



Abbey Gate College

Commemoration & Prize-Giving

September 2022

Head's Address & Closing Remarks



Abbey Gate College

**Commemoration & Prize-Giving
Autumn 2022**

Dear Honoured Guests, Trustees, Governors, Parents, Staff, and Students

Let me start by saying that we did consider very carefully, a week ago, whether this event could, and should, actually go ahead. In the end, we decided that it actually represented an opportunity for us, as a College community. Together, we can recognise the life of Queen Elizabeth II, acknowledge the accession of King Charles III, and in the same gathering, commend what our pupils – with the support and guidance of their deeply caring and committed teachers – have been achieving in recent months.



So, what was going to be our 'Celebration Day' has rightly, appropriately, and respectfully become our 'Commemoration & Prize-Giving'.

As I look around the room today, I think for almost every single one of us, Elizabeth II has been our Queen throughout all of our lives. She was 96 years old when she passed, and, as we remember so clearly from this summer's Platinum Jubilee celebrations, 70 of those were as Queen of Great Britain and the wider Commonwealth, of over 50 additional countries.

As a child, we read about queens, kings, princesses, and princes in fairy-tales and we watched magical stories in Disney cartoons. From that early age we were introduced to another world, completely unlike our own, of: grand palaces, sumptuous banquets, amazing balls, fabulous clothes, incredible travels, and luxuries that will only exist in our imaginations. And yes, there is a truth in this that aligns with some aspects of what Queen Elizabeth experienced throughout her life, from her childhood as a Princess to when she became a very young Queen in her mid-twenties, on the sudden death of her father, King George VI.

But golden carriages, woodland castles, and bejewelled crowns make for a very superficial perspective. To be a monarch is to give of oneself, wholly and completely, to the service of others. It is a duty of remarkable personal sacrifice. There are no days off from being Queen. Every action, every reaction, every word, every opinion (such as may be permitted), every item of clothing, every choice – was observed and scrutinised by millions around the world and, to a large extent, were all guided and orchestrated by teams of advisors and officials.

When Queen Elizabeth was crowned in 1953 she said: *"I have in sincerity pledged myself to your service, as so many of you are pledged to mine. Throughout all my life and with all my heart I shall strive to be worthy of your trust."* Three months ago, she had afternoon tea with Paddington Bear, and only last week she accepted Liz Truss as a new Prime Minister. No retirement. Queen Elizabeth served until the very end of her life. She gave all of herself to her duties as monarch for more than 70 full years. That is a remarkable example of Service. And it deserves our deepest and most sincere commendation, acknowledgement, and gratitude.

I will return to the Queen in my closing remarks.

For now, let us turn our attention to our pupils and our prize-giving.



Traditionally in events such as these, the Head's speech was the one, annual occasion to actually share in public what the school had been doing over the past year. But it's a little bit different now. Email, social media, platforms, websites – the Digital Age has opened up so many ways and opportunities for a school to communicate, at any time that suits. And we do.

So, the purpose of my Head's address today is not to list everything that we have been doing at Abbey Gate College over the last 12 months, because, for the most part, you actually already know that. And for anything that I do choose to mention, I am not just going to talk about the winners, the cups, the medals, and the prizes. That would be too limited and too selective. And it is not, deep down, what we are about at Abbey Gate College.

Over the past year, every single pupil in our College has experienced moments of failure, moments of success, moments of stuck-ness, moments of flow, moments of can't-do-this-yet, moments of got-it-now, moments of we've-lost, and moments of we've won. Every single pupil has persevered in a way that must never be overlooked or taken for granted.

Since 2020 in particular, the world around them has seemed to spin completely off its axis. And their adults, who should represent some form of reliable stability and be role-models of calm reassurance for these young people, have themselves faced unprecedented challenge, if not even trauma. Yet these pupils here today have kept going, they have kept surviving, and so many have – with the support of the College and their families – continued to thrive. We are commending all of our pupils today, for all that they have been through, and all that they are still going through.

If I do think back to our Autumn Term, I recall clearly numerous early morning or late afternoon meetings with my Leadership Team, as national guidance changed constantly in relation to mask-wearing, distancing, frequency of testing, isolation rules, and absence timescales. It was hard. There is no doubt about it. Our College community rallied round, co-operated, and supported us throughout; but we never knew what the next day may

bring, how much remote learning would need to be provided on top of in-class provision, or whether we would have enough teachers and support staff for each day.

However, our aim throughout was to do as much as we could, so that our pupils' experiences could be as full as reasonably possible. Team-building, Hallowe'en, and sporting successes still made headlines for us. We even put on a challenging and courageous drama production of 'Monsters', with some superb performances of this stark, intense, and highly acclaimed play. A pre-Christmas family pantomime it was not; but it did showcase admirably that we have students with seriously good skills, able to deliver a serious message, with real depth and maturity.

