

Speech - Headmaster

It is wonderful to see you all here tonight. Guests, parents and family members, Governors, staff and, of course, students. Now, there are many more interesting and important moments than my speech tonight. Soon, you'll hear one from Stuart Laing, our Guest of Honour, who hugely supported the school during his time as Deputy Ambassador in Prague. You will also hear from Ann Lewis, our Chairman of Governors, with, I hope, stories of ECP's wonderful day in Buckingham Palace at Prince Charles' 70th birthday party earlier this week. And finally, of course, the speech you are all waiting for from your very own Samanta Rožánková. I don't think it will be a tough crowd tonight, Samanta - but you never know!

This year, we are delighted to add another four very distinguished names to the already incredibly impressive list of people who have allowed their names to be associated with the English College's academic prizes. There's Jan Grossman, who attended the Prague English Grammar School. He was variously a literary critic, editor, an instrumental figure of Prague's best theatre in the 1960s and of course, the best man at Václav Havel's wedding. We are honoured to have the Otto Wichterle Prize for Chemistry. He was the author or co-author of over 180 patents and was central to the development of contact lenses. Professor Sir Roger Scruton's name now honours our Philosophy prize. His name has forever been associated with the underground philosophy seminars in Prague and we were lucky enough for him to visit us at ECP. Lastly, we have Professor Jaroslav Slavík who was a formidable teacher at the then Prague English Grammar School. Jaroslav's principled beliefs led him into direct conflict with the communists resulting in him spending seven years in the uranium mines of Jáchymov. Indeed, all of these intellectual giants achieved all that they did despite state persecution and obstruction.

As you, the graduates, sit here tonight, and listen to me peppering my speech with the names of distinguished guests, academic giants - there's even more as we read through the prize lists - you may feel a disconnection between you and these great names, a lack of relevance, a gulf. However what I am going to suggest to you is there is no real disconnection. There is no gulf. These great names are no different from yours. The only difference is time. All they have on you is time. In years to come, each of you has the internal drive and energy for your names to become to us as their names are to us today. Your stories will unfold, you will journey, you will discover, challenge, invent and create your way through time and ultimately some of your names may cross back across the page of ECP's graduation programme and become the name of a prize itself and not just its winner. Maybe ECP, maybe some other institution, will in time want to celebrate you. Listen to the names as they are read tonight, read the biographies, choose one and make a commitment to yourself to leave school, go out into the world and try and give just much back to society, to our cultural heritage and to our shared knowledge as they have.

Dr. Nigel Brown, Headmaster

Speech - Guest of Honour

I am very honoured to be here with you this evening. As you may know, I first came to Prague in November 1989, a few days after the Velvet Revolution had started. Even as I drove across Europe to come here and take up my position as Deputy Ambassador, but especially after I arrived, I realised that I was witness to a historic process that would change not just Czechoslovakia (as it then was) but all of Europe. The time I spent here, though less than three years, left me and my family with an abiding love for this city, your country and your people.

And, incidentally, I was in the Embassy here just at the time when the idea of founding the English College was first proposed.

For you, graduating class of 2018, the events of 1989 are history. But let's not be critical of history! For one thing, as I have learnt, especially during recent years when I have researched and written books of history, the study of those who lived before us is fascinating, and often instructive. But more than that: for us Europeans, the study of the 20th century shows us what disasters can happen when we lose sight of the values of democracy and freedom and allow totalitarian rule to take over.

I want to talk this evening, very briefly, about two things: internationalism, and transition, or moving on.

I have been told that internationalism has been a theme of the College this academic year. Looking round, I can see that this is a natural subject for a school such as this. Your mix of nationalities and backgrounds personifies internationalism.

You are growing up at a time when we are connected across the globe more than ever before. I believe that you will turn out to be the sort of people who will seize the opportunities presented by this international connectivity. I can see for example evidence of your skills in languages, and the determination of many of you to choose foreign universities for your next stage in life. This will not always be easy. But I am sure you will never regret it. Nor will you regret those hours you spend grappling with the tricky grammar or vocabulary of a foreign language. My experience in the British Foreign Office showed me that language study not only enables direct contact with people of other nations, but also places you where you can understand their culture and their way of thinking. This kind of understanding has all sorts of positive outcomes: personal ones, such as friendships across borders; commercial and industrial prosperity, as we trade with each other; and advantages for human society more broadly, if international understanding can reduce confrontation and conflict. And this is something that in today's world we badly need.

Many of us, in our lives, experience transition – that moment of moving on. As adults, that's often leaving one job and starting another; or moving house. But leaving school is different. This is moving on with a whole new element of excitement added. You look out on the world with the feeling that all sorts of constraints are being lifted from you, freedom beckons, and so on. All that's true – I remember it well! Later you begin to realise that with increased freedom comes increased responsibility. I'd like you not to forget that.

