

16th September, 2020

Letter to parents and guardians of our first and second-year students.

Dear Parents and Guardians (copied to National Committees),

It is over three weeks since most students arrived on Campus, and I am pleased to report that there is a good “buzz” to the place – it has been an even better-than hoped-for start to the UWC and academic year!

This coming weekend the final 2nd year student returning from beyond Germany is due to arrive (using a repatriation flight from her country to Spain), bringing to 100 the number of 2nd year students on campus – RBC’s advertised capacity per year-group. Currently we have 86 1st year students on Campus and remain hopeful that visa and transport challenges will be resolved for at least a further handful of incoming students. Those students who cannot arrive in fair time are offered deferred entry for August 2021. Again, I want to thank everyone who led or joined the effort to persuade the German Authorities to create an exemption that allows any RBC student (with a visa if necessary) to travel to Germany. The 1st year-group represents a potentially united world, not simply a united Europe, to the benefit of all!

Everyone is Covid-19 well, so far. Unlike most years when people need to build resistance to the different strains of bacteria and viruses brought together from different parts of the world (a different concept of a united world!), the general daily sick list is short to non-existent. Yesterday 6 students visited the school Nurse for various matters, and one was excused from some lessons. By comparison, on the 15th September last year, 20 students reported sick, with 9 enough to be excused from lessons. The students’ sense of precaution around Covid-19 is keeping them healthy in other ways too! Remarkably (but not giving grounds for complacency), every student and member of staff received a negative PCR test at the time of their arrival (and in a few follow-up tests when a student has not felt well) and of the 211 antibody tests that were undertaken on the 22nd/23rd August, only 4 members of the RBC community tested positive (suggesting they previously have had Covid-19). I interpret this as a measure partly of good fortune and, more pro-actively, that the people who have come together to form the RBC community have learned to live in Covid-19-prudent ways (for 1st year students, before arriving at RBC).

As you know from previous letters, the Health Authorities required that students be kept in student houses, in a form of quarantine, until they received a negative PCR test. This generally took around 24 – 48 hours. Then they still were required to remain on campus, wearing a mask in most circumstances, for the balance of 14 days. This resulted in an unusual Orientation, but at least it has allowed a lot of (masked) getting to know each other and the Campus! The initial waiting period within Student Houses provided a great opportunity for catching breath and

building bonds initially with a smaller group of people. While there was less physical contact than during a more regular Orientation, there still was opportunity for a Welcome Show, an (outdoors) Party, House and Tutor Group activities, team building activities, working in the College Monastery Garden, inter-cultural communication workshops, a subject fair and subject choosing for 1st year students, introductions to the Creativity, Activity and Service (CAS) programme as well as to the Health and Wellbeing support at RBC, quick medical checks, bicycle tests (and for some, learning to ride a bicycle), relaxation and fun. For the 2nd year students, it also gave time for those needing further work on their 1st drafts of their Extended Essays. Some 1st year students have commented that it gave them time to transition into speaking in English and getting a sense of how RBC works.

Regular classes started on the 1st September for the 2nd year students, and on the 2nd September for the 1st years. Apart from the neat numeric symmetry in these dates, to me it is a triumph that inperson classes started for almost all our students on the days put down in the calendar months ago. Of course, not everything is the same as it would have been without Covid-19. There are clear, mandated Covid-19 protocols for lessons and for being in school buildings (apart from the student houses.) All the reports I have received suggest an excellent start to teaching and learning and it is a pleasure walking past all the open classroom doors and open windows, witnessing academic engagement. Open windows are all well and good in the current glorious, late summer weather. But when we move to winter I hope to be reminded of the saying: there is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing! RBC students all have been introduced to our excellent supply of used clothing including winter clothing (and other resources), the Chic Boutique, available at no charge to students.

For your reassurance, RBC is proactive in keeping teachers up to date with IB approaches: two weekends ago all RBC Language A teachers participated in an IB-aligned workshop, and last Thursday and Friday the RBC Theory of Knowledge (TOK) teachers attended a workshop on the new TOK curriculum (both workshops were held at RBC).

Back to the full RBC community: we held this year's first Global Affairs session, on Environmental Justice, led by former RBC teacher Mihir Sharma and 1st generation RBC graduate Elias Koenig. Currently students and staff are working to bring together the first Special Focus Day – on Interfaith dialogue. The first major planning session including students is this Thursday. At our first two “regular” assemblies since the start of class we received student presentations on the fires in California, and the Ecosia internet search engine – where the majority of profits go towards the planting of trees (including through RBC partner the High Atlas Foundation).

