

Corona-Update: March 16th

At the time of writing, UWC Robert Bosch College has not yet received final confirmation from the Authorities that the boarding section can remain open through the duration of the school shut down in Baden-Württemberg. I remain confident that RBC will be permitted to remain open in that sense, and our planning is based on this assumption.

Most if not all parents will be following the news. Some countries now are refusing travel from non-nationals from Germany and other parts of Europe and are requiring returning citizens to go into self-quarantine. Several international flights have been cancelled. There now is a partial closure of the German borders with France, Switzerland and Austria – goods and commuters are still allowed to cross the borders (and I would assume, returning citizens or those with permission to be in the country). We have checked with the bus service between Freiburg and Basel Airport – a service that crosses into France – and reportedly it is running. But it is clear: things now have the potential to change quickly.

Please know that RBC is committed to looking after the welfare of your children – our students – who remain at the College or who, in the unlikely event that the College is required to close its boarding, are accommodated in homes here in Freiburg and in different parts of Germany. My view remains that students are not at significantly higher risk remaining at RBC (or with a family in these parts) than by travelling home. In many cases travel itself increases risks of being infected by Covid-19. Also, in my non-expert view the Freiburg health facilities are stronger than in many other parts of the world.

This was a special and sometimes poignant weekend at the College. Informally, some students have suggested it was the best UWC weekend so far... with many activities and impromptu games, a beautiful “candle ritual” evening on Saturday where many students came forward to speak – mindful that some students already had left (mostly for health reasons) and others were still to leave on Sunday or during this week. This was followed by a bonfire. The new RBC student orchestra brought forward its first concert to Sunday late afternoon, in the village square. Students began to realize that there wasn’t an infinity of time for important and necessary conversations with some fellow students in the process of leaving, possibly not to return.

I am humbled by the sense of initiative and support coming from the students, by their sense of camaraderie together and with the staff. We understand that we are in this situation together, whether still on campus or now at home.

To practicalities:

- Today (Monday) is the last day in which face-to-face lessons are allowed. A special timetable was drawn up so that each student went to each of their subject teachers.
- Faculty are working hard to move to on-line teaching and support of their students. Assignments have been set for the next days while the transition takes place.
- Today also is the last day that those members of staff who do not live on campus are allowed on campus, before the “school” officially closes. Some “off-campus” staff already are in self-quarantine having travelled in the last fortnight to and from areas now registered as “high risk” – though no-one at RBC shows signs of being infected by Covid-19. I want to express

appreciation for the off-campus staff, to those who offer whatever support they can give in addition to teaching / tutoring / working from home / online.

- I am moved and proud to report that during the course of today three of our teachers without direct family commitments and a social pedagogue are moving into spare rooms on campus, to strengthen the team of adults here for the duration of the shut-down as a “school”. A further two language teachers are moving onto campus for the remainder of the week to complete the IB oral examinations but not in a classroom setting.
- All adult campus residents who are not employed at RBC in a full-time capacity have accepted the request/offer to move to full-time employment at least for the remainder of March (after which the situation will be reviewed, depending on the number of students on campus).
- At Assembly, the RBC nurse gave a further briefing to students on health precautions, on what to do when sick, and on feeding arrangements for the sick to reduce the risk of sick students infecting others.
- Right now, there are some spare rooms in student houses in which students who may be infectious to others (not only potentially with Covid-19!) can stay in isolation. Later this week, with over 20 students scheduled to have returned home, the plan is to rearrange student accommodation to completely free up one student house as an isolation house.
- The caterers are resolute in their determination to continue catering from the RBC kitchen not only for RBC but also for a medical clinic and for a centre for people with disabilities. From today, all meals are “self-service” to minimize contact between students and the catering staff. Also, to meet local regulations during this period, a roster is being drawn up so that no more than 50 students are in the Mensa at any one time.
- For reasons of hygiene, cleaning services especially for bathrooms and toilets will continue, on a clear schedule to avoid contact between students and the cleaning staff.
- Routine maintenance is suspended, and a maintenance team is on stand-by in case of emergencies.
- Current and new campus residents are scheduled to meet later this afternoon to plan for the week ahead.
- RBC is fortunate that within its on-campus staff is Art therapist and academic counselor Nicky Shaw. Students also will have on-line support of the college counselors: psychotherapist Verena Heidenreich and clinical psychologist Sarah Gouda.

Several students and parents have asked about the IB examinations. The difficult reality is that this is a situation fraught with uncertainty.

- RBC continues to plan to be an examination centre for the May 2020 session. At this stage schools in Baden-Württemberg are due to re-open on Monday 20th April. If the opening is further delayed, RBC will apply to the Authorities to continue as an examination centre. In this eventuality it may be that returning students (if they are allowed by the Authorities to return to Freiburg / Germany) need to be accommodated separately from those who have stayed throughout on campus.

- The UWC schools and colleges are in daily contact. Also, we communicate collectively with the IB on a regular basis. At this stage there is no certainty which UWCs will still be able to act as examination centres, and if they are able, whether these centres will be allowed by their local and national authorities to welcome transfer students from RBC (or any other UWC) to write the examinations. Today UWC has agreed to issue a joint statement in this regard by or on the 30th March, with the best information available on that date.

Individual students who have returned home are *invited* to approach local (non-UWC) IB schools, to enquire whether they can be accommodated for the purposes of writing examinations. In order to help with this, in the next days each 2nd year student who has returned home will be provided with a pdf. letter from RBC to give to the new IB school. If the IB school tells the student that there is the possibility of a transfer, the student should then inform RBC about their choice of IB school. RBC will then contact the new IB school and confirm whether they will accept to act as the IB exam centre for the student.

To repeat my general framing statements from earlier letters, updated in light of current directives:

- UWC Robert Bosch College does not plan to close its student village – the boarding section – unless instructed to do so by the Authorities. We are awaiting confirmation that we can remain open.
- If UWC Robert Bosch College is required to close the boarding section, the College will work closely with you, staff, the families of German students, Host Families and the German National Committee to ensure that every student who cannot return home is accommodated. Under these circumstances, the College will fund the travel costs for all students who receive travel assistance as part of their scholarship provision, and if needs be those where the family / national committee is genuinely unable to bear the costs. But let us hope – and continue to plan as sensibly as we can – that we can keep the boarding section open and with generally-healthy students and staff.
- With the unfolding situation the responsibility remains yours for deciding whether you wish your child to remain at UWC Robert Bosch College with the precautions described above, or whether they should return home. Should you or they take the view to return home now, I will respect the decision and the student will remain in good standing at the College and with UWC.

Laurence Nodder, Rektor