Prize-giving means that it's nearly the end of term. For you, the graduating students, it means the end of your spell in a place which you have known - and I hope loved - for several years. From here you move on to the next episode in your lives – probably to further study at university or other higher education.

When I was at school, a piece of poetry we were asked to memorise was the passage from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*, usually known as the seven ages of man. Jaques philosophises about the episodes in our lives. You students are described as "with shining morning face, creeping unwillingly to school". And you who are about to leave may know that your next age is that of the lover, "sighing like furnace". I remember my headmaster making this point – the one about the episodes, not about the lover – to my batch of school leavers when I was in just your position. He said to us that he hoped we had enjoyed our school days, because as a teacher he wanted us to learn but also to enjoy learning. But he didn't want us to look back on our school days as the happiest days of our life. He himself had found, like Jaques, that his life was made up of episodes, and that you go from one to the next in a series of transitions. And his recipe for a happy life was to use those transition periods as

moments for looking forward to the next bit. Treasure the good bits of the past. But be confident that better is to come. You may be nervous when you're not quite sure how it will be. But your confidence will usually be justified.

How may we reduce the risks of the uncertainty of the next phase? One way is to look in the mirror – and a straight mirror, not a distorting one. The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates had a good motto here: “Know yourself”. That sounds easy too, but it's surprising how many of us have delusions about ourselves. You must work out where your skills really are, and other things, like whether you're better as a leader, a team player, or an individualist. Nothing wrong with any of those: the world needs them all. But you need to know where you fit in. You may remember the character Polonius in another of Shakespeare's plays, *Hamlet*. Poor old Polonius – he gets a pretty bad press, being a pompous old buffoon.

But Polonius says some quite sensible things to his son Laertes before Laertes goes off to Paris. He tells him to dress well, because the French worry about that sort of thing – perfectly true. And he ends up with

“This above all: to thine own self be true,
and it must follow, as the night the day,
thou canst not then be false to any man”.

These words sound like clichés now, and perhaps they did even in Shakespeare's time. But sometimes even clichés contain a germ of truth.

So: know yourself. Be yourself. Be true to the self that you know and are. And look for things to do that match with that self-knowledge.

I'd like to end by offering my congratulations to the prizewinners this evening, and to the staff and others at the English College who have helped to build the prizewinners' successes. In a sense, the development of these fine young people, who move on from here to the next stage in their lives, is a collaborative venture – between the students themselves, their parents and their teachers. Well done all of you!

Thank you for inviting me. Thank you for listening.
Good evening, ladies and gentlemen

Stuart Laing MA MPhil
Master of Corpus Christi, Cambridge

Speech - Chairman of Governors

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all again to what I hope will be the highlight of the year for those of you who are graduating – always excepting the Graduation Ball and tonight's after-party, of course! For your parents it is the culmination of several years of stress, anxiety and possibly nail-biting. While I have met quite a lot of the graduating students, I have met very few parents. So I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for putting your faith in The English College and entrusting your sons and daughters to us for both their academic education and their introduction to the wider world. I trust we have lived up to your expectations.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to introduce another shadowy group of people who play a vital role in the College: the Governors. They may not be very visible but they are always active, as they – or rather we - are responsible, in consultation with your excellent Headmaster of course, for the ethos, strategy and key policies of the school. Today they have come out into the light and are sitting behind me on the platform. They are all eminent in their own spheres, yet freely give of their time, energy and experience to support the College.

I also bring you greetings from our Patron, the Prince of Wales. Prince Charles is celebrating his 70th birthday this year. Asked by the Queen what kind of party he would like, he opted for a garden party at Buckingham Palace for all the organisations of which he is Patron. And that, of course, includes the English College. We were invited to send 5 people to the party, which was held the day before yesterday, so along went Martyn Bond and I, as key founders of the school; Elizabeth Cooke as current Chairman of the English College Foundation, the charity which originally set up the English College; Petr Fiman, our youngest Governor, a former ECP student and holder of a Prince of Wales Scholarship, and of course your Headmaster, representing the school. In that way we aimed to cover the past, present and future of the English College.

A touch of extra glamour was lent to the proceedings by the presence of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex – better known to us all as the newly-wed Harry and Meghan. Prince Harry made a short but moving speech about his father's many charitable activities.

Prince Charles, as you may be aware, is quite a controversial figure in the UK. He deserves a good deal of credit however for some of his early activities, which at the time were considered eccentric but are now mainstream. I am thinking of his long-standing interest in environmental issues. For instance he introduced organic farming on his own estate long before this became normal, not to say fashionable.

He has also had a long-standing interest in helping disadvantaged young people to develop their practical and communication skills and find a worthwhile role in society. He has, for instance, been very active in getting business people to invest in his training, mentoring and other schemes.

