role - through clear boundaries, education, and guidance for both students and parents/carers.

We are grateful to everyone who took part in the survey. Your feedback will directly inform our next steps as we work together to promote safe, healthy, and balanced smartphone use across our Trust.



# TEENAGERS & SMARTPHONES: PROS, CONS & SAFE USAGE GUIDELINES



Woolwich Polytechnic  
School for Boys

Technological developments throughout history have frequently had unintended consequences, whether it is the car with the advantage of independent travel but distinct disadvantages of pollution and traffic jams or antibiotics saving countless lives and now risking biotic resistance, leading to the growth of 'superbugs'. Smartphones likely fit within the same group of pro-with-con technologies, even if we accept that their relative newness means that any conclusions are tentative and speculative.

We also recognise that smartphones have become an integral part of modern adolescence: in our consumerist society, smartphone branding even conveys a social status. According to recent studies, over 95% of teenagers own or regularly use a smartphone, making it a central tool for communication, learning, and entertainment. However, this widespread adoption raises important questions about its impact on development and how to ensure safe and balanced use.

## Benefits

- Communication & Safety: Quick contact with family and friends, reassurance in emergencies.
- Learning Support: Access to e-textbooks, apps, and digital resources.
- Social Connectivity: Maintaining friendships and networks, especially during isolation.
- Skill Development: Time management, digital etiquette, and online safety.

## Risks

- Mental Health: Links to anxiety, depression, poor sleep, and phone dependency.
- Academic Impact: Notifications and multitasking disrupt focus and memory.
- Social Challenges: Reduced face-to-face interaction and empathy.
- Exposure: Cyberbullying, harmful content, and privacy breaches.

## Development Concerns

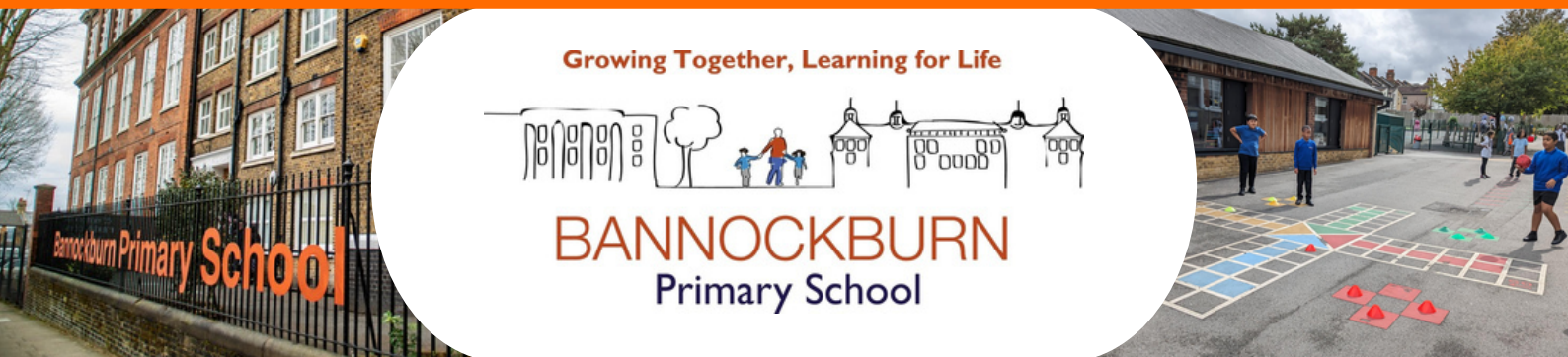
- Adolescence is a sensitive stage for brain growth. Social media's dopamine-driven feedback loops can heighten peer pressure and emotional instability, while excessive use may affect cognitive control and emotional regulation.

## Safe Usage Guidelines

- Limit non-school screen time to under 2 hours daily.
- Keep phones out of bedrooms at night.
- No phones during meals or family activities.
- Use parental controls and teach digital safety.
- Encourage offline hobbies and model balanced use.

We are not an anti-technology school but have recognised recently that smartphones have presented problems when available in the school site, notably with interruption to attention impairing academic development. We also note that frictions between students almost invariably have started online and outside the school. Modern life for a teenager is now much more complicated than it was perhaps when we older generations experienced our teenage years: social media enable teens to have a life, and even a personality, that differs from their student life at school and their childhood life at home, an online life that may not even be recognisable to their parents and teachers. Therefore, we caution usage of smartphones for parents and have taken the decision to ban them onsite for our boys from years 7 to 11. We hope to reach a point when smartphones enhance a childhood experience but do not replace the essential developmental experiences that happen in the real world, whether at school or at home.