Nationally, there was much talk about academic catch-up. For us at Abbey Gate College, this was not such a big issue, because provision by our staff and support from home during the lockdowns had been strong. Less well reported, but actually something that all schools experienced, was the need for 'pastoral catch-up'. Our pupils' habits had adjusted to being away from social and community contexts, and some key developmental goals for our young people in these critical years had actually been missed. So we put a lot of effort during this term into how to be together again, how to relate with each other, how to trust, and how to manage the whirlwind of thoughts and emotions that were going through so many of our pupils' heads as a result of the pandemic.



During the Spring Term, we pushed ourselves further; even though the country really couldn't decide if we were mid-pandemic, neo-endemic, post-pandemic, or just floundering haplessly. Our co-curricular programme was fuller, and even included a whole College Wellbeing Day, organised by our students; our Young Enterprise team was, once again, winning in their various heats; we launched our own academic competition for creative writing and saw some of our pupils being selected at national level for publication of their words. Sport – whether football, rugby, netball, swimming, or athletics – again saw individuals and teams giving their all and achieving some remarkable wins as a result.



Our Summer Term started with a telephone call early on a Monday morning from the Independent Schools Inspectorate. With formal, internal examinations for all of our Senior School and one of our Aldford year groups out all week on residential, there could have been more 'normal' weeks to select. However, it was what it was, and we were delighted with all that the inspectors recognised in their (very brief) time with us. Of all the many, positive statements that we could select from the full report, I would highlight two in particular.

Inspectors commented: *"Throughout the school pupils answer questions without fear of failure"*. This says so much about our College. It shows that our classrooms are safe spaces for pupils to learn, that our learning is a collective and collaborative activity, and that our pupils are valued for their own thoughts and ideas. This is how we develop self-esteem, self-belief, and self-worth – the foundations of resilience for later life.

Inspectors also said: *"The school is successful in meeting its aim to enable pupils to have the self-confidence to go forward into the changeable world with courage and compassion."* We were founded, 45 years ago, on these holistic values and if all our young people can enter adulthood with the strength to be brave in life, and with the heart to be kind and caring; then we will, as a school and as parents, have done the best job we can.

The Summer Term never eased (!), as we put on full drama productions; suspended lessons during Activities' Week so that pupils could go on residential and trips; confirmed updates to our uniform with brand new House ties for everyone; commissioned a complete re-furbishment of our Sixth Form Centre and Learning Enrichment Cottage; and finished off with a superb music concert, a hugely enjoyable Sports Day, a fabulous art exhibition, Geographers in Iceland, Choristers on national tour, and our Service Project team spending several weeks in Eswatini – an amazing life experience, that they had prepared and fund-raised for so diligently and for so long. It was wonderful that this actually was able to go ahead and our Abbey Gate College

students could make the positive difference they did to the lives of others in a very different community and context.

Mr Green
Director of Studies
1986 – 2022 (36 years)
Happy Retirement!

Mrs Moses
Head of Pastoral
2004 – 2022 (18 years)
Happy Retirement!

Mr Allmand
Deputy Head
2004 – 2022 (18 years)
Happy Part-Retirement!

Mrs Prestwich
MFL/Head of Y7
2007 – 2022 (15 years)
Good Luck in Portugal!

Thank You, Farewell & Good Luck

We also finished the year with a Thank You meal out for our staff. They deserved it! We took the opportunity to remember the passing of Mr John Baines and Mr Trevor Manning Foster who, 45 years ago, were central to the founding of our College. And we also recognised the superb commitment and dedication of Mr Andy Green, retiring after 36 and a half years of wonderful service to our College; Mr Gavin Allmand and Mrs Nerys Moses, retiring after 18 years of admirable commitment and care; and Mrs Ana Prestwich, who has now moved to an international school after 15 years of much valued work.

GCSE Results (Percentage of Entries)

	9-8	9-7	9-5	9-4
2022	27%	47%	85%	96%
2021	21%	43%	87%	97%

A2 Headline Results (Percentage of Entries)

	A*	A	B	C	A*-A	A*-B	A*-C
2022	19%	29%	30%	12%	49%	78%	90%
2021	25%	22%	28%	18%	47%	75%	94%

A Level Results – Abbey Gate College Bucks the National Trend!!

GCSE Results 2022 – Abbey Gate College Continues to Improve, Challenging National Trends