This interest had some effect on the foundation of this school. When Prince Charles was first invited to be a Patron, we had a letter from his office seeking assurances that the College would not be an elite institution – by which he meant socially elite, not academically. We assured him that we aimed to be as inclusive as possible, and we have always held to that. Ideally, we would like to be needs-blind, which means we could recruit students irrespective of their parents' ability to pay. Sadly we have not yet reached that stage, but we do try to keep the fees as low as possible and provide scholarships and bursaries which help some families who otherwise could not afford the education we offer.

Here I would like to pay tribute to all those students who have been involved in fund-raising for the Vaclav Havel Scholarship, an effort which our other founder-patron would surely have approved. I would also like to thank Jan Barta, one of our very first graduates, who has done well in life and has invested substantial sums in scholarships at ECP. I hope that you too will wish in due course to give back some of what you have received as students at the ECP.

You are now going out into the wider world, mostly straight to university. You are all clever, and most of you are hard-working and highly motivated. You are likely to do well in life, whatever you choose to do. It is a pleasure to see what varied careers our alumni enjoy, from doctoring in Africa to railway engineering in China, to professional ice-hockey in Canada. Personally, as a retired diplomat, I am delighted to see quite a number go into the diplomatic service, including the current Deputy Ambassador in London and head of the European Union office in St Petersburg, not to mention the several who have worked at the British Embassy in Prague. Diplomacy, as I am sure our guest speaker will agree, offers an interesting – and very varied – way of life. And this school might never have existed but for a chance remark by President Havel during a visit by a British Minister after the Velvet Revolution, at which I had the honour to be present. That is when the idea emerged of creating a school in Prague as a successor to the old Prague English Grammar School, which was closed by the Communists in the early 1950's.

But that was all a quarter of a century ago. What of the next 25 years, covering your most active adult life? You will face many challenges. One is my generation's sorry legacy of environmental damage and the threat of climate change. In addition, demographic changes will lead to massive pressure for migration northwards from Africa and shift the world's centre of gravity to Asia and Africa. Economic development will make China vastly richer than Europe or even America, with India also a major power. AI and other technologies will transform the workplace as much as IT has changed the world that existed when I was your age. The kind of liberal democracy we have enjoyed will probably be in decline before the march of autocracies with limited human rights.

In the face of these changes I hope that the values and skills you have learned here will stand you in good stead: creativity, flexibility, a capacity for independent thought and respect for the views of others, an appreciation of democracy and the rule of law,

I say all this not to shed gloom on this joyous occasion, but to say we look to you, the next generation, to bring all your talents to bear on tackling the challenges ahead. You can and will make a difference both to those around you and to the wider community.

On a more personal level, for a happy life you need friends, family and a fulfilling job or other role. I trust you will all find such happiness and wish you all the best for your future life.

Ann Lewis CMG, Chairman of Governors

Speech - Representative of the Graduands

Dear ladies and gentleman, dear Dr Brown, dear teachers, dear families and friends and last but not least, dear students.

First of all I would like to say how happy I am to be standing here speaking on behalf of our graduates. It is a true honour to be given this responsibility.

And as you may know, we are all very happy to be here, because it means that the exams are officially over and we have successfully survived them all.

I put a lot of thought on how to start this speech and looking back at the six years we have spent here at the ECP, if there's one thing that we will be taking away, it would have to be the wonderful art of reflection. Over the years we have reflected on absolutely everything. On our extended essay, on our TOK, on our CAS experiences, we have reflected on ourselves, our teachers, the food on our trips, anything that comes to mind.

Therefore I think we have all quite successfully mastered the art of reflecting and I was actually very glad that I could use this skill in a real life situation. I approached this speech as my final reflection as I tried to look back at everything that happened in our past 6 years together and how it has shaped us into the open-minded, principled and knowledgeable risk-takers, communicators, inquirers or anything else the IB wants us to be...

In September 2012, right around the time when Queen Elisabeth was celebrating her 60 years on the throne and the world was supposed to end according to multiple predictions, we met and were put on a bus and sent off to our induction trip. There were 44 of us at the start, we were complete strangers to each other and some of us, including myself, barely spoke any English.

And even though the world did not end in 2012, coming to the ECP surely felt like entering a whole new world. A world where people spoke a different language, filled with strange abbreviations like IA, EE, CAS, HL, IOC, FOA and so many more. And this language, among many other things is what makes ECP so special. It is our own language, which is based on combining these abbreviations with two or more other languages. A special language, in which it is completely acceptable to switch between Czech and English in the middle of a conversation and possibly throw in some German, Spanish or Russian words and phrases as well. We have adapted to the language, accepted it as our own and we will possibly struggle now for quite some time to get it out of our heads.

We are here now, 6 years later and there is 77 of us. We are possibly the biggest graduating class ECP has ever had in a really long time, which is interesting, since usually people tend to leave as school gets harder, but we just grew in size.

A lot has changed over the 6 years. Technology has taken a giant leap forward and we now have phones that don't even fit into our hand. During all this time we went through 6 final exams, 2 mock exams a maturita exam, we went to Berlin, to Liverpool, to Edinburgh, to Madrid and