



Principal's Address at Prize Giving, September 2016

Honoured Guests, Directors, Ladies, Gentlemen and boys.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all this evening to celebrate the achievements of our pupils and to remind ourselves what is at the core of an Elizabeth College education.

I am also delighted to welcome our Guest of Honour, Dr Simon Bradshaw (OE 8358). Having welcomed a notably diverse group of Old Elizabethans to Prize Giving over recent years, including a bishop, TV presenter, Olympic champion horse rider, journalist, biology professor and global social media guru, it gives me real pleasure to add to that diverse list this year with an environmental and human rights campaigner. We'll try and find a candlestick maker for next year.

Although he left well before my time, Simon represents much of what I hope for in College pupils when they leave school – someone who, inspired by his academic and extra-curricular interests at the College, has spent the last twenty years pursuing his various passions all around the world, picking up a degree in Cardiff and a doctorate in Melbourne along the way, and working tirelessly for the benefit of other people. Initially this was in support of the people of Tibet who face significant environmental challenges and threats to their human rights and, more recently, for Oxfam as their climate change advisor and spokesperson in Australia, working particularly in support of island communities under threat in the Southern Pacific. All this excitement and he is still adamant that Guernsey is the place he calls his true home – what a top bloke. Simon – I am really looking forward to hearing your address later.

To get one thing over and done with, I do appreciate this will be my last speech at Prize Giving as Principal of the College but don't worry – you will not have to sit through a multitude of poignant reflections and worthy anecdotes from the last seven years. There will be plenty of time for goodbyes and thank yous towards the end of the year and, after all, this evening is not about me - it is primarily about the pupils' excellent achievements and what makes this school so very special. We will celebrate the former tonight and I want to say a few things about the latter.

Last week, having flummoxed the new Year 7s with the Latin of the Carmen, I spoke to all the boys in our first assembly together about the ethos, aims and values of the College; these are the words, phrases and sentences that define what we stand for, what we do and, most importantly, how we want to serve our pupils in the education we provide. The ethos and aims are therefore deliberately expressed, in plain English, with direct reference to the pupils.

The ethos statement is as follows - *the College aims to provide a rich, diverse and exciting experience for pupils of all backgrounds, enabling them to flourish and make the very most of themselves.*

I was often reminded of these words whilst enjoying the magnificent spectacle of the Rio Olympics in August. The games certainly provided rich, diverse and exciting experiences for the viewer, even if you needed a couple of pints of coffee to watch some events, and involved athletes of all backgrounds from 207 countries around the world, including a team of refugees who had been invited to participate. The ten brave athletes of the refugee team did not win any medals but it was great to see them there competing at such a high level despite all their previous hardships. The refugee team also provided an appropriate reminder of the need to support those less fortunate than ourselves and to ensure that, wherever possible, life-changing opportunities should be accessible to as many people as possible – two things that Elizabeth College has always excelled at.

The College has a long and deep-seated tradition of welcoming pupils from a wide diversity of backgrounds in Guernsey, with many current high profile leaders and figureheads on the island having originated from notably modest origins and had their lives transformed through the benefit of a College education. Such opportunities have been maintained over recent years through a combination of the special place holder system, relatively low fees and, most recently, the development of bursaries to support the cost of pupil activities.

Whilst we are all aware that change may be nigh regarding secondary education on the island, though nobody seems entirely sure when, I do know that the Board of Directors is firmly committed to keeping the College as socially inclusive as possible going forward - very possibly with the help of a states-sponsored and means-tested bursary scheme if the 11+ is ended.

Back to our ethos statement and, as one would expect, there were also plenty of examples at the Olympics of people flourishing and making the most of themselves. To be an Olympian in itself is a great achievement given the years of hard graft and commitment required for national selection. To be a medal winner, of course, is the ultimate goal and only the very best can achieve this. It was therefore wonderful to see team GB doing so well, surpassing their London 2012 performance by winning an incredible 67 medals including 23 golds and coming second in the medal table behind the USA – who'd have possibly predicted such success at the start? It was also good to see the lad who started riding donkeys on Sark, our own Carl Hester OE, getting a silver medal in the Team Dressage to add to his gold of four years ago. And at 58, showjumper Nick Skelton won his first gold medal, giving me hope that I still have eleven years to train for my big move from the Guernsey Vets side into the GB Rugby Sevens team.

This evening we celebrate the achievements of the College's annual medal winners – in terms of both academic attainment and effort. Like the Olympians, they also worked hard and showed great commitment in various ways last year in order to be here tonight.

This was particularly the case for the boys who did so fantastically well in their public examinations this summer, many of whom exceeding their own expectations in the process.

At GCSE we gained our best results for a number of years with 99% of pupils achieving the key standard of five A*-C grades (including English and Maths) and 85% of all passes graded at A*, A or B. Perhaps most pleasingly given our very broad intake, every single pupil who joined the College having not done well enough in the 11+ to be offered a Special Place here or a place at the Grammar School (note my careful wording there), every single one achieved five A*-C grades (including English and Maths). A 100% pass rate for those pupils and a clear reminder, please note Mrs Theresa May, that schools with pupils of all abilities can work exceptionally well provided the right things are in place.

At A level, we were delighted to set a new College record for the % of A* grades, with 19% of grades awarded at this highest level, a grade which requires students to achieve over 90% in the hardest A2 exams. For the second year in a row this was the highest proportion of A*s in any Channel Islands school and, along with the fact we currently have fifteen Old Elizabethans at the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford, shows that the noble tradition of academic excellence and scholarship is still flourishing at the College. Most importantly, as ever, our leavers' A level results allowed the majority to secure places at their first choice universities to which, given the relatively late date of Prize Giving this year, many have already departed.

