Welcome to our

NEWSLETTER

A YEAR OF
ALTUS EDUCATION PARTNERSHIPS

Garrison Keillor famously began many of his short stories with this unassuming introduction, “Well, it’s been a quiet week in Lake Wobegon, Minnesota” before launching into a story showing that the week had been anything but. This year has certainly been one of those “quiet weeks” Keillor was speaking about. But while literature, film, and TV are full of dystopian post-apocalyptic visions of what a pandemic and post-pandemic society might be like, the truth is rather humbler, and much more humane. Our collective response has very largely been one of co-operation, rather than competition. Of partnership rather than conflict.

It is not an accident that the word ‘partnership’ is part of our Trust’s name. Partnerships are fundamental to the way we do things. It is through partnerships that we will support the wider regeneration of Rochdale. And it is through partnerships that we continue to raise students’ achievements and aspirations, so that they progress onto a wide range of wonderful academic and employment destinations.

This year we have worked together with students, staff, parents and carers to maintain high quality education, and support the mental wellbeing of RSFC students. With Hopwood Hall College we have implemented the ‘Rochdale Offer’ which guarantees all school leavers in the borough a place at one of the town’s two colleges. We have worked with the local authority to keep our staff and students safe both in and out of the college. And we have also worked with local and national partners (most recently Kate Bingham, chair of the UK vaccine taskforce) to raise aspirations, and provide opportunities. Partnerships have a long tradition in Rochdale; they have a bright and hopeful future too.

With very best wishes, great pride, and wishing you a not too ‘quiet’ Christmas,

Richard Ronksley
Chief Operating Officer of the Altus Education Partnership
Principal of Rochdale Sixth Form College

MERRY Christmas
AND A VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR
Altus Education Partnership is delighted that Admissions are now open for year 7 places for 2021!

Edgar Wood Academy will open on a temporary site within the grounds of Hopwood Hall College’s Middleton campus before transferring to the new building and permanent location located off Heywood Road in 2022.

If you have already applied for another school through the local authority’s admissions process, you can still apply for a year 7 place at the Edgar Wood Academy for September 2021. It is, in effect, an additional choice of school. On 1 March 2021, those offered a place at Edgar Wood Academy will receive TWO offers: one from their Rochdale Borough Council choices and an offer from Edgar Wood Academy. Apply now!

https://edgarwood.org/apply

Our ambitions for the Edgar Wood Academy are that it will provide a broad and balanced curriculum to all our pupils and be judged Ofsted outstanding after three years. The school will also have close links with primary schools, and post-16 partners (particularly RSFC and Hopwood Hall College). From early years to 18, our students will be on a path which effectively builds on each prior stage of education and helps them fulfil their enormous potential and promise.

Introducing our Headteacher Designate – Marcin Kojder

Marcin Kojder is a dedicated senior leader with 24 years’ experience working in the secondary sector, most recently as the senior deputy headteacher at Hollingworth Academy, an Ofsted outstanding school in Rochdale. At the school, he was responsible for teaching, learning and curriculum development.

Marcin’s joy though, is the day to day work with students. Teaching is, and always will be, a privilege. Each day brings different challenges, but also wonderful rewards, which is why after 24 years, Marcin still loves coming to work every single day.

Marcin commented, “I am committed to the principle of outstanding, comprehensive education. Having worked for 12 years in a high performing comprehensive school in Rochdale I understand how successful educational provision can be achieved in Middleton and Heywood. I am incredibly excited and privileged to be taking on the role of Headteacher at Edgar Wood Academy and will work hard to ensure we deliver a world-class education to the students and community we are proud to serve.”
2020 has challenged every one of us, in every aspect of our lives. So, when we reviewed the year in our self-assessment report, our focus was on the impact of lockdown on students the effectiveness of our response; and the lessons we have learned from these experiences.

Right from the start, we at RSFC made a strategic decision to continue teaching and learning as normally as possible. This was to minimise any disruption to students’ education, and to support mental well-being. Consequently, in late March the college switched all students over to a virtual version of their existing timetable, and broadcast lessons and tutorials using Microsoft Teams. On the first day of lockdown, and every day of lockdown, it was ‘lessons as usual’ for students and staff alike. And as usual too, our year 13 students finished in May, our year 12 students finished in July. Farewell assemblies took place for both year groups, with around 1300 students and staff logging in to say our goodbyes.

