

Dear Bacheliers of Europa School UK, dear Honoured Guests, dear Parents, dear Colleagues, past and present.



I stand here representing the future and the past. I am immensely proud of what we have achieved as the Europa School UK. Nearly six years ago a father of one of our British primary pupils approached me after we had been open for about six weeks. He greeted me with a beaming smile: “It’s working, my son is speaking German. Of course I can’t understand a word, but it’s definitely German.” Today, looking out at a Europa School from age 4 to 18, I can confidently echo his words: “It’s working”

But I am mindful that for you, our first bacheliers, we have simply rounded off a European School education that for some of you dates back 14 years. As a British teacher of mathematics, I can’t resist a Newton quote: “If I have seen further than others, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants.” Europa owes its very existence to the educational giant, the European School Culham and you have come to us from the great tradition built that school.

It is usual to finish with thanks, but I must interrupt now to acknowledge the debt we owe to so many, not least those who have remained to help establish our secondary school, most notably the person who has worked phenomenally to lay paving for every step you have taken through your Baccalaureate: Mrs Lynn Wood.

I have walked alongside you for five years and suddenly burst into your lives for this final run in. I have brought with me all the glories of UK funding: bigger classes, broken heating, overworked staff, obsession with the lack of money, the list goes on. But I have also been able to offer you riches: a staff team totally dedicated to our common European heritage, a belief in the pedagogical advantage of our curriculum and a passion to see you achieve the best you can.

And what a success, despite all the upheaval.

The European School maintained its high standards right up to the end: in 2016 the Bac average grade was 81.34%, in 2017 80.86%. So how do you measure up? Well with an average of 81.79% you beat both scores!

Congratulations on your success. Congratulations too to your proud and sometimes long-suffering parents. Congratulations to your teachers who, it

must be said, have at times worked harder for this than you have! And congratulations to all those who have supported you in the background, the unsung heroes of our school who work in offices or around the site serving you in so many capacities.

Your schools have played a vital role in bringing you to this moment, but when it comes to our European Schools, it is not just about academic success. You have reaped the reward today of your hard work, but I am struck too by your kindness, care and (mostly) gentle sense of fun.

The European Union was born out of the desire for reconciliation and constructive cooperation in the wake of the devastation of the Second World War. The European Schools are from their foundation part of that healing process. The UK stands at the point of leaving the EU, but the Europa School will continue to play its part in holding the UK to account in preserving that vision. It is not a lost cause. In fact it was the very British Winston Churchill who gives me an excellent account of the vision and confidence that the UK can still play a major part in the future:

This was Churchill in Amsterdam on 9th May (Europe Day) in 1948: “We hope to see a Europe where [those] of every country will think as much of being a European as of belonging to their native land, and that without losing any of their love and loyalty of their birthplace. We hope wherever they go in this wide domain, ..., they will truly feel: ‘Here I am at home. I am a citizen of this country too.’ Let us meet together. Let us work together. Let us do our utmost – all that is in us – for the good of all.”

... “for the good of all” ... and that leads to a final point - a final opportunity to teach you or at least remind of something before you go.

We are today celebrating your success. But please as you go forward from here, remember you are privileged in a way that many are not.

I have had the delight twice of being in the audience to listen to a man whom I consider to be a living saint. That man is Jean Vanier. He too came from a privileged background – the son of a diplomat who served as an ambassador and as Canadian Governor General. After a brief, but successful naval career, Jean obtained a PhD in Philosophy in Paris. He then changed course and became the founder of l’Arche, an international network of communities where people with and without intellectual disabilities live and work together as peers.

In an interview, Jean Vanier expressed more eloquently than I ever could the vision I would like you to take out from this school:

“The history of humanity is one group breaking off from another group, creating their rituals, creating their language and so on and then wars. Very quickly my culture is better than your culture, my religion is better than your religion, my way of doing things is better than your way of doing things. Our problem is that we have been so caught up in prejudice. How can I today be an artisan of peace?

“We like to say at l’Arche, ‘change the world one heart at a time’...

Other people may be difficult, but how to eradicate the seeds of fear and the seeds of hate? The thing that will change us – if I see the other person as precious.... maybe we can only discover what our humanity is when I meet the different. ‘Cause I can think that humanity is my culture and we are the best, and we can become victims of others, or we can victimise others; we are the good ones and the others are the bad ones... and so we create walls. So what is important is helping people to grow to become free – free from fear, fear of the others.

“Free to open ourselves up to other cultures; tell me your story, ‘cause each one has a story. I’m not there to change you, I’m there to walk with you and maybe in listening to you, to reveal to you that you are a precious person.... The extraordinary thing is that if we learn to love the enemy, the enemy will change me, will help me discover that maybe the greatest enemy is in myself, with my protective defence mechanisms, my need to prove that I am better than you. And I am not better than you. I am just myself. ... What is important is that we can meet and then meeting we can transform each other.”

I welcomed you to the Europa School, but that was something of a paradox. Most of you were, after all, territorially here first and you have welcomed me. And now we come to not only your final event, but also mine. It has been a joy and an honour for me to share this day with you. Take the best of you have received through your schooling and offer it generously to the world.

Ladies and gentlemen, I ask you to join me in showing our appreciation for our first Bacheliers.

*Peter Ashbourne,
Founding Principal of Europa School UK
Baccalaureate Proclamation, 7th July, 2018.*