

24th September 2024

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Just over a month has passed since we opened our doors to students ahead of the new academic year at RBC.

It has certainly been a whirlwind of experiences for our first years who have been confronted with the UWC values and the sometimes harsh realities of what a transformative education actually means - from a new approach to learning, which for most is not in their mother tongue, to experiential placed-based education (working in the garden or engaging in the outdoor weekend) and learning more about the beautiful local environment that we are so lucky to find ourselves in here in this corner of Freiburg. Many have already discovered the truth in Kurt Hahn's words "there is more in you than you think".

Our second years have taken on the mantle of being "elder siblings", setting the tone for the academic year whilst bearing in mind the question: "what kind of community do we want to be?" This has seen them guide their first years through student orientation as well as taking on formative roles in the community, such as running workshops, leading CAS activities and guiding hikes during the first years' Outdoor Weekend. Of course, work in the academic programme continues with Extended Essays (EE) submitted, Internal Assessments (IAs) progressing and the checklist of IB requirements steadily being ticked-off and thoughts turning to life post-RBC.

University Visits to RBC

RBC has received many university visits in the last couple of weeks. Almost half of our students do not have the opportunity to further their studies without significant scholarship support, even if they were to return home to attend a university in their country. The great privilege of students in Germany and several other parts of Europe to study for (almost)

no tuition cost is by no means universal. Scholarship support for undergraduate study is often very hard to secure.

In this regard, UWC graduates have the extraordinary benefit of the financial generosity of Shelby Davis, who has partnered with around 100 US universities and colleges to make it financially possible for UWC graduates to receive scholarships that meet their financial need for both tuition and accommodation. (Given the cost of especially private higher education in the USA, most of these universities and colleges need to provide generously from their own funding sources to supplement Shelby Davis' extraordinary support, and we thank them for this.) In 2023/24, the total number of Davis UWC Scholars attending these schools has now reached 4,209 from 164 countries. The 2024 graduating class includes 928 students from 144 nations.

There are some undergraduate scholarships at specific universities in, for instance, Canada, but for a student who needs a scholarship to continue with their studies - circumstances which apply to almost half of RBC's students - by far the most likely route forward is as a Davis Scholar in the US: <https://www.davisuwcscholars.org/about-us>. In the last two and a half weeks, RBC has received visits from admissions staff from 16 US universities and Colleges:

Universities: Brown, Case Western Reserve, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Yale

Colleges: Bates, Colorado, Concordia, Davidson, Earlham, Middlebury, St John's, St Olaf, Wartburg, Wellesley and Whitman.

Student recruitment for private U.S. universities and colleges is far more personalized than for universities elsewhere. At Davis partner schools, admissions staff often visit, give presentations, and pre-interview prospective students. This level of attention, along with the abundance of information and the need to interview, adds pressure on our students, especially in their 2nd year at RBC. We should acknowledge this while also celebrating the great opportunities available to them.

Open Day and 10 Year Anniversary

Saturday (September 28th) sees our annual Open Day. This is always a special occasion but even more so this year as we mark the 10th anniversary of our official opening. During the day, we will be opening our doors to the local community, but will also be joined by alumni, host families, supporters together with members of the German National Committee; I hope a number of you can join us. In the evening, our students will be packing and preparing to leave for Project Week which runs from Sunday 29th – Friday 4th October.

Project Week

I think it important to inform parents and guardians about the importance of Project Week at RBC. At one level this is about the projects themselves – this week will see some students working on different social service projects with a range of external partners such as Kindernothilfe e.V., Serve the City, various farmers, even Freiburg's local animal park - to engaging in outdoor challenge (one group will be climbing up Germany's highest mountain) or various creative endeavours. At another level, Project Weeks are about planning and then the execution of plans, together with the final accounting as each group submits its receipts for the week away. Almost all the projects are student-conceived and student-led, and the groups learn about risk assessment, how to find safe but budget-priced accommodation and public transport. Project Week also is about travel, for many of our students to visit places they have heard much about and for many to discover new places. For most it is learning to come out on a strict budget of €190 per student for the week including safe transport and accommodation, food and any other costs associated with the project. In some parts of the world €190 is a lot of money, maybe enough to sustain a family for a month. In western Europe this is a modest amount if one is not staying at home. Project Week is also about learning to work in a team. Putting all these factors together, you will understand that the 'Project' aspect of Project Week is not always as rigorously planned for or achieved as would be the case for a staff run study week, and that the learning always is much more than the stated project – important as the projects are.

Why does RBC allow and even encourage student-led Project Weeks? It is our observation that schools and other institutions, particularly those in the global North, are doing more and more to ensure the safety of young people while within the confines of the school or institution. It is hard to argue against this type of approach, but this type of approach has unintended consequences in that young people are less and less equipped to navigate safely those places where they are not under the strict supervision of adults. One cannot teach people to be autonomous, responsible young adults without at some point letting them be autonomous - and hoping that one has prepared the ground well enough that they are responsible. There comes a time when there isn't an authority figure standing in front to sort everything out if something needs to be initiated, if a group needs to be pulled together, if something goes wrong. Far better that this happen in a context of relative safety (in global terms, most parts of Europe are relatively safe), where adults have had a degree of oversight over the planning and (light) risk assessment, where adults will be checking in with each group on a daily basis, and where there is a team on call in Freiburg to mobilize support quickly if something more serious goes wrong - if needs be to travel to the group. Naturally, RBC insists on a member of staff being part of a group if the Project involves heightened physical risk (for example, the hike up the Zugspitze, Germany's highest mountain, or a bouldering trip to Fontainebleau near Paris). Year after year our students and our graduates report that their RBC Project Weeks were periods of intense learning and discovery and the highlight of their UWC experience.

I wish all our students a week of great learning starting on Sunday, hopefully also a week of relaxation from the academic and (for 2nd year students) university application pressures of the last weeks.

If you wish to write to me, please feel free to do so in a language of your choice.

With best wishes,

Helen White

Rektor