

19th April 2024

Dear Parents and Guardians,

This year, I have written too seldom to Parents and Guardians. Of course, it would be easy to write about all the wonderful and impressive things that our students are accomplishing – and indeed there is a lot that could be written here. It is harder to write of the difficult ‘learning’ when things go wrong, when people are hurt (doubly so when it is not their ‘fault’) or when they are deeply disappointed – the part of RBC where in a sense the realities of being human and living in society insert into our daily lives. It is hardest, and I think false, to write mainly in cheery tones when many of the communities and societies RBC’s students and staff come from are in a state of war or where people are living through crises.

Yesterday (Thursday) evening, many students and staff joined together in mutual support. The student-initiated call to gather follows the recent tragic escalation of violence in the MENA region and came with a poignant invitation: “Many of us might share a feeling of powerlessness, a fear of seeing what the future holds, for us and for our loved ones. I do too. That is why we’d like the community to come together and support each other in these painful times. Because shared sorrow is half sorrow.”

On one hand, there can be a real sense of powerlessness over what the future holds for us, our families, communities, and countries. On the other hand, there is the responsibility to use our opportunities well, especially the opportunity of attending (or working at) RBC and the opportunities this makes possible both now and in the future. The future can be shaped. UWCWK Patron and Nobel Prize Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu claimed that he was not an optimist, but rather a “prisoner of hope”. “To choose hope is to step firmly forward into the howling wind, baring one's chest to the elements, knowing that, in time, the storm will pass.” This is what I recognize in so many RBC students, graduates and colleagues: the courage to be hopeful, and to prepare and commit themselves accordingly.

Today is the final day of classes for 2nd year students. Picking up on a German tradition, this final week of lessons, the ‘Mottowoche’, has had 2nd year students coming to school dressed in a different theme for each day. To conclude the week, there is an off-campus Leavers’ Dinner this evening for 2nd year students and members of staff. The final examinations start next Wednesday. Sooner than we can imagine, examinations will be over, the ‘handovers’ to the 1st year students completed, the Closure Ceremony upon us (Sunday 19th May), farewells said, and, by 12 noon on Monday 20th May, the new graduates will have departed. (A separate email will be sent to Parents and Guardians of 2nd year students.)

Amid all their academic responsibilities, 1st year students are engaged fully in Theory of Knowledge (TOK), exploring what different objects can reveal about knowledge in the real world. Many 1st year students spent afternoons this week gathering data for their Natural Sciences (Group 4) research projects. Thirteen brave first-year students will complete their final exams in Self-Taught literature next week, and we wish them and all the second-year students well. In the following weeks, 1st year students can

look forward to the spring Block Week (where shorter examinations will be written in most subjects), followed by a week dedicated to their Extended Essays.

Last week the formal CAS (creativity, activity, service) program came to an end for this term. RBC has a strong focus on Service and Service learning, and cooperates with more than 25 partner organizations and groups in Freiburg. Since the beginning, RBC has enjoyed cooperating with several schools in Freiburg (often where our students teach English), with the local foodbank, with homes for the elderly, and institutions that support refugees in Freiburg. This year, new cooperations include: the 'Foodsaving Café', an 'Anti-racist education in schools' project, and a student-led initiative teaching music to children of lesser privileged families. The 'Share your story' CAS took RBC students into several schools and brought students from other schools onto the RBC campus, our students sharing their personal accounts on topics as diverse as Climate change in Zambia, Growing-up as a queer person, and Finding my own voice as a refugee in Germany. RBC looks forward to continuing these many cooperations, and continuing to open the doors of RBC to the wider Freiburg community.

Generally, my role is such that I do not interact with students in classes. My perceptions and delight come more from seeing students' interactions, engagement and initiative beyond class. Spring Day (Saturday 13th April) was a triumph, with students working hard that morning in their Tutor Groups across the Campus lands, under the overall direction of Garden Pedagogue Eva Schuele. There were student-led cultural workshops in the early afternoon, and a session for 2nd year students led by five RBC graduates on 'Life after RBC'. The afternoon culminated in what has become a RBC tradition: a colourful celebration of the Hindu Holi Festival. That evening, as part of RBC's Kultur in der Kartaus series, members of the public joined RBC in filling the Auditorium for a performance by the Freiburg artistic duo Pape Dieye (percussion) and Michael Vollhardt (cello).

I particularly enjoy music and (watching!) dance. A few weeks back there was a classical music concert in the college Library (with its wonderfully warm acoustics), possibly the most accomplished student classical concert I have attended at RBC (with some staff contributions, too). Last week, there was a student-led focus on Latin America, culminating in an educative show last Friday evening under the title 'Echoes of Latin America'. This Monday evening, members of the Choir CAS gave lively and, in some instances, tender performances.

A further highlight for me was the participation of 24 RBC runners (in a school of only 200 students!) in the Freiburg Marathon on the 7th April (2 students entered the full marathon, 11 the half marathon, 11 for shorter but still considerable distances). Our runners showed great spirit. 2nd year student Emiliano came 2nd in the U20 category. 1st year student Nabwia helped RBC's participation expand into a fundraiser, in the process covering the Marathon entry costs for the runners and raising over €800 for an NGO supporting the provision of sanitary products for women in Sudan.

I take particular pleasure in working and living in a school and community that allows for different cultural and religious expressions, where students are open to sharing their backgrounds with others, and where there is a sense that these things are matters of interest and sympathetic engagement, rather than grounds for division. Over 60 students observed fasting during the holy month of Ramadan. This included several students who are not Muslim fasting for a variety of reasons including solidarity and sharing experience with their fellow Muslim students. It was a pleasure to see the

determination, discipline and support in this community during this time that is holy for Muslim students. Food and love were shared during the meals students prepared after sunset, the biggest highlight for many fasting students.

I asked a small group of students what they might add to the highlights already mentioned. They added: there have been several student theatre performances and a 2nd year Visual Arts exhibition. The 1st year students spent a day at the Robert Bosch Stiftung in Stuttgart. An inter- House competition is reaching its conclusion. Tomorrow evening will be the final 2nd-year student Café of this academic year (traditionally, there is a thank-you and farewell Café for 2nd year students during their final weekend, presented by the 1st years).

And, the group added, I should mention the surprise student takeover of last Monday's Assembly as a farewell for me as I approach retirement. It was a complete surprise: I had no inkling of the extensive preparations, nor of the book of memories that had been collated and printed. It was a fun and (for me) a deeply moving assembly, and a reminder of the difficulty there will be in saying goodbye to a place and community that has become a 2nd home and which, with all its (and my) flaws, I have come to love. Now my wife Debbie and I begin to experience firsthand something of what UWC graduating students possibly experience as they leave, generation by generation.

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