

**Charter Day Speech 2017**  
**Mr John D. Rafter, Headmaster**

**Academic Prize Giving for 2016-17**

**Monday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2017 @ 19:30 in WWH**

Chairman, honoured guest, ladies and gentlemen, staff and students of The King's Hospital:

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of September I celebrated 50 years since I started in KH as a student which was followed closely by my announcement to the Board of Governors that I will retire at the end of this academic year. The Board has initiated the process to recruit a new Head and they hope to be in a position to appoint my successor by Easter. So this will be my final Charter Day Address in KH.

As we are currently going through an educational revolution in Ireland with the phased introduction and implementation of the new Junior Cycle Framework the transition for students and teachers is both exciting and somewhat daunting. The main objective of the new Junior Cycle is to place the student at the centre of the learning process facilitating new ways of learning and assessment over a broader range of skills.

Underpinning the new Junior Cycle is a set of principles, key skills and statements of learning.

The eight principles are Learning to Learn, Choice and Flexibility, Quality, Creativity and Innovation, Engagement and Participation, Continuity and Development, Inclusive Education and a new area of learning called Wellbeing which I will come back to later. The eight key skills are to permeate across the entire curriculum featuring the old norms such as Being Literate and Being Numerate but expanded to include other skills such as Managing Myself, Staying Well, Managing Information and Thinking, Being Creative, Working with Others and Communicating. The aspiration is that through engaging with these key skills students will take greater ownership of their learning, become more actively engaged with digital technology and be encouraged to problem solve and think critically and creatively. The twenty-four statements of learning describe what each student is expected to know, understand and value having participated in junior cycle and KH will have to ensure that all these statements of learning feature in the programme offered to our junior cycle students.

The new subject specifications are being implemented in schools on a phased basis which started with the certification of English this year to be followed by Science and Business Studies in 2019, Irish, Modern Languages and Art in 2020, Maths, Home Economics, History, Geography and Music in 2021 and finally Technical Graphics, Technology and Religious Education by 2022.

Starting from September 2017 Junior Cycle students will be experiencing a new area of learning called Wellbeing. Through the Wellbeing programme students will be learning the knowledge, attitudes and skills to enable them to protect and promote their own wellbeing and that of others. According to Katherine Weare “there is overwhelming evidence that students learn more effectively if they are happy in their educational environment, believe in themselves and feel school is supporting them” and this philosophy is fully endorsed from many perspectives in KH.

The most significant changes in the new Junior Cycle are in the method of assessment and the introduction of a different grading system. A dual approach to assessment, involving classroom-based assessment across the three years and a final externally-assessed, state-certified examination will be recorded in a new Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement. Grades are being replaced by descriptors such as Distinction, Higher Merit, Merit, Achieved and includes Partially Achieved for a score of between 20 and 39%. For the first time the Junior Certificate Class of 2017 will receive their JCPA from The King’s Hospital this Christmas which will reflect a wider range of their achievements including not only their subject results but also giving recognition to their Other Learning Experiences.

We have also had some interesting internal educational developments in KH with the addition of subjects being offered to our already broad curriculum. The introduction of Politics and Society as a senior cycle subject last academic year, with Jerome Devitt as their teacher, has gone from strength to strength with the first group preparing for their Leaving Certificate exam in June 2018 and two classes currently enrolled in Form 5. More of this anon.

This September we introduced Technology as a new practical subject for all First Year students to sample in addition to Home Economics, Technical Graphics, Art, Music and Business Studies. Having sampled each of these six subjects over a 10-week period the First Year students will be able to make a more informed decision about which two of these subjects they choose to continue to study over the next two years of the Junior Cycle programme.

I pleased to report that the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate classes of 2017 performed very well in their State Examinations last June.

30% of the 109 students who sat the Junior Certificate in KH achieved 11 honours grades and overall well over half of the year group at 61% obtained 9 honours or more while 95% achieved at least 4 honours. Impressively 90% of all papers were taken at the Higher level which is important to bear in mind given that our intake is based on mixed academic ability. Once again the girls out-performed the boys and a special word of congratulations to our top achievers who were Saoirse White, Tia Doyle and Ingrid Duggan. Also congratulations to Richard Beattie who was recognized by the State Examinations Commission as a high achiever in Mathematics and Science.