Throughout lockdown students and staff worked together learning about the challenges and benefits of teaching online. They supported one another to provide the best alternative to in-class learning we possibly could. Consequently, student engagement and attendance continued to be very high all through the spring and summer terms, with the regularity of our timetable helping provide structure for everyone. In short, we were able to support students’ wellbeing and academic progress. No-one is pretending that what we did was as good as students being in college full-time; it wasn’t, but it was the best alternative in the circumstances. In effect, our online college was a field hospital operating in the time of a national emergency. And a damn fine field hospital at that.

In 2020 the performance of our students was outstanding, with an overall achievement rate of 95% (national average 85%) and a DfE progress score of +0.43 (well above average). Additionally, our two-year retention rate was the highest ever recorded by a sixth form college – a testament to students’ dedication, and the support on offer from the college’s outstanding teachers, SPDLs and support staff.

Following a validation of our self-assessment report which involved external stakeholders, RSFC was rated Outstanding for overall effectiveness, and in all four key judgement areas. This is a fitting testimony to the outstanding work and commitment of everyone connected with the college – the staff, students, parents, carers, employers, and the local authority. But we are not done yet and we certainly have no intention of resting on any laurels. As we move forward, we will ensure that any student whose education has been disrupted because of Covid-19 is fully supported so that they are able to fulfil their academic and personal potential.

Finally, there is so much we have learned in 2020. The obvious ones are around the new ways of working we have adopted because of online learning. For example, we can now record lessons that students can watch if they miss a session or for revision. But these technical lessons wane in comparison with the other, more human things that we have learned: how important structure, purpose and ambition is to our lives, how together we managed to tackle the challenges of lockdown, and how together we will continue to tackle them until, together, we move on to a new and brighter future.
OXNET SUCCESS FOR 10 RSFC STUDENTS

Congratulations to the ten students who were successful in their applications to undertake the ‘unapologetically academic’ course which aims to widen participation to a variety of competitive universities.

The competition to participate on the course is fierce. The students all had to compose an admissions essay, which is deliberately challenging, along with their application to secure a place. There are five academic strands, with RSFC students securing places on four of the strands.

• Humanities and Social Science
• Philosophy and World Religions
• Modern Languages
• STEM
• Ordered Universe

Throughout the year-long programme, which is being delivered virtually this year, the students will be treated as first year undergraduates and study topics not included on the sixth form curriculum.

Whilst undertaking a range of academic challenges the students will have the opportunity to learn different study skills, develop a strong understanding of the standards leading universities expect of their students and the admissions processes. The students will participate in: an academic study day; seminars and reading groups; an Easter essay competition; academic skills webinar and an access week during the summer holidays.

CHRISTMAS JUMPER DAY
Staff and students wore their Christmas jumpers and showed their support to Rochdale Foodbank and the Sanctuary Trust soup kitchen by making food donations. Thank you to everyone, the support was outstanding.

CHRISTMAS DINING
RSFC catering team provided staff and students with a delicious Christmas dinner with all the trimmings.

CHRISTMAS BOOKS
We hope our students enjoy the RSFC Christmas book recommendations.

BRINGING CHEER TO SOME OF ROCHDALE’S CARE HOMES
For one year only (due to Covid restrictions), a slimmed down brass band and RSFC staff performed to bring some Christmas cheer to residents of Rochdale’s Care Homes. The staff performed carols in the homes gardens to residents safe inside.

FRINGE FESTIVAL
Our excellent creative departments of art, drama and music combined to showcase their achievements. Over five advent days staff and students enjoyed a range of festive features, including a staff video Christmas song, the Twelve Days of Covid and a Christmas Art Exhibition.

KEY DATES
MONDAY 4 JANUARY 2021
RSFC reopens

FRIDAY 5 FEBRUARY 2021
Edgar Wood Academy Admissions closes

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