

Rektor's Quarterly Report – March 2017

Student Matters

The final phase of last term was extremely positive with a series of Christmas celebrations, from a ceremonial turning on of the lights plus bonfire on the edge of the fjord to the Christmas dinner in the Kantine. A well-planned set of events in early December helped to lift any flagging spirits culminating in the Christmas College Meeting on the last day of term with a special power-point slideshow set to 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star' - recorded by a group of students - of the term gone by.

We also benefited from having paced November slightly more effectively than in previous years – with a well-positioned November Break and other activities.

On the penultimate afternoon of term, a team of student volunteers kindly helped to put on an event – including a Santa's grotto - in 'Sperrestova', the wooden house behind Bekker House, for the children of staff working at both RCN and the Rehabilitation Centre. On the evening following the departure of the buses to the airport, the staff Julebord was held in the Høegh – with a strong turn-out from both Support and Education Staff.

One member of staff and five students – Hilde (Norway), Helen (Germany), Juan Pablo (Colombia), Pam (Venezuela), Shweta (India), Yael (Israel) - attended the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony and candlelit procession. The 2016 prize was awarded to Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos.

We arranged the finances again so that we could offer to fly home all the second year students on Travel Support, providing them with the opportunity to reconnect with home and to 'recharge their batteries' before returning for the final phase of the IB programme.

Thirty-four students (including three second years) joined the RCN Winter Programme for the December break – this figure was significantly larger than the previous year due to the admissions intake in August 2016. The day after the end of term, the group headed by bus to Oslo and were superbly hosted by our UWC network during their stay. The students' programme included a visit to the SOS offices, ice skating and a winter wonderland, and various museums. The students headed directly to the Red Cross cabin at Langeland – in spite of some initial reservations expressed by the students about the lack of internet many found it quite liberating – encouraging conversation – and many said it was the best part of the winter programme. The students wrote signed cards to all involved expressing their 'deep and humble gratitude'.

The following staff members deserve special praise for their support of the Winter Programme and the students: Thor, Alex, Josh, Arne Osland, Arne Ophaug, Svein Peder, Hildegunn, Daniel and Barbara. This year, Hildegunn also organised for every student on the winter programme to spend some time with a local host family.

The employees at Red Cross Haugland Rehabilitation Centre decided that this year their Christmas presents from their workplace – with a total sum of 30,000 kroner – would go to 'Book Book Tuk Tuk', a project in Cambodia being put together by some of our students and which has been put forward as RCN's entry in the Aurora Competition.

Students returned from their December breaks in good heart.

Important news on individual students includes:

In December, RCN was invited to nominate four outstanding current second years for the Davis-Mahindra International Scholarship Award. Advisors were requested by the university office to nominate students from their advisor groups they felt met the selection criteria. The following students were nominated this year to represent RCN as Davis-Mahindra International Scholars:

Flor (Argentina), Johanne (Norway), Nikita (Belarus) and Ravi (India).

We are continuing to look at the rhythm of the two year programme to ensure that we are able to reduce the strain on students – and, for that matter, staff. The process of consultation continued this term with workshops for Education Staff, Support Staff, Student Council, Standing Committees with feedback passed onto the working party. The Deputy Rektor has been asked to lead this process as to redesigning the shape of the two year programme and to make recommendations for implementation in the academic year first for 2017-8 and then 2018-9.

We also have held a meeting with one of the doctors (an AC alumna) at the Dale Medical Centre as to how we can improve the partnership and how the Dale team can contribute to training for staff and students, and our health and wellbeing programme.

A recent RCN Life Skills session for first years focused on RCN's 'Safety Net' – happiness, wellness and self-care with focuses on personal, academic, social, physical, emotional wellness. This is part of the College's commitment to focusing on our health and wellness programme.

The opening month of term has been busy – from academic commitments to the RCN Model United Nations, from the Red Cross First Aid Course to Project Based Learning activities (including the family-sponsored Neil Davis Memorial PBL), from the New Year's Prom with Dale Vg to Valentine's Day celebrations. Given the positioning of Friluftsveka by our Outdoor Department, the first five weeks of term have had a slight staccato effect with the academic timetable being frozen every fortnight to accommodate our extra-academic programme. A better rhythm will be introduced for Jan / Feb 2018.

Our MUN was opened by Arne Øi, a member of the UN Association West (based in Bergen), and was also attended by a team of students and staff from Nordahl Grieg vgs.

A group of our students came together to learn and share the 'Sami Eatnan Duoddariid' joik in celebration of the 100th Sami National Day.

Pardis Shafafi, the coordinator of our Survivors of Conflict programme at the Norwegian Red Cross, came to visit the campus and meet the students for the first time. During her visit, Pardis took the time to meet the members of staff at RCN and RKHR who contribute to the programme and to talk with the other student participants in this programme.

The results of the second round of the Abel Maths Competition (Abelkonkurransen) were announced in early February – and three (Angela, Ayca and Nikita) will now be invited to participate in the final round of this prestigious competition in mid-March at Trondheim.