# OUR FAMILY OF SCHOOLS



Growing Together, Learning for Life



**BANNOCKBURN**  
Primary School



Woolwich Polytechnic  
**School for Boys**



Woolwich Polytechnic  
**School for Girls**

# BANNOCKBURN PRIMARY SCHOOL

Headteacher  
Mrs R Ford



Bannockburn Primary School has received an extremely positive Inclusion Quality Mark (IQM) Flagship Review, highlighting its strong commitment to inclusive practice, high-quality teaching, and a calm, values-led culture. During the review, pupils demonstrated confident use of Knowledge Organisers, describing them as helpful tools that support memory and understanding.

The school now enters the final embedding year of its Flagship Project. Leaders plan to develop an Adaptive Teaching Framework, drawing on Rosenshine, Cognitive Load Theory, and EEF guidance, to ensure consistent, evidence-informed practice across the curriculum. Subject leaders will audit existing schemes to reduce cognitive load and define clear hallmarks of high-quality, subject-specific lessons. A particular focus will be refining adaptations for pupils with SEND who do not have high needs, ensuring support promotes independence without over-scaffolding.

Staff development remains central, with the introduction of Adaptive Teaching Coaching Cycles, strengthened CPD, and a central bank of shared resources. New staff will continue to benefit from structured induction and opportunities to observe expert practice.

The review also celebrated Bannockburn's outstanding SEND provision, exemplary behaviour, strong pupil leadership, and wide-ranging wellbeing support. Parents spoke highly of the school's positive impact on their children. The assessor recommends the school retains its IQM Flagship Status, with next year's review focusing on outreach and cluster engagement.

#### Other mentions:

- The house system has gone from strength to strength. Alizarin House earned an exciting science workshop after collecting the highest number of house points in 2024/25.
- Children enjoyed a fantastic range of educational visits this term, including trips to the British Museum, Plumstead Library, the London Canal Museum and the Tate Modern.
- Reception pupils had a special visit from local firefighters, helping them learn about important community roles. Children across the school also took part in fire safety workshops.
- We celebrated creativity and culture with a vibrant Diwali dance workshop, which pupils thoroughly enjoyed and an after school celebration.
- Our focus on active, healthy lifestyles continued. Pupils took part in specialist cricket coaching and a judo experience day that encouraged confidence, discipline and resilience.
- Parent engagement remained strong, supported by a variety of well-attended coffee mornings across the term, such as speech and language, anxiety and neurodiversity.
- Pupils also had great fun at the school discos held at the High Street site, helping to build friendships and strengthen our school community.



# WOOLWICH POLYTECHNIC SCHOOL FOR GIRLS



**Headteacher  
Ms L Williams**

What an incredible term it has been at Woolwich Polytechnic School for Girls! From the very first day, when we welcomed our new Year 7 students with excitement and anticipation, to the many vibrant events that have followed, our school has truly been alive with energy, creativity, and community spirit.

Our Year 7s began their journey with team-building activities, guided tours, and their first whole-year assembly - a milestone that set the tone for their future with us. We are so proud of how quickly they have embraced our values and routines.

This term has also been packed with unforgettable moments:

- Green Club's Poly Pumpkins grew from tiny seedlings into impressive harvests, ready to shine in October.
- Jamaica Fundraising Day saw us raise an amazing £465 for the Hurricane Melissa Relief Fund, celebrating Jamaica with music, dance, and joy.
- Wear It Pink Day brought our community together to support Breast Cancer Now, honouring survivors like our own Mrs. Bridge and remembering those we've lost.
- Robotics in Action showcased innovation and teamwork as we hosted the FTC South Scrimmage, welcoming teams from across the region.

And of course, the highlight of the year so far: SIX Teen Edition!

Our talented cast brought the house down with two electrifying performances on 19th and 20th November. This bold, empowering reimagining of Henry VIII's six wives as pop icons was nothing short of spectacular. The energy, confidence, and creativity on stage were a testament to the hard work of our students and staff.

We were also thrilled to share the magic with our local community through three special performances for primary schools, inspiring the next generation and giving them a taste of the performing arts at WPSfG.