The Class of 2017 performed very well in the Leaving Certificate this year with a new points system in operation for the first time so direct comparisons with previous years do not correspond directly. Nevertheless 23% achieved 500 points or more, 46% scored over 450 points and 59% got over 400 points while 85% were awarded

over 300 points. Perhaps of greater significance is that a very high percentage of the year group were offered either their first or second choices for their chosen third level courses. The top achievers were Alan Armstrong, Saman Ashfaque and Ruth Walsh each with 613 points out of a maximum 625 while Matthew Begley and Scott Le Roux both scored 601 points.

Congratulations also to our university entrance scholars this year:

Jack Donnelly was awarded an Entrance Scholar's Award from UCD, Jack Bambrick has received an Academic Scholarship Award from DCU and Alan Armstrong, Alex Power, Andrew Johnson, Matthew Begley, Ruth Walsh and Scott Le Roux have been awarded Entrance Exhibition Awards from TCD.

Ten KH students have gone on to study outside Ireland to some of the top ranked universities such as Masstricht University, the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow and the University of Vienna.

Congratulations also to John Keane who has been awarded a GAA sports' scholarship to DCU, Josh Maddock who has taken up a Soccer scholarship in the USA and Clinton Wokocha who received a Rugby scholarship from Maynooth University.

Our Special Education Needs Department, coordinated by Mrs Jan Nelson, deserves special mention as we had a number of students requiring special exam accommodations for a variety of reasons. Thanks to their diligence and commitment these students were given the best opportunity of reaching their academic potential which many of them did successfully.

There are a number of proposed building projects in the pipeline in KH over the coming months and years. Although we have experienced some delays in the planning process with regard to the building of the second all-weather hockey pitch we are very hopeful that there will be good news on this front in the near future. The Boarding sub-committee is at an advanced stage of gathering information for plans to upgrade our boarding accommodation and facilities and several meetings have been held to date between teachers and architects, engineers and quantity surveyors about the proposed Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics or STEM Centre which is under consideration. The Board of Governors and the Board of Management along with the staff are being very proactive about making sure that The King's Hospital will continue to provide an exceptional educational environment where every student can thrive.

As a member of the Wellbeing Working Group of the HMC, the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference, I have become increasingly aware of the negative impact Social Media is having on our general Wellbeing and especially on young people. Digital Awareness UK has been carrying out extensive research about Digital Addiction on behalf of HMC schools and has concluded the following: "Social media continues to be a dominant force in the lives of young people, with so many unable to imagine life without it. Competent handling of social media and its general benefits are widely recognized, however schools are beginning to see the impact that its dangerously addictive aspects are having on their students.

Young people are equally worried about how to 'switch off' and manage certain aspects of social media, such as its overemphasis on physical appearance and being seen in the right places with the right people.

The Tech Control campaign provides guidance for parents, students and teachers around healthy online habits and feedback from schools has been extremely positive. There is a growing demand for support in this area.”

Some interesting statistics from their research about staying safe online which involved the participation of over 4,000 young people:

- Despite the ever increasing popularity of social media amongst young people, almost two-thirds (63%) wouldn't mind if social media had never been invented
- 71% are now undergoing Digital Detoxes to take a break from it all together
- A quarter (25%) of young people would consider having a 'brick phone' with no access to social media at all if their friends would do it too.

