



**ibosc**

**international boys' schools coalition**





# What Sort of a Man?

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# The proposition

Do our boys' school liberal traditions of open discourse, relational learning and education of the whole child across a broad landscape, continue best to prepare boys for the opportunities and responsibilities of the times?

What sort of a man?

# Why do societies educate and have schools?

- Participation – civilizing

Participation of an interested, skilled population who take control of their lives

There is no Plan B

- Advancement - challenging

The adaptability to complexity and variety to challenge

*'If we focus solely on the skills we need to make a living without allowing time for thought, then knowledge stagnates and people with it'. John Wyndham*

# Through the one to the many

Through education we seek to judge and nurture the conditions best suited to develop the growth of the innate and acquired potential of each individual to the social good of all, so through their participation, societies continue to advance.

## So, we have the kernel for our quest

- How do we enable each boy to find interests that can grow to passions and guide him to mastery so being interested and seeking mastery become habits for life, providing purpose and fuelling participation?
- How do we empower each boy to be adaptable, to think differently to most and mostly about different things, while remaining cognisant that his quality of life is a product of the quality of lives of all around him – near and far?

# Culture, structure and guiding stars

- It clearly requires some common values
- It clearly requires an educational framework through which these values can manifest in each boy's lived experience
- It's likely to require some guiding stars to keep all together on the journey



# The values of a broad liberal education

- Choice

The choice for a school to set its own character and for parents to select the school of best fit for their son
- Free open discourse

Encouragement for boys and staff to put a position, expound and critique, in the knowledge that it is by listening and adapting that an opinion takes best shape



## ... values ...

- Confidence

A belief in the power of science to advance societies, and confidence in the necessity of the humanities to help us make best use of such advancements

- Equality and personalisation

The premise that all are equal before the Law, and the understanding that, otherwise, all need to be treated differently to need and capacity

## Built on such values a broad liberal education:

- Seeks to develop the whole person and nurture each boy's innate and acquired talent to the greater social good
- Is grounded in intimacy and relational practice knowing it is by nurturing passions and honing mastery that being interested and striving for improvement become habits for life
- Believes interested, talented people make for interesting, prosperous societies
- Understands diversity means respecting, observing and learning from that which is different and knows this is the real source for growth individually and as a society

# Guiding Stars

- Guiding Principle: The inherent value and dignity of each person
- Guiding Question: How did the world get to be like this and how might it be made to evolve for the greater social good?
- Guiding Spirit: To challenge that which needs challenging and support that which needs supporting



# Why is such education important for boys?

- Boys need to be respected and valued; they need to find a peg on which to hang their hat
- Boys need to feel of worth, to belong while contributing to something bigger than themselves: a team, an orchestra and, most importantly, a cause
- Boys are relational learners, they learn teachers before subjects and hang learning on story, humour, big ideas and activity

## ... important for boys?

- Boys need to feel they can access and have a degree of success in that which we are telling them is important otherwise they disengage and opt out
- At key stages of development, boys get things wrong; they need soft hands that don't move
- Anger and charm

# What is shifting in these times?

- The flow of information is constant and ubiquitous
- We have moved from clear countable vertical restrictive pathways to a densely connected surface in which pathways are legion but undefined
- Shift in the way in which information flows challenges our social and economic foundations; societies shudder then advance
- The rise of Artificial Intelligence
- Though upward, the path to respecting the inherent value of each person is not monotonic; shifts in power are hard and test our democratic values and institutions



## ... shifting in these times?

- Increasing focus on masculinity: where do boys and boys' schools fit amidst changing landscape?
- The rightful and long overdue pursuit of equity for girls and women has brought change for boys; much is good, but there is also worrying evidence of disengagement
- Education and 'success' are increasingly premised on a content/test/qualification format; schools are increasingly struggling to find time for what works for boys. The gap widens.

# Three-headed dragon

Essentially, education is a three-headed dragon:

- Head 1 is named, 'What we Teach' and is often called Curriculum
- Head 2 bears the name, 'How we Assess' and is inseparable from its bed mate 'Qualification'
- Head 3 is named 'How we teach' and stands aloof, but not by choice
- Since the mid 80s Heads 1 and 2 have dominated discourse for because they are readily controlled by those who want to control
- But it is Head 3 which determines quality, growth and advancement

# Five main issues from Heads

- Gender transitioning
- Masculinity
- Recruitment and retainment
- The place of boys' schools and the growing public awareness of the challenges being faced by boys and men
- Artificial Intelligence



# Artificial Intelligence

- Significant societal change – challenges truth across all our senses
- Immediate impact on Heads 1 and 2 of the Dragon
- What of our adaptability and advancement?
- No longer dominant species for differentiated delivery of content and assessment
- Focus on Head 3, strength of boys' schools of broad liberal tradition: addressing the challenges and opportunities posed by change
- Need to find home and purpose in the humane development of those in our care and thence the advancement and social good of all

# How are boys and men faring (Reeves)?

- Across economically advanced nations, boys are 50 percent more likely than girls to fail at all three key school subjects: math, reading, and science
- Men's rates of work force participation, high school graduation and university completion have fallen
- The 2022 (Q3) UK male suicide rate of 16.8 per 100,000 represents a significant increase from the rate in 2017 and is three times that for females (consistent with the rates over the past 10 years)
- Pursuing equity for girls and women and addressing the challenges facing boys and young men is not a zero-sum game

# Are boys disposed for success in these times?

- Boys want to find their niche, gain mastery and connect with others to play their part solving big problems for social and economic gain
- Boys are disposed to disrupt and dismantle; to find simpler and cheaper ways of doing things
- Boys like to immerse themselves in their passion, to be completely absorbed without distraction
- Boys like the autonomy, belonging and purpose of small groups and teams that play larger part in causes bigger than themselves



# Boys' schools of the broad liberal tradition

- Understand boys and girls develop at different times and at different rates
- Offer families choice for a broad education of the whole child that acts intentionally for boys
- Take time to unearth passions and hone mastery, making being interested, skilled and involved habits for life
- Nurture the relationships that inculcate belonging and the mutual respect and trust on which boys thrive

## ... boys' schools ...

- Are built on conversation, ritual, activity and story, and guide boys to choose engagement with, rather than separation from, learning and society
- Understand that at key stages of development, boys get things wrong and the destructive stigmas of failure and rejection
- Intentionally and freely steer recruitment and professional development towards staff skilled in learning relationships and the development of boys
- Are best positioned to meet the societal challenges and grasp the opportunities of AI
- Are a bedrock of participation, purpose and advancement for the benefit of all