Chris Hamper and Simon Ramsay led a group of six students to surf in Hoddevik bay in early February – an example of the College's commitment to providing many opportunities to engage with friluftsliv. One alumna wrote in response on Facebook: 'I still remember it like yesterday'.

In spite of low levels of snowfall, Friluftsveka has been a great success – the first years were split into two groups with one group heading to Stryn and the other participating in a 'Winter Carnival on

Campus' before swapping location. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive with challenges experienced and new friendships forged. Second years remained on campus to revise for the forthcoming mock exams.

The Student Council continues to make a significant contribution to life on campus. Members of the EMT have been impressed by the mature and thoughtful approach to their role within the community.

IT has continued to be an area we are focusing on with the IT Committee currently working on provisional IT policies for students and staff.

Avis, the Red Cross Coordinator, has launched the revised Red Cross Diploma for both first and second years.

Norwegian language is available to students as a taught IB course, a weekly extra-academic activity with an introduction to all first years built into the RCN Life Skills programme. The College has also advertised an on-line course for beginners offered by the University of Oslo (Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies) through Future Learn which has been taken up by some of our students.

A group of 18 students visited Dale vgs for a Norwegian universities' fair. We continue to explore new routes for our graduates within the Nordic region – and we are currently liaising with the University of Western Norway and the University of Bergen for possible connection points.

Two students – Ghada (Palestinian Refugee in Lebanon) and Maria (Colombia) have been selected to represent the College at the Tutu Foundation UK Peace Summit – on the tem of 'Aftermath of Conflict – Managing the Peace'.

The Foundation Year students are thriving and some fellow students, under the guidance of Angie Toppan (the Learning Support Coordinator), have written profiles of these students for our 'People of RCN' column and for the relevant pages of our website.

Management and Staffing

Ellen Merete Bye has taken on the role of Admin Team Leader – an important role in terms of coordinating personnel and developing cooperation and collaboration within the team.

We are delighted to announce that it is confirmed in tandem with our partner, SoF Fylkeskommune, that Bill Wilson has been granted a lærling (trainee) position in the IT Department through to summer 2019.

Mostafizur (Mostak) Rahman has been appointed to the position of Development and Alumni Relations Officer for RCN. Mostak is an alumnus of RCN (1999 to 2001) from Bangladesh (and SOS Children's Villages). We have started important work in engaging Alumni Year Reps, alumni and former members of staff.

Fan Xin Ling has taken over from Luo Dan as the Chinese teacher at RCN, attached to our College through the Confucius Institute, Bergen.

Alf Magne Salbu took over the position of Head of Maintenance from Vidar Jensen on 1st January – Vidar will work part-time until his retirement.

We have been approached by a former student of Alessandro Cozzarini's for some teaching work experience. We are open and keen to support those embarking on teaching careers and looking for work experience in a chosen subject – hence our partnership with the World Teaching Programme at Leiden University. Loredana Stroe (Romania) joins us from Sunday 19th February to Saturday 1st April – and will focus her energies on helping the Foundation Year students with extra support / tutorials.

The Board of UWC Connect AS was pleased to announce the appointment of Leonora Kleiven to the position of Daily Leader of UWC Connect. Leonora currently works as a Key Account Manager in the Sales and Marketing Department of Enoro after taking undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications in Business and Administration at the Norwegian School of Economics (NHH). She will start in this role full-time in early April – and will be visiting campus between now and then for meetings and to contribute to the handover of this portfolio.

Edmund Cluett (TOK coordinator and Communications Team Leader) and Angie Toppan (English B and Learning Support Coordinator) have requested a two year unpaid leave of absence with effect from the end of this academic year – and this has been granted. They have given an enormous amount both in the classroom and beyond during their time at RCN and it will undoubtedly be a challenge to replace their skills and generosity of spirit for this two year period. They are outstanding members of the team and contributors to the mission and values of RCN.

On the leave of absence front, the Rektor and Chair of the Board have granted Alistair Robertson (Deputy Rektor) an unpaid personal six month leave of absence (for the first term of the academic year 2017-8).

We need therefore to advertise for some new positions for the forthcoming academic year. We already have a plan to cover and support Alistair's absence including Pete Wilson as Acting Deputy Rektor. Ola Hovland, in liaison with local municipalities, is also exploring the possibility of recruiting a part-time psychologist for RCN in support of pastoral care.

We also placed on the staff notice board an announcement inviting members of staff to put themselves forward if they are interested in developing their teaching by taking on a different (to current) combination of subjects teaching certain subjects, in taking on residential responsibilities etc.

Mark Chalkley, our Senior University Counsellor, visited Case Western University in January and took the opportunity to connect with two recent RCN alumni.

We continue to place greater emphasis on delivery in the classroom and to promote the good practice of teacher lesson observations - a week in February has been set aside, during 2nd year examinations (hence, reduced teaching commitment), in which colleagues will visit each other's first year classes as a means to promote reflective practice as well as greater knowledge of the work of others.

Simon Ramsay will be teaching Biology for the duration of June at our sister College in Swaziland – in response to the Head's request for a cover teacher for this period. This will provide a superb professional opportunity for Simon.

In early February, Julius Krajnak also led a highly stimulating 'Talking about Teaching' session on the Finnish educational system and the design of classrooms.

