

1st April 2022

Dear Parents and Guardians,

In many ways it has been a good March at RBC, though for many, especially (but not only) our students from Ukraine and Russia, war and conflict, together with the wellbeing of their families and friends, are very much in the foreground of their thinking. Students and staff have enjoyed the improving weather (though today is cold and rainy!). Students increasingly have spilled out of the Mensa into the Mensa courtyard, enjoying meals under a warming sun. Outside, students and members of staff are allowed to sit together. I have enjoyed many informal conversations over lunch and weekend brunches.

The “Mock” Examinations (2nd year students) and the “Livable Cities” week (1st year students) went smoothly. The “Livable Cities” week is a multi-disciplinary extension to the IB “G4” Project – the International Baccalaureate requires all DP students to engage in a cross-disciplinary project embracing the experimental sciences. This month RBC has had two excellent Global Affairs sessions: the first with British author and investigative journalist Geoff White on “Cybercrime : how it affects us personally and politically”. The BBC hosts several of Geoff’s podcasts if you would like to listen. Last Wednesday students led an intersectional environment and climate justice Global Affairs, examining where social and environmental issues intersect.

If I am to be frank, the lesson attendance of some students has been disappointing. This is a challenge in what essentially is a trust-based system without layers of smaller sanctions (we trust that students understand their responsibility to attend classes and to complete assigned work by deadlines, and that their contributions in class are of importance also to their peers.) Absences are recorded on Semester reports. Part of the dilemma is that I see RBC as a transition from school to (mostly) university, a place where students learn to take responsibility for themselves without being chased at every formal moment by a parent or teacher. Yet at most universities, there isn’t the same institutional commitment to getting students to graduation as there is at UWCs. In most university systems, if you miss too many lectures/tutorials, you simply are deregistered from the course. My colleagues and I are reflecting how we can do things better.

Having been frank around lesson attendance by some students, I also need to record how deeply impressed I have been with how students have learned to go beyond the campus in covid times in ways that are safe(r). Given current infection numbers in these parts, it is an incredible achievement – especially by the students – that there hasn’t been an outbreak (yet!) of covid on campus. In recent months, several members of staff have become infected with Covid, almost always in the context of their children or travel. But the campus measures have been sufficient that, no doubt with a measure of good fortune, these infections have not spread into the RBC community. Currently I am in isolation at home, having tested positive after travel for a family matter, where the only credible explanation is that I was infected on a flight last week to Boston.

Looking ahead, many RBC students will be observing Ramadan, which in Germany most likely starts this Saturday evening.

This weekend is designated as the Host Family weekend. We regard the Host Family programme not simply as a social programme and as an escape from campus. It is part of the broad RBC educational programme. It is where students (especially those from beyond Germany) gain a glimpse into the lives and homes of people who live in Freiburg. For several months RBC has allowed students to have contact with their Host Families, but not overnight contact. My colleagues and I have decided this time to include an overnight (Saturday night) stay, but under careful provisions. All members of Host Family households will test for Covid by tomorrow, as will the visiting students. Students need to sleep in a room separate from Host Family members. And RBC needs to be informed, immediately, if in subsequent days any member of a Host Family becomes covid positive.

RBC has hired a mountain hut for students who cannot join Host Families, where they will be accompanied by RBC Social Pedagogues. And it has been decided to keep the Student Houses open this weekend, for those who may not be able to be accommodated by Host Families or in the Mountain Hut, or where arrangements need to be changed quickly.

Finally for this coming weekend: on Sunday morning several students and some members of staff are taking part in the Freiburg (half) marathon.

Easter / Spring Break

The RBC programme runs until supper time on Wednesday 13th April, and then resumes at 7pm on Sunday 24th April. The Student Houses (and Mensa) remain open throughout the break. Even in non-Covid years, typically more than half of the students stay at RBC through the break, 2nd year students

often using this as a helpful revision period before the start of their final examinations near the end of April.

This year, any student who leaves overnight will be required to have a negative PCR test result before re-entering campus, with the test having been conducted no more than 48 hours before their arrival back on campus. The test will be for their / your account because students have the option of remaining on Campus. In addition, as they arrive on campus, they will be required to take a rapid antigen test (RBC-provided). Further measures will be in place to provide further protection against the spread of any Covid infection that may arrive with a returning student.

War in Ukraine

The war in Ukraine is very much in people's minds. RBC has received regular and powerful reports from our students from Ukraine, as well as testimony from our students from Russia. Several within the community have pointed out that the RBC community has paid much more attention to this war than to wars in other parts of the world. Two Syrian students gave moving testimony at a recent Assembly following 6 years of war in their country, and others are organizing a War and Conflict Awareness week.

UWC has a clear commitment to peace. UWC does not stand for war. Personally, I was a conscientious objector against military conscription into the South African Apartheid army. Yet, RBC has not made strong public statements regarding the war in Ukraine. Instead, I hope students and staff have felt encouraged and supported in their efforts from attending demonstrations, letter writing, fundraising and awareness-raising campaigns, in their humanitarian efforts. I do not agree with everything that students are campaigning for. But it is their right to campaign as individuals and as groups of individuals, as RBC students and members of staff. What I have asked is that people not speak on behalf of RBC. RBC itself has given clear practical support to humanitarian efforts: such as providing RBC vans for taking various forms of aid from Freiburg to the border of Ukraine and bringing refugees back to Freiburg. We have offered some of our student houses to the City for refugee accommodation during the summer break. RBC has created an internship for a refugee Ukrainian English 2nd language teacher.

In addition to this type of support, RBC views its most important role as that of keeping alive the possibility of bringing together people from different sides of several wars and conflicts, into an educational space, a place of dialogue. In my view, official and strident pronouncements might close down those possibilities. I have been moved by the efforts of the Ukrainian UWC National Committee in continuing to conduct selections inside and outside of the country during a war, and to honour their efforts RBC has offered a further scholarship to that NC for the August intake. RBC will continue to offer scholarships to students selected by the Russian UWC National Committee, and for this August RBC has made a scholarship offer to the UWC National Committee in Belarus.

In my view, the most valuable "thing" that RBC can offer at an institutional level is a place / scholarship. Of the non-UWC school/college countries, the countries from which RBC has welcomed the most current students/graduates are Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. I hope this demonstrates institutional commitment to young people from places at war and in conflict. RBC also understands its deep responsibility to current students from Ukraine and Russia, responsibility that extends as best as we can manage until these particular students and soon-to-be graduates find their next steps. It does not stop on graduation.

As usual, should you wish to write, please do so in a language of your comfort.

With best wishes,

Laurence Nodder

Rektor