



29 August 2016

Hope, vision and resilience

Dear Parents and community members

There is no doubt that our country is at an interesting time in the history of our young democracy. There is a lot happening that we do not quite understand and the political landscape is particularly toxic after a bruising lesson for the ruling party at the polls. In many ways this is truly democracy at work and we should be reassured that the people of South Africa have spoken and quite clearly are tired of corruption, lies and deceit from leaders.

In this highly emotionally charged time we need to be particularly careful about filtering the information we receive before we make decisions. One of the crucial decisions that government needs to make has to do with the fee increases for tertiary institutions. Government, particularly the executive, seem to be keeping their collective heads in the sand by indicating that there will once again be a 0% fee increase in University tuition in 2016. This will quite clearly have significant effects for excellence and quality at Universities, as more of our top academics will be poached by competitive offers from around the world.

There will need to be collective decision making in the next while should we want to continue to ensure our top ten Universities retain their academic standards in the future. This situation quite clearly makes all of us nervous and anxious, and at times like these there are many scaremongers quietly (or not so quietly) trying to exploit your fear(s). I would urge you to ensure that you consider all the facts before you respond emotionally.

One of the stories I have heard in our small community of Plett and Knysna, is that only a Cambridge education will be able to get you into an international University. Firstly, I would like to give you some facts and secondly challenge anyone who is spreading this blatant lie.

The fact is: most South Africans cannot afford an international university experience for their kids and this argument is quite clearly a red-herring. An education at Harvard this year would have cost your son or daughter \$63 000 without pocket money. This is clearly out of the reach of most middle-class South Africans, unless of course you receive a generous scholarship from the institution of your choice. First and foremost, considering an international University has to start with the cost and this disqualifies the majority of us. As South Africans we will need to take a decision to be more active as citizens and ensure that we *become the change we want to see in the world*, as Ghandi once famously said. We will need to make a difference and in my interaction with Prof Jonathan Jansen, this week, he indicated that we need to make it possible for poor students to attend University by finding ways to sponsor them. I would love to chat to any parent who is willing to help with this. Oakhill spends a significant amount each year on sponsoring students from underprivileged areas to study at University but we can always do more.

I have very little patience for individuals or institutions who purposefully seek to exploit situations for their own selfish purposes. The IEB Matric is for obvious reasons, benchmarked internationally and as a result your children are exposed to world-wide academic standards. This is evident by the amount of students who leave Oakhill to firstly study at international Universities and secondly the fact that the majority of our students are accepted to the University of their choice in South Africa. Oakhill has the following students studying at International Universities:

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Frances Maughan-Brown	Boston College, Massachusetts, United States
Matthew Myers	Cambridge University, England
Mikail Barnard	University of Leipzig, Germany
Maren Seydack	Uni Freiburg (Medicine), Germany
Penelope Ceillier	University Zaragoza, Spain and University of Bath, England
Jeremy Hemmes	Capilano University, Canada
Caroline Pichler	Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management in Salzburg, Austria
Andrew Frost	Edinburgh University, Scotland
Douglas Ericson	University of Bath (Music), England

I would like to challenge the schools in our area to publish a similar list – for the sole reason of celebrating excellence. We should celebrate children, particularly from our area who have achieved this milestone, not use it as a competitive tool to try and attract families at the expense of other educational institutions.

Not only do a select and privileged group of Oakhill children get into international Universities but the vast majority get into the course of their choice at the top South African institutions year on year. Please visit our website if you would like to see my comments on our 2015 Matric results which were clearly outstanding. **Our dux scholar, Dean Matter achieved 9 distinctions in his final examination but more importantly 92% of our candidates achieved a University entrance qualification.**

The fact is – it will be an absolute disaster if our sons and daughters do not have a South African University option to choose from. It will be a tragedy for us and an indictment on our country. We will all need to stand together to ensure we continue to give hope to future generations and every effort counts. Now is not the time for doom and gloom – now is the time for action, now is the time to stand together for the sake of our children and to remind ourselves that our attitudes and conversations are listened to intentionally by our sons and daughters. Now is the time to practice the art of resilience and hard-work, now is the time to practice what we preach. We all have a responsibility to give our children a sense that the future will hold many bright opportunities for them and I, for one actually believe this statement. We need to be more active citizens, Jonathan Jansen recently said: *There is only one way to stop the rot. When ordinary South Africans appreciate the importance of universities in our future, stand up as one and say loudly and clearly: "Enough is enough."*

Nelson Mandela, famously said: *I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb.* Let's get started!

Yours sincerely

Shane Kidwell
HEADMASTER