Our Staff Room has been refurbished with new sofas, tables, a collection of prints relevant to our mission by a Costa Rican artist – and we also asked staff what magazines / papers they would like us to order. This initiative has been introduced to create a more welcoming environment for staff members and to encourage greater interaction. In tandem with this, a team of staff (Lisa, Cristina and Daniel) has introduced an occasional ‘koselig’ evening in which individual members of staff can offer a talk on an area of specialism. The first event took place in Sperrestova with Alistair giving a presentation on vultures to over 20 members of staff.

One of the highlights of the term was an event coordinated by Simon Ramsay and RCN in tandem with Jakob Sande Selskapet and Litteraturmisjonen. A Burns-Sande evening was held in Dale with a dinner, speeches and songs with over 50 guests drawn from the RCN staff and the local community. This was a superb initiative and there are plans afoot for the Jan 2018 with Scottish dancing / gammaldans added to the programme.

Reflections / Developments

It is with pleasure we received the news in mid-December from the Royal Palace that Her Majesty Queen Sonja will visit the College on the 21st and 22nd September 2017.

We have written to Utdanningsdirektoratet both to inform of our plan to create a programme centred on inclusion and to invite participation. We have just received a reply which, in summary recognises our ‘valuable contribution to the educational system’ and encourages us to continue our ‘good work with inclusive education’ but they decline to be directly involved in the conference. Although a little disappointed, we have put ourselves on their radar through this process and have their blessing to continue with this programme. We shall consider how best to engage with a focus on local engagement with SoF.

Our Communications Team members have continued to profile individuals on our ‘People of RCN’ – a weekly profile on the home page of our website of current students, alumni, current or former member of staff and other supporters. This initiative has received lots of positive feedback including one email from an alumnus: ‘This is a great idea – to have alumni specific newsletters to start creating a culture of ‘giving’ not just about money, but about talent and expertise. Thank you to the team for doing this’. Another wrote: ‘I really appreciate it: it makes me feel more encouraged to engage in activities with UWC ideals’.

We have also initiated social media coverage of the two places we now have as a partnership between the College and Sogn og Fjordane Fylkeskommune.

UWC RCN Strategy 2020 was created to document our highest priorities and provide a clear path to RCN’s future. We have, since launch, shifted from imagination to action. We have turned the six strategic areas (Academics; Extra-Academics; Pastoral; Stewardship, Management and Impact) into action points – and Ola, as COO, has made a vital contribution to this. In a recent meeting with the new Secretary General (Bernt Apeland) of the Norwegian Red Cross, we were able to show that our partnership is a strategic priority and then to update him with recent developments.

The letter of invitation to Council (and observers) and the provisional itinerary were distributed in early December.

The UWC International Board has asked that all UWCs enter into a process of accreditation with an internationally recognised agency by 2017. Pete Wilson (IB Diploma Coordinator) has been asked to lead the CIS (Council of International Schools) Evaluation and Accreditation process. We shall be receiving Monica Greeley in May for the Membership Application visit.

The financial year has finished with a surplus of NOK 4.7 million. This positive result follows a series of actions including increased income generation (including fundraising), responsible fiscal control and careful management of budget lines. We need to continue to work hard to ensure that RCN remains a cost efficient and financially sound enterprise – with financial sustainability as one of the central pillars of RCN Strategy 2020.

We have much to look forward to in the coming weeks. It remains imperative that students of all profiles are given the opportunity to flourish here at RCN – and it is the EMT's opinion that the students are happier and more secure on campus, with developing support systems around them. Ashok, the Director of Residential Life, and his team are working extremely hard to support the students.

There is still a long way to go. We are currently reviewing our calendar year and the Director of Residential Life is developing a system of monitoring students and a coordinated programme of health and wellbeing at RCN.

The Support and Education Staff continue to support the students in all that they do.

The Education and Central Management Teams continue to work effectively and supportively in tandem.

I'd like to finish with two reflections:

We had a successful event at Marianne Andresen's house in late November and invited some members of the Storting's Education Committee. Norunn Tveiten Benestad (Høyre) wrote in thanks: 'UWC is an exciting school concept that I wish even more young people have the opportunity to experience. It does something fundamentally with the attitude of young people to be in such an international and engaging environment'.

A reminder to us all of the impact of an RCN education.

Antonin Besse, patron and honorary vice-president of UWC, passed away in December. It was Antonin who bought and donated St Donat's Castle for the founding of Atlantic College back in 1962 and who, later, contributed to the founding of the UWCs in Italy and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Highly articulate, erudite and perceptive, Tony was committed to following the progress of Yemeni students on our campus. With support from the British Council, he would carry out selections himself with his motto at the heart of his forging connection between the backgrounds of the students and UWC: 'From Nowhere to Somewhere'. Our Yemeni students owe him a debt of gratitude and so do all members of our College, past and present, given the rich addition of our Yemeni students to our deliberately diverse community over the years.

Frenchman, Arabist, businessman, educator and friend – we thank him for all that he gave to UWC and educating for peace and a sustainable future.

Richard D A Lamont
Rektor
21st February 2017