Academic Success 2021-2022

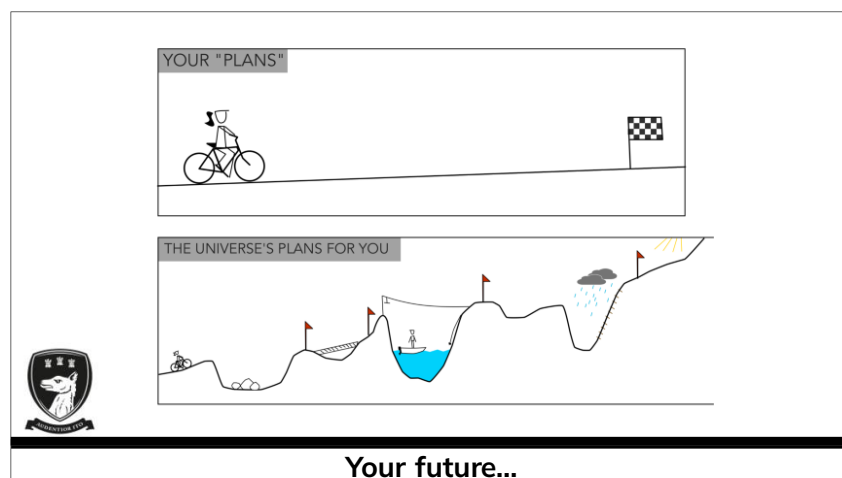
And in August our Upper Sixth and our Year 11 pupils collected their respective A level and GCSE results. The mood of national headlines has not exactly been upbeat during the summer holiday, and the media seemed to delight in darkening the skies of hope in the days ahead of actual publication. Prevalent were expert comments on inflated results during the pandemic, decreasing grade boundaries, and claims of independent schools previously massaging outcomes in response to all their privileged and super-rich

parents. Nationally, there was a drop. But not at Abbey Gate College. At both GCSE and A level, our headline results actually increased on the year before, evidencing not only continuous improvement for our school, but also the integrity of everything the College had managed with results during the pandemic under Mrs Pollard.

These are remarkable outcomes, especially when we think about how much these young people and their teachers have been coping with, during all their time preparing for these examinations. And so many of our students far exceeded 'standardised predictions' of what they would achieve – some by 2 or 3 grades higher in each subject. That's what we call value-added. So, when we celebrate examination results, we commend every single student – not just those who collect a clutch of 9s or A*s, as impressive as that may be. We applaud each individual who worked hard, who kept going, who gave of their best, and who reached the summit of their own mountain; ready for the next.

Both results days were a fabulous way to bring a unique year at Abbey Gate College to a close. But complacency is not one of our foundation values. Courage and compassion are, but not complacency. I will say a little more about that as well in my Closing Remarks.

Closing Remarks:

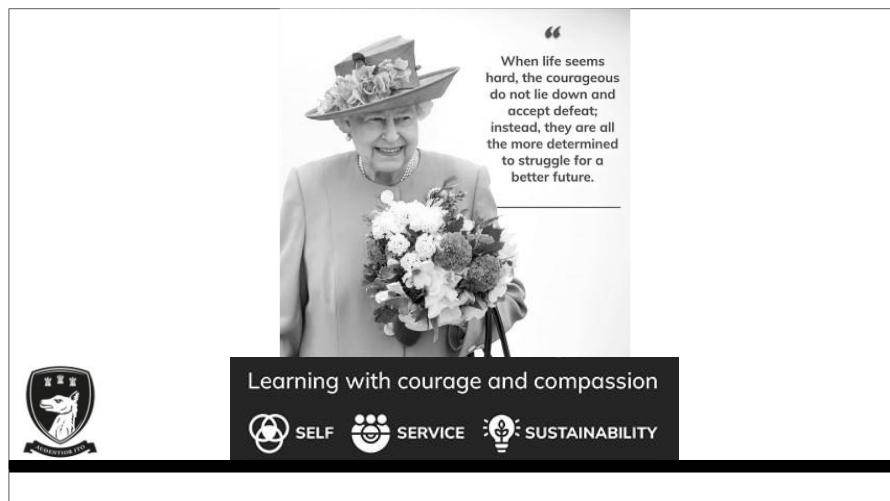


Life is uncertain. Nothing is permanent. And there are no guarantees of anything. The experience of the pandemic has certainly reminded us all of this. And so does Queen Elizabeth's reign. In her life she saw: children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren being born; rockets launch into space and human beings walk on the moon; the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of Apartheid in South Africa; as well as the introduction of the Digital Age and remarkable advancements in scientific discovery and medical care. But she also lived through family deaths and tragedies; natural and community disasters; and an on-going variety of wars, intolerance, and suffering.

For our leavers in particular, be aware and accept please, that this makes for a balanced perspective on Life. Any expectations of a straight line going forward, daily smiles on social media posts, and non-stop happy ever after and success – will be met with a disappointing reality. Life is uncertain. Nothing is permanent. And there are no guarantees of anything.

What you do will shape what you will be.

A further outcome of last year at Abbey Gate College was the re-evaluation of our founding principles from 45 years ago, the evolution of our 'Be Someone' motto, and the re-casting of all this into our 3 new pillars of: Self, Service, and Sustainability. These are for all of us, to help guide us, individually and collectively. Why? So that, in this uncertain existence, we may thrive, not just survive. So that we may have the courage to make changes and do things differently. So that we may have the compassion to take care of ourselves and to take care of others, as we all journey forward together.



Quite appropriately, I will close with some helpful words from Queen Elizabeth: *“When life seems hard, the courageous do not lie down and accept defeat; instead, they are all the more determined to struggle for a better future.”*

And thus, we go forward at Abbey Gate College. Audentior Ito. With Courage. With Compassion. And with our new King, Charles III.

Thank you all for being here today, for your ever valuable support, and for all that you bring to our Abbey Gate College community.