

8th October 2021

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Earlier this week I informed students of decisions around the “Fall” Break, for which classes end on Friday 29th October and students must be back at RBC by the evening of Sunday 7th November. As is usual for Fall and Spring Breaks, the student houses will remain open under the usual weekend level of staff supervision. Catering continues for those students (normally the majority) who do not travel or who wish to remain at RBC for some of the Break.

This is what I communicated to students:

- *RBC encourages students to stay in Freiburg or surroundings over the Fall Break, and the Student Houses will remain open.*
- *RBC strongly discourages students from leaving Germany over Fall Break. Part of the reason for the strong discouragement is that sometimes borders have closed during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is an unpredictable pandemic.*
- *Students who leave Germany to travel home by train or by car: if the Covid-19 incidence rate is higher in your home country than for Germany, as published by <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus> on the 27th October, then you must enter quarantine for 5 days on your return to RBC, or you must provide a negative PCR test no less than 48 hours old. If you travel home beyond Germany by bus, then you will enter quarantine on your return to RBC.*
- *Students who leave Germany for touristic reasons / to visit friends will enter quarantine for 5 days on your return to RBC.*
- *Students who plan to travel out of Germany for Fall Break must inform Laurence by the close of school on Monday 25th October, so that RBC plans can be made.*

Unless regulations change, these are the arrangements.

Some students noticed that I did not speak of air travel. This was a deliberate omission, as I would like the very few who are planning to fly this Fall break to discuss this with me. RBC will not refuse permission, but in general terms RBC discourages students from flying over the shorter breaks (including on grounds of sustainability). During the Covid-19 pandemic there is a further challenge that air travel often has been the first to be disrupted in changing circumstances.

The Fall Break arrangements try to marry three imperatives: keeping the community safer from on-campus Covid-19 infection, keeping a relatively open set of arrangements as a release-valve also mitigating against mental ill-health, and being relatively simple to administer (and likely within the capacity of the RBC isolation house with its maximum 26 places). Within Germany, Land Baden-Württemberg has amongst the highest current levels of Covid-19 infection (at the time of writing 85,1 newly diagnosed infections per 100.000 people in the last week, as per Die Zeit), so being in other parts of Germany should not carry significantly greater infection risk for students than being in Freiburg.

I understand that even with these three imperatives, different arrangements could have been made, but also open to critique.

Host Families

Host families in and around Freiburg generously offer welcome RBC students into their “hearts and homes”. These off-campus ties grow important for many RBC students, a 2nd-home away from campus, and an important means of entry into German society for our students from beyond Germany. Several of RBC’s 1st generation of graduates remain in affectionate and appreciative contact with their Host families, something that is experienced by many UWC graduates around the world. In “normal” times, students spend one designated weekend with their Host families (often followed by many more, informally arranged) each Semester, and the Campus closes for the designated Saturday and most of the Sunday.

Since the beginning of the Covid pandemic, both Host families and RBC have had to take a much more cautious stance. Last Semester students were allowed to meet with their Host families mostly outdoors, but no overnight stays were permitted. This semester, with the very high vaccination rate of RBC students and staff, and now with all school children being Covid tested at least twice weekly in their schools, RBC thinks it is important and appropriate to take a step closer to “normality” with the Host family programme. 1st year students will meet their Host families on Sunday afternoon, as a first introduction, and under the same health concept as for last year – which was before anyone was vaccinated. Then, on the weekend of the 16th/17th October, Host families will welcome students at a level where both feel comfortable. This may be not at all, or in a public place, or at home. This Semester RBC will allow students to spend the Saturday night with their Host families if both feel comfortable about this, but has asked Host families that the student sleep alone in a room (or with another RBC student), not with the family children.

At the time of writing not enough Host families have come forward, I expect because of general Covid caution. Unfortunately, this means that some students do not (yet) have a designated family. Because of this and because at this stage RBC does not wish to force any student to spend the weekend or the Saturday night with a Host family, the Campus will remain open for the Host family weekend.

Interfaith Dialogue Special Focus Day

The Interfaith Dialogue Special Focus Day is scheduled for Thursday 14th October. The aim of the Interfaith day is for us to celebrate the diversity in our midst, and to learn together about different religions, faiths, spiritualities and beliefs, often those held by students within the RBC community. It is not to promote any of these over any others, or with the intention to influence anyone’s beliefs. Instead, the emphasis of the day is on education, exchange and respect.

The day is divided into different sessions: some sessions take place as a large group within the Auditorium, others (especially discussions and workshops) are with a dozen other students. There also are Seminars on a wide range of religions, answering the question: “What is (name of religion/faith)? What do adherents believe?” Discussion groups, mostly suggested and led by students, will focus on the intersection of social issues and faiths. Examples from previous years include: “Dear colonizers, why is Latin America Catholic? “,

“Women in Islam”, “The conflict between individual values and church as an institution “, “The rivalry of Bosnia’s religions”, “The role of media and terrorism in promoting Islamophobia” and “From conservative to liberal: generational change of attitudes in Morocco”. Workshops, also mostly student initiated and led, will focus more on something practical related to a belief system. Examples from previous years include: “Experience Gospel music “, “Learn Nepalese Dance “, “Practice Armenian Calligraphy”, “Creating a Truth Mandala” and “Baking Jewish *Hamantashen*”.

A short video from the 2018 Interfaith Special Focus Day, which captures well the ‘spirit’ of the event, is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohWoztQRU3o>

Filmed Performance of *Can I Live?* at RBC

Can I Live?, conceived, written and performed by Fehinti Balogun, will be screened this Saturday evening jointly by the RBC COP26 task force and the RBC Anti-racism working group.

Fehinti Balogun takes the audience “on a journey into the world of an environmental activist, as he tells the story of how, as a young Black British man, his path has been forever changed by what he’s learnt about our planet. Using original hip-hop and spoken word, *Can I Live?* is an energizing and uplifting exploration of the place where the climate emergency and social justice meet, and a call-to-arms to anyone curious about what we can do to help.” (<https://theatreroyal.com/whats-on/can-i-live/>)

Concluding thought:

A danger of the Rektor’s letters is that while they often highlight things that are important parts of the overall life of this UWC community, they do not necessarily emphasize the nature of RBC being a school subscribing to the International Baccalaureate Diploma curriculum. The letters might be perceived as describing an extended UWC Short Course! Please be assured that your children, our students, are being well taught, and that a professional and highly committed staff puts in great effort also in the basics of RBC being a school!

With best wishes,

Laurence Nodder
Rektor
laurence.nodder@uwcrobertboschcollege.de