

29th January 2021

Dear Parents and Guardians, copied to National Committees,

We are nearing the end of the 3rd week of the Semester. Almost every student who left Campus has now returned, each with a negative PCR test for Covid – 19, those returning into Germany also having to undertake a minimum 5 days' quarantine off-campus. This was not easy (or inexpensive) for those students or their families. You can imagine that this process of bringing the community together again also is one of anxiety for RBC. So far it appears as if we have re-gathered in a manner that has kept Covid-19 out of the campus community. I am enormously grateful for this. It also means that fingers cannot be pointed at RBC for bringing Covid-19, or particular strains of Covid-19, into Freiburg – an important political consideration as we look to bringing in the next generation of students.

For the first three weeks of the Semester, classes have generally been online. From Monday 1st February the plan is to resume with in-person classes, under a current exemption for exam-level classes (which for RBC are the two DP years) in Land Baden Württemberg. For a variety of reasons not every teacher will be able to teach in-person, and the classes for these teachers will continue online.

All indoors interaction between students and staff in the Kartaus and Auditorium will continue to be masked (and staff are masked when they enter Student Houses, where we ask students to mask again when members of staff enter). The Creative, Active, Service (CAS) programme will continue, still largely on-campus. In general terms, students continue to have permission to leave campus – including for walks, cycling, even cross-country skiing, and for shopping at local supermarkets (where medical-grade masks need to be worn). A leading German virologist thinks it is unlikely that Germany will be Covid-free even by summer: our educational task is, I believe, to educate students into highly responsible behaviour when they are off-campus so that they can live more freely as one “household” when on-campus. I continue to think that it would be difficult to sustain for many months a more restrictive approach than this, including enforcing social distancing between students on campus, under current infection circumstances.

More on online lessons: Christian Bock, the Director of Studies, ran surveys last week, one for students and another for teachers, to get a better sense of the evolving online teaching and learning experiences within the RBC community. The responses help us shape our approaches. Two juxtapositioned student responses show part of the challenge. The first student, to the question: *How academically stressed are you feeling about the current remote teaching situation*, gave the numeric answer 7 (out of 7). To the open response question: *What has worked well when we used the Teams environment to structure our contact time*, their response was *Nothing*. The next student submitting their responses gave the answers to these questions as 1 (out of 7) and *Everything*. At a technical level, RBC's internet service provider (and there is only one in this part of Freiburg) has been experiencing challenges and there have been periods when the internet is patchy. But in general, especially the 2nd year students perceived this online learning experience better than that in March/April 2020, and teachers perceived that they were better prepared and equipped this time round. Reading the responses to the several questions (many open responses being rather more detailed than the ones I quoted!) makes me think that it is

easier for (most) students to be learning online when physically congregated in a learning community like RBC, rather than to be studying online at home. What also was clear that most teachers were positioned to structure further support for students, and because most of the students were physically present quite a bit of this support could be in-person.

Circumstances can and may well change. On Wednesday, Freiburg reported the detection of one of the newer, more infectious, strains of the coronavirus in a local Kita (pre-school). I try to avoid using national labels for such strains. Yesterday a Boarding School in the Black Forest also reported the detection of a newer strain. We at UWC Robert Bosch College will continue to evaluate circumstances as responsibly and pragmatically as we can, including following the directives of the Authorities interpreted into the RBC context.

Even though we are mostly on-campus, students enjoy a much richer life than simply attending to online lessons and completing academic assignments. Some highlights include the TEDx RBC “Starting a Conversation” on Saturday 16th, a UWC Café with student performances on Saturday 23rd, and, tomorrow evening, a Winter Ball. The last weeks have seen usually heavy snow in and around Freiburg; most have enjoyed the snow on campus, and many have been out in smaller groups, cross-country skiing. Tomorrow (Saturday) is the monthly outing of the RBC “Mountain Hamsters” walking group – appropriately transported and socially distanced.

On Wednesday 27th five RBC students contributed the reading out from bibliographies of resistance fighters on the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz (a WW2 concentration camp) – online – as part of Freiburg’s commemoration of the Holocaust, and we also stood in silence, in assembly, to commemorate.

Project Week starts on Sunday 7th February. Inevitably in Covid-19 circumstances, RBC can no longer send students, in groups, away from the college and widely throughout Europe. The students have been creative in envisaging projects either on campus or in outdoors projects in these parts – with students return to campus each evening. While the almost 100 students who stayed on campus for Winter Break self-catered in their Student House kitchens, in my view these kitchens are not sufficiently equipped for catering for 194 students and neither will students have sufficient time to do regular grocery shopping. Instead, the Mensa will stay open.

Friday 12th February has been designated a Special Focus Day (SFD) on Racism and Inequality. Following the SFD, some students have come forward to organize a Black Culture Week for the end of the February. 2nd year student Gil Joseph writes: *Black Culture Week will focus especially on **celebrating** black culture and heritage. We will explore together the traditions, customs and cultures that emerged from black heritage. We will discover and celebrate what is beautiful, commendable, and memorable about 'blackness'. Our political figures. Our scientists. Our artists. In short, the contribution of black folks around the world to the progress and development of modern societies. While the black community continues to face daunting challenges, there is much to celebrate. But unfortunately, we rarely hear a rhetoric of celebration. This is what the Black Culture Week will aim to initiate at the school!*

Graduation in May

For the first years at RBC, many parents and friends joined the graduating students in a packed Auditorium for a formal Closure Ceremony the Sunday after the completion of the final IB Examinations. We need to be responsible and prudent as we look ahead for the next months. It is most likely that Covid-19 will remain a major concern by late May. In these likely circumstances, to plan to bring people together from many different parts of Germany, other European countries and even further afield for a joint celebration has to be recognized as being unrealistic or even irresponsible. Accordingly, and mindful of the deep disappointment that this will be for some parents and guardians (and students), I have decided that RBC will not hold a formal Closure Ceremony that includes people from beyond the direct school community. Last year's "Saying Goodbye" with the 2nd year students, in late March after the IB had cancelled the Examinations, was warmly perceived by the students and staff. An event of this nature will be held in 2021 and might become RBC's normal way of bringing closure – in which case a different event will be highlighted as the time around which families and guardians are formally welcomed to Campus, possibly even the Robert Bosch day (the closest Saturday to his birthday on the 23rd September).

Thank you again for your continued support and confidence!

With best wishes,



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