As impressive as all such exam statistics sound, it's important to remind ourselves that the word 'education' must never be confused with the word 'assessment' and that exceeding one's expectations in straightforward academic terms is only one aspect of what constitutes an outstanding education.

We believe the development of individual character, confidence and personality is equally as important, some might say more important, than letters on certificates. If you consider our most successful athletes in Rio, all of them are naturally physically gifted of course, but to be an Olympic champion other important ingredients are required such as determination, commitment, resilience and self-belief. People like Mo Farah, Max Whitlock and Laura Trott, and teams like our men's Coxless Fours and women's hockey team have these qualities in spades and it is this which sets them apart from their equally gifted rivals. I think anyone watching the women's hockey final would have to admit that the Dutch were by far the more naturally talented side, but our girls still won the gold medal by demonstrating extraordinary tenacity, unwavering resolve and great coolness under pressure (and an incredible performance by goalkeeper Maddy Hinch).

At Elizabeth College we nurture such qualities partly through the academic curriculum but just as effectively through our extensive extra-curricular programme – strongly encouraging all our pupils to get involved in various activities outside the classroom and find their niche. It is in sport, the CCF, DoE programme, music, drama and a whole host of other activities where key character traits are best developed, building on natural strengths but also cultivating areas of relative weakness. Confronting and overcoming weaknesses can be a tough and uncomfortable process, particularly when you are growing up, as it has to involve one being totally honest with oneself, taking risks and, invariably, much disappointment and failure along the way.

We saw plenty of this in the Olympics too, with perhaps the most heart-breaking example being the very end of Lutalo Mohammad's bid to become Olympic champion in the final of the men's 80kg Taekwondo. To lose a gold medal in the final second of a contest is bad enough but to lose

it whilst being simultaneously kicked in the head must be very unpleasant indeed. Minutes after that terrible moment and fighting back the tears, not very successfully, Lutalo said he was totally gutted but also absolutely determined to work relentlessly over the next four years to get gold next time. Although winning an Olympic silver medal is hardly a failure, he immediately faced up to his monumental disappointment by saying he would simply have to do better next time.

We see moments such as these, albeit not quite as stark, as essential educational experiences at the College with pupils daring to do their best every day and often learning from their mistakes and failures. In a school this must always be backed up by the thoughtful support of staff and excellent pastoral care, something that the College is greatly renowned for and was recognized as outstanding in last October's ISI inspection, alongside excellence in pupil achievements, and excellence in both curricular and extra-curricular provision.

There was one other thing that Lutalo Mohammad said in the aftermath of that fight that caught my attention. In that excruciating moment of personal agony he apologized to viewers back home for having had to stay up late to watch him. In that very public moment of grief and disappointment, having committed himself to thousands more hours of training over the next four years, he was thinking of others.

So this brings me finally to what I perceive to be the most important aspect of an Elizabeth College education. Ensuring that when our pupils leave, they leave with a sense of great individual purpose but also a strong sense of higher purpose – by this I mean service to others and the community around them.

The astronaut Jim Lovell, Commander of Apollo 13, made the following observation, *“There are three types of people in this world; people that make things happen, people that watch things happen and people that wonder what just happened.”*

Making things happen for the benefit of other people can be done in many different ways, one of the most obvious being fund-raising for charities and this provided a major highlight of last year with all College boys involved in the process under the eternally enthusiastic leadership of charities senior prefect TJ Fitzgerald. Through a great diversity of activities throughout the year, the boys collectively raised a new College record of over £12,000 for the benefit of selected Guernsey, UK and international charities. Inspired by his experiences on the College trip to Kenya last year, Sam O'Neill also set up the Elizabeth College Kenyan Scholarship Fund which will enable one pupil every year from the Turi Children's Project to attend secondary school. These are just two recent examples of our pupils, amongst many others, making things happen for others less fortunate than themselves during their time at school. We then expect that they will carry on displaying that sense of service to the broader community throughout their adult lives. As I said earlier, our Guest of Honour tonight provides a great example of that.

Although we actively encourage our pupils to get off the island when they leave the College and broaden their horizons further afield, we know that many will eventually return with the experience and qualities required to act as key figures and leaders within Guernsey's companies and institutions – another major way in which the College and its pupils have traditionally given service to the island. It is worth reminding ourselves that the main reason for the foundation of

the College, 453 years ago, was to produce people of sound moral purpose and firm mind to spiritually lead the parishes and keep the island in good order after years of institutional corruption and poor administration (I could say something very mischievous now but I won't). The island serves the school in many ways but, likewise, it is essential that the school continues to serve the island.

The last thing I have to say tonight at this truly great school is that I hope I'll be remembered as a decent servant of a fine institution. It's easy for Headmasters to slip carelessly into talking of MY school but, of course, it isn't my school – it's our school - the Directors' school, the staff's school, the pupils' school and, perhaps most importantly, Guernsey's school. I have not owned the school in any way over the last seven years; I have simply been its chief steward and given my best shot at looking after it. It seems to be in pretty good shape and although there may be some tricky waters to navigate ahead, I have absolute confidence that with its excellent staff and the current Board of Directors, it will remain truly great, allowing all its pupils to make the very most of themselves and continue serving this wonderful and unique island for many years to come. *Semper Eadem, Floreat Collegium.*

Thank you.