



WINCHESTER
COLLEGE

From the Warden
Winchester College

All Old Wykehamists

10 March 2021

Dear Old Wykehamist

Thank you to all those who have written to the School following the announcements which we made a month ago. We have received over 200 messages from OWs and others, and I am happy to say that a significant majority have been supportive of the Governing Body's strategy.

Inevitably, however, a number of important questions and concerns have been raised. I thought it would be helpful to provide a broad answer to those questions which have come up most often.

(i) **Why are you doing this?**

The focus of the Governing Body is on the long-term success of the School. Like previous generations of Fellows, we believe in initiating considered and timely change. Our focus is on two areas which were central to the thinking and ambitions of our Founder and remain central to Winchester's future: learning and access. We are also responsible for ensuring the long-term financial health of the School – including its ability to continue to fulfil its charitable obligations (maintaining the Ancient Buildings; provision for the Quiristers; support to parents unable to afford our fees).

Learning

Winchester has a wonderful and unique approach to learning, combining intellectual rigour with a focus on subjects and issues not covered by public exams. It is what makes the School so special. We believe this approach will offer even greater advantages in the future than in the past. But we also need to modernise what we teach and, in some areas, how we do it. That is how we can best help our pupils to thrive in (and contribute to) an interconnected world. Ensuring our boys understand modern China as well as Ancient Greece is, in my view, essential preparation for the 21st century. Similarly, using Div to inculcate the instincts of creativity and the habits of collaborative working is a natural adaptation of the School's greatest single advantage: the non-examined curriculum. The Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation will introduce our pupils to an environment in which many will make their lives – first indications suggest they find this both fascinating and worthwhile.

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Access

The Governing Body would like as many as possible who would benefit from a Winchester education to come to the School – irrespective of financial means or gender. We want to continue to attract the brightest pupils and to help them achieve outstanding academic results. We need to do this in a way which reflects the realities of British society in the 21st century.

That is why we are increasing our **bursary provision** (initially to a target of 150 pupils in 2024 – but with the clear aim of going well beyond this); and opening the School to up to 80 day pupils (between 1970-2000 the number of day pupils at the School fluctuated between 30 and 50). This aim also underpins our plan to develop a new network of **partnerships** with state schools (building on those we already have), to identify ways we can support their most able pupils to fulfil their potential: we believe the online provision we developed during lockdown could bring significant benefits in this context.

The same logic applies to the admission of girls to VIth Book. We see no good reason not to allow girls access to Winchester’s unique approach to learning – they can get it nowhere else. We believe they will benefit and the School will benefit. Co-education in VIth Book will prepare all our pupils better for life outside the School; it will enrich life in the School in multiple ways (including diversity of thought in academic discussions and new opportunities in drama and music); and a larger VIth Book will ensure our continuing ability to offer rich and varied options at A-Level. We have considered carefully the potential impact of co-education on the boys as they move through the School in the future. Looking at experience elsewhere, and learning from it, we are confident that boys will continue to enjoy all the advantages which Winchester offers – plus added benefits as well. No boarding school which introduced co-education has subsequently reversed its decision.

(ii) **Consultation**

The Governing Body includes those with considerable standing and experience in the field of education. We gave the important issues raised by our recent announcement long and careful thought over more than eighteen months.

Co-education was extensively debated fifteen years ago – indeed the Governing Body established a “Question of Girls Committee” at that time. More recently, the Fellows and I have discussed the issue with numerous members of the Winchester College community, past and present.

We have heard many different points of view; given the issues involved it is unsurprising that many have been strongly felt. None has persuaded us that the College should not embark on increasing access to a Winchester education. Indeed, the Governing Body came to a unanimous decision.

As previously announced, we have initiated a round of discussions and consultations, taking different forms, in order fully to engage the views of our community (including OWs), so that we can harness a range of informed opinion about how best to deliver the ambitious programme of modernisation which we have announced.

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(iii) Timing of the changes

I understand that those directly affected, e.g. with sons in the School, might have preferred to delay any changes until the boys had left. There is never a perfect moment to make a major change in an ancient institution. But I believe it is a reasonable approach to announce in early 2021 changes that will be implemented over the period to autumn 2024. I think the School is more nimble than many suppose - as the response to the pandemic illustrated.

The period between now and 2024 will allow us to listen to the Wykehamist community and ensure we are properly prepared for the real challenges involved in making this change a success – as I strongly believe it will be.

(iv) Tradition

There is a sense that the recent announcements, particularly on the admission of girls and the increase in day pupils, are overturning 600 years of history. In reality, the School has gone through major changes throughout that time. William of Wykeham created a religious foundation: today, values and ethics remain central to a Winchester education, but they are addressed in many different ways. The tight focus on Classics and Mathematics, described in histories of Winchester, is a distant memory. Between 1850 and 1870 the School expanded from under 160 to 380 (today it is nearer 700). Two 19th century Headmasters, Moberly and Ridding, pursued a conscious course of radical reform over decades. Winchester has thrived over the centuries by adapting, not by standing still.

The Governing Body believes in protecting the essence of the School (which is above all about learning and access), while adapting areas where change is necessary or desirable. It is also our responsibility to ensure that the School moves into the future on a sound financial footing – as we are doing. We are not without our own personal investment in this community: my grandfather came to the School in 1918 and my eldest son left in 2002; there are a further seven OW Fellows. Our responsibility is that the School should flourish in the future as it has in the past.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Stagg". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Sir Richard Stagg KCMG