As we approach the end of this term, I want to take a moment to celebrate the incredible achievements of our students and the unwavering dedication of our staff. Together, you have made this term one of growth, creativity, and success.

Looking ahead to the new year, we are excited to build on these accomplishments and continue creating opportunities for every student to shine. Thank you to everyone - students, staff, families, and friends - who supported these events and made them such a success. Here's to an even brighter future filled with learning, discovery, and unforgettable experiences!



# WOOLWICH POLYTECHNIC SCHOOL FOR BOYS



**Headteacher  
Mr T Lawrence**

This term has been nothing short of extraordinary. Our students have exceeded expectations, with GCSE results far above national averages for boys in English, Maths, and Science - a testament to their hard work and the dedication of our staff. Together, we are breaking barriers and proving that every student can thrive.

Beyond academics, our students have embraced incredible opportunities: exploring sustainable design at IKEA, stepping back in time at the Globe Theatre, capturing nature at Green Oak Farm, the History Day Trip to Belgium and immersing themselves in Spanish culture during our Barcelona trip. We've also introduced a state-of-the-art 3D printer to our Design & Technology department, giving students hands-on experience with modern manufacturing techniques and preparing them for future careers.

At our wonderful Open Evening we launched our brand new video 'More Than a School: My Journey at Woolwich Polytechnic School for Boys', capturing the voices and experiences of our students. It reflects what I believe wholeheartedly: we are not just a school - we are the starting point for extraordinary journeys.

Our community spirit has shone brightly. When Hurricane Melissa struck Jamaica, our staff and students came together for an unforgettable fundraiser. Together we raised a grand total of £2,251.92 in aid of the Hurricane Melissa Relief Fund. This achievement is a true testament to the generosity and spirit of our Woolwich Poly community. From those who donated raffle prizes, shared their cooking talents, gave their time, and most importantly gave so generously - we are incredibly grateful. We proudly raised £293 for Breast Cancer Now during Wear It Pink 2025. From bake sales to pink accessories, every contribution supported life-changing research and care - a true reflection of our community's compassion and unity.

Humanities Week was another highlight, packed with debates, quizzes, and even a school-wide election - bringing learning to life in exciting ways.

Six Woolwich Polytechnic Sixth Form alumni have secured prestigious apprenticeships - four with Ofcom and two with leading insurance firms. Their success reflects determination and the power of mentoring, which provided guidance, confidence, and motivation throughout applications and interviews. We are incredibly proud of their achievements and the reminder that ambition, supported by opportunity, leads to success.

Thank you for your continued support. Wishing you all a joyful festive season and a happy New Year.



# WINTER SUPPORT PACKAGES



For several years, our dedicated staff across our schools have been assembling essential winter support packages for families. These include non-perishable food, toiletries, small Christmas gifts, and vouchers. Our staff give their time generously to prepare and deliver these packages directly to families, reflecting the deep care and commitment within our school community.

This year, PolyMAT has once again reached out to local businesses, whose generous donations will make these packages even more meaningful. We are especially grateful to the companies supporting us for the third consecutive year. While we regret that we cannot provide packages for every family, we take immense pride in the contributions received. Every item donated will be put to good use by our students and their families, and we are truly thankful for the kindness shown.







MULTI ACADEMY TRUST  
**PolyMAT**



# Are you looking



# to join

# PolyMAT?

## BECOMING A POLYMAT SCHOOL:

If our vision and values strike a chord, we would welcome the opportunity to work with you and see if you would like to become part of our trust. We are open to collaborations with schools in the South East, if your school is interested in becoming part of PolyMAT, please reach out to: [contactus@polymat.co.uk](mailto:contactus@polymat.co.uk)

## ARE YOU LOOKING FOR A NEW CHALLENGE?

At PolyMAT, we place great emphasis on creating a workplace that is happy and fulfilling and puts people on a journey of development, both professionally and personally. We feel truly blessed with the amazing staff that we work with and their never-ending drive to do special things to help our students. We are ambitious and dedicated and will always place the quality of education before any other desires. If you are interested in working with us, please contact one of our schools directly, and we will be very happy to discuss opportunities with you.

If we do not have any vacancies matching your interests, please join our Talent Pool at [MyNewTerm](#) and we will review your application.

Tim Plumb  
CEO of PolyMAT