Yesterday afternoon students participated in a Service Fair with 15 external service partners and 5 RBC-based services, naturally held outdoors and with other Covid-19 precautions (everyone was masked, the different service presentations at a good distance from each other, and the students spread out in a physical sense). The CAS Office has worked hard to establish which external projects can proceed, with appropriate precautions, under current circumstances. As Parents and

Guardians, you will understand that participation in off-campus projects and events will depend on the state of Covid-19 infections in and around Freiburg, and on future regulations by the Authorities. But for as long as we are allowed, RBC wishes to be outward looking.

September 27th would have been the start of the 1st Project Week. Sending students (mostly in unaccompanied groups) in public transport around Europe and into somewhat uncertain circumstances is not prudent right now, in my view. Instead, RBC has added to its hiking and camping equipment so that 100 students at a time can be equipped for hiking and camping. Bringing things forward by a week and also hoping to capitalize on good weather, 2nd year students depart on Saturday 19th (4 groups leave earlier, late Friday afternoon) in groups, on longer or shorter hikes to reach a camping ground in Schluchsee where they will continue with yeargroup – building activities. They return to Campus, by train, on the afternoon of Tuesday 22nd. On Wednesday 23rd the 1st year students will depart by train to Schluchsee, to learn the RBC basics of outdoor activities and camping, go on day outdoors outings. They return by train at midday Saturday 25th for an RBC community Garden Festival “Garten und Lecker”, which is to be filmed for broadcast by WDR Köln at a future date. (As an indication of the level of precautions that are taken, the TV crew have undertaken to have PCR tests two days before coming on campus and will be exercising social distancing from student and staff.)

Many 2nd year students are most likely to apply to study at college or university in the USA. This is partly because there are many fine institutions of higher education in the USA. It also is partly because, thanks to the philanthropy of Shelby and Gale Davis together with partner colleges and universities, UWC graduates receive means-tested scholarships to attend almost 100 partner institutions. For students where there are strong institutions in their home countries (or the EU), and if their parents or guardians, or the state (or other scholarships) can make it financially possible to attend these institutions, this offer from US institutions is not critically important. Where it is realistic, UWC suggests that students investigate the possibilities of returning home for higher education. In my experience, often students receive better-aligned professional education in their home countries or regions if they wish later on to pursue careers “at home”. For those students attracted to studying in the US or for whom it is the only realistic chance of a good higher education, the first major event of the academic year is a virtual College Fair on the evening of Tuesday 22nd. Students have the possibility of engaging with and being interviewed by Admissions Staff from amongst 48 Davis partner institutions (<https://smieconsulting.org/uwc-virtual-visit-days>). Also, RBC is a registered centre for students to write the US ‘SAT’ university entrance tests, and will be hosting tests on September 26th, October 3rd, November 7th (subject tests only) and December 5th. Students who need help in registering, or who need financial support for participating in a SAT session have been advised to contact Hubertus Zander for assistance with enrollment.

To close with an update on Covid-19 measures: once the 14 days on-campus “quarantine” had passed, we allowed students the opportunity to start exploring beyond campus. Currently this is to a somewhat restricted range of places and with restricted times: the forest above and beyond the college, the valley that runs

for approximately 10 km to the east of RBC, and the closest shopping centre (where there is a high level of compliance in mask-wearing and reasonable compliance with social distancing). Within these constraints, students are allowed to go to recreational facilities, restaurants and other places so long as they remain outdoors where the risks of Covid-19 infection are much smaller than for indoor gatherings (each establishment follows an approved hygiene concept that meets regulations). Students need to sign out using the normal system. This week general permission has been extended from 5:30pm to students needing to return to campus by 8:30pm. We are pivoting to a high level of student engagement in proposals how to gain from our proximity to Freiburg (including for instance indoor places of religious worship with registered hygiene concepts) while keeping ourselves and each other Covid-19 safe. We will be discussing in House and Tutor Group meetings some detailed suggestions arising from a student-conceived survey of the student body. For me, this is the interesting “UWC” part of the discussion, where students engage with the sensibilities of their fellow students and teachers/tutors, where we discover those circumstances that leave some feeling too restricted – and others feeling unsafe, and work towards solutions that meet regulatory requirements.

At RBC we work on the assumption that almost every one of our students would be interacting with their families and friends, and still would be attending school if they had not come to RBC. We presume they would be living carefully, but not living lives of zero Covid-19 risk. In my opinion it would be a lost educational opportunity and counter-productive if at this stage and for the whole of the academic year we attempted to enforce a zero-risk lifestyle on students. If infection rates rise especially in and around Freiburg, we have scope and the determination to take and persuade students to follow more precautionary measures. We also have a beautiful and sufficiently extensive Campus into which we can retreat, if needs be. Let's hope this is not necessary.

With best wishes,

Laurence Nodder
Rektor