### **Here are some reasons why young people are rebelling**

The social media trends young people enjoy the least are:

- Tracking locations of friends i.e. 'Snap Maps' (50%)
- People being able to access you 24/7 (46%)
- Live broadcasting (i.e. Instagram Live) (43%)

Many also recognize the Emotional Impact

- 62% of young people think their friends show a fake version of themselves on social media compared to real life, whilst only 15% admit that they have an unrealistic version of themselves on social media compared to real life.
- Over half (57%) have received abusive comments
- Over half (56%) of young people have experienced social media addiction
- Over half (52%) of young people think social media makes them feel less confident about how they look or how interesting their life is
- Over a third (34%) have shared something that they have later regretted

And finally some of the things young people **would like** to see on social media in the future:

- Less advertising (73%)
- Feeling less judged (63%)
- More trusted sites i.e. less fake news (61%)
- Feeling confident to share who they truly are (57%)
- People being more respectful towards others (55%)
- More creative and inspiring content (55%)
- People fighting for worthwhile causes (50%)
- Greater privacy (49%)

In an article in the Guardian newspaper I read recently Justin Rosenstein, the Facebook tech engineer who created the 'like' button, admitted that he had banned himself from Snapchat which he compared to being as addictive as heroin. He is

concerned about the psychological effects on people who research shows, touch swipe or tap their phones up to 2,000 times per day.

There is a growing concern that as well as addicting users, technology is contributing toward so-called “continuous partial attention”, severely limiting people’s ability to focus, and possibly lowering I.Q. One recent study showed that the mere presence of smartphones damages cognitive capacity – even when the device is turned off. Rosenstein says “Everyone is distracted all of the time”.

From an educational perspective while I completely accept that our students must be comfortable and competent with technology I worry about the impact it is having on their ability to concentrate and to interact socially. I am rapidly coming to the conclusion that a ban on the use of mobile devices during the school day would not only be of benefit to our students in terms of their ability to concentrate but that it would also contribute significantly to their overall wellbeing.

The reason KH runs efficiently and successfully is as a result of the many different but interconnected teams within the campus that work well together. So I’d like to take a moment to acknowledge their contribution and to express our gratitude to them:

Thank you,

To the Prefects, Student Council and Mentors for your advice and help in creating a happy atmosphere in the school and to Ray McIlreavy, Susan Leahy & Lorna McGinn who coordinate their activities,

To the Parents’ Association & the KH Past-Pupils Union for your expertise, practical assistance and support,

To nurses Kathy Sutton, Ros Garrett & Jane Newell and Dr Robert Nelson for looking after our wellbeing,

To the Administrative Staff: Mary Wheeler, Ann Clayton, Carly Lynch & Paula Perry, Síle Jio & Michelle Foley in Marketing & Admissions and Linda Toland in HR,

To all our sports coaching staff,

To Pat McCartin and the maintenance staff,

To Peter Wilson & Andrew Richardson who maintain the grounds,

To Kay Boland and the laundry and cleaning staff,

To Christina Foster, John Fields & John Doyle and all the catering staff,

To our chaplain Canon Peter Campion for constantly keeping us spiritually uplifted,

To the House and Duty Staff for your tireless dedication and commitment to the boys and girls in your care,

And a personal word of thanks and appreciation to my PA Lorraine Walker whose meticulous attention to detail and support is very much appreciated.

To the Board of Governors and the Board of Management for the extra-ordinary amount of voluntary time and commitment made by many of you contributing to the smooth running of this large institution.

A special thanks to the Chairman Mr Ken Peare and the two Deputy Chairs, Mr Gordon Milne and Ms Sue Baird for your encouragement and support towards the running of the school.

Many thanks to the members of the Senior Management Team: Deputy Head - Louise Marshall, our recently appointed 2<sup>nd</sup> Deputy Principal – Cormac Ua Bruadair, Head of Finance & Operations - Tony Kearney, Assistant Head of Pastoral Care -

John Aiken, Assistant Head of Academics - Siobhan Daly, Assistant Head of Arts, Culture & International Students – Kerrie O’Reilly who has joined the SMT since January and the recently appointed Director of Sports – David Keelty. Thank you all for your assistance, collective wisdom and constant support in the management of the day to day running of the school.

Finally I want to say “Congratulations and well done!” to all our prize winners tonight and to wish you continued success and enjoyment with your studies in the future.

*John D. Rafter*  
*04/12/2017*