

Graduation Speech 2018 – Welcome Address

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all our guests here today - from parents, families and host families to members of the RCN Board, from our regional partners to representatives from the Norwegian Red Cross (our largest delegation ever) and SOS Children's Villages Norway.

Today is a day of great celebration.

After the fast and challenging pace of the RCN experience, today is a day for turning back momentarily and allowing a heartfelt joy to catch up with our graduates. From the national flags to the potentially embarrassing Swedish placards in the auditorium today, from the colour and vibrancy of global national dress to the last precious seconds of your time here on campus.

It is an emotionally charged day for us all.

As part of Student Introduction Week, we invited you to sit here in the auditorium one evening and write a letter to yourself either in English or, if appropriate, your native language and to outline confidentially your feelings, your concerns, your dreams and sage advice to yourself as you embarked on your RCN journey. We have kept them sealed and undisturbed – and we shall hand the letter back to you when you come to pick up your diploma.

This letter, we hope, connects the student you have become at the point of departing the door of RCN with the student you were on arrival.

I trust that during the course of today you find a moment to think of your loved ones unable to be here whose unstinting support, daily sacrifices, and dreams for your futures have guided you to this point. It is your achievement; it is their achievement.

They are with us in spirit today.

This is an opportunity for me to invite our graduates to show their appreciation to their families (here and back home), their host families, our founders and supporters, and to the staff for the unstinting support they have received on the road so far.

The relationship between RCN students and staff is rightly characterized as a partnership. We have tried our very best to 'be there' for you, 'to help you through'.

On this note, I would like to turn to some staff members, respected for their contributions to community building, for whom this also is an emotional day - and to take a moment to thank Avis, Cristina, Erik, Kathini, Marloes and Simon for their outstanding contributions to RCN. All of you have individually enriched our world - and the College shall miss you. We wish you the very best for the adventures ahead.

I have two messages for our graduates of 2018 - the first on the power of friendship across cultures.

I have commissioned the RCN choir to sing 'A Little Help from my Friends' - originally written by the Beatles in 1967 and covered by Joe Cocker - this afternoon as a reminder to our second years of the days gone by and the days ahead – and the power of friendships forged through UWC.

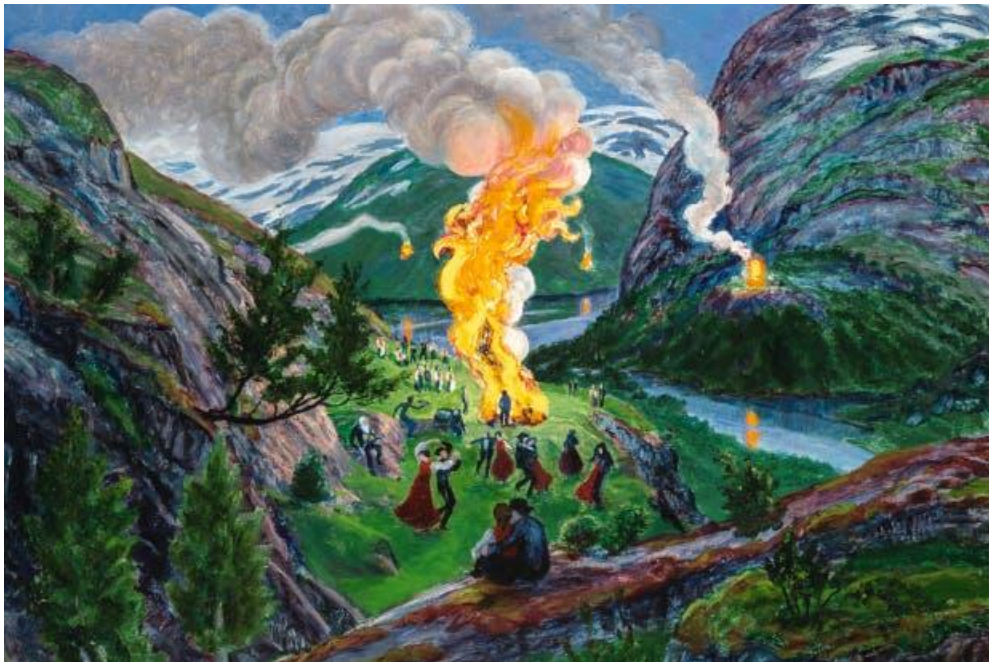
You have developed here at RCN both intercultural understanding, a shared humanity and a global friendship network which will serve, stimulate and support you for the rest of your lives. From time to time, you will pick up your RCN kaleidoscope and images and experiences caught immortal in your memory will help you to draw strength for the next step.

An essential part of the education you and we receive at RCN is that we learn to value those around us and celebrate and support all our differences.

Diversity is our strength.

There are some of you who have been here for three years including a Foundation Year and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you – Sumaya, Samira, Mean and Petter - for all that you have given.

On the front cover of today's programme, there is a reproduction of my favourite picture in Norwegian art by Nikolai Astrup - a unique and innovative artist from this region.



The painting captures the culmination of the rites of spring in a bonfire on midsummer's eve – the snow remains on the mountain tops, the streams and rivers flow into the fjord, the bonfire's

yellow flames bring the landscape to life, the locals in their bunads stare up at the flames, the fiddler plays on the rock, the revellers dance through the night and a couple sit in the foreground.

I take this as my metaphor today. You too have wondered at this unparalleled landscape, worn your national dress with pride, made lifelong friends, emerged from darkness into light, taken part in the rituals of RCN (from the colourful spring festival of Holi to the end-of-class water fight), and today we celebrate your achievements and dance with you around the fire of graduation.

Cherish your memories and cherish your friendships.

My second message is about the power of communities.

The challenges of today strike me as more complex and affect all of us more immediately with a world more polarized than we remember. Our responsibility at RCN is to prepare you to confront and embrace these issues in the years ahead.

Increasingly, I realise that our role as educators is to help to build communities on our UWC campuses – and to encourage our students both to take a more inclusive approach in the world beyond and to contribute actively to building communities, rooted in dignity and respect.

You will need to step forward to the challenges ahead.

In April 1910, Theodore Roosevelt - the 26th US President - gave an address to students at the Sorbonne, the University of Paris. At the heart of the speech is a call to action, to seek to make a difference, to give repeatedly of one's self (and one's best):

'It is not the critic who counts: not the (person) who points out how the strong [one] stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the [person] who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends him [or her] self for a worthy cause: who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, [fails but fails] while daring greatly - so that one's place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.'

This is stirring stuff and perhaps a little outdated in its imagery. It does, however, offer valuable encouragement - to see the world as it is, to reject the comfortable and luxurious position of the armchair critic, and to be a force for the betterment of our shared world.

This year's graduates have given generously to this community in so many areas. You can, and should, dare greatly to win fulfilment which will enrich not only yourselves but also the communities you will serve.

The Roosevelt speech has a special resonance for me - as a colleague unexpectedly hand wrote it in a card upon my first promotion as a Head of an English Faculty with the associated challenge to lead for the first time in a professional capacity. It has served me well as a 'touchstone' in the years in between.

What sustains us as educators at RCN is hope – hope that you, aware of the unique privilege of a UWC education, in turn give back in some shape or form and strive, throughout your lives, to build a peaceful and more sustainable future and to be role models within your communities for conversation, companionship and compassion.

This is our hope.

This afternoon, there will undoubtedly be tears of sadness, of relief, of exhaustion and of happiness – and you will have that sense of ‘half turn[ing] to go yet turning stay’ [Christina Rossetti] as Kathini and I shall in late July when, as a family, we take what we have learnt here at RCN to a new residential community in British Columbia, Canada.

And as the bus this evening bumps over the familiar road to Flekke, please take a moment to reflect on the magic of the place – and, at the same time, reflect that you are a part of a larger, compelling and unstoppable hope which radiates today from our fjord.

Dare greatly.

It has been a privilege to be Rektor of this College for the past six years.

Richard D A Lamont
Rektor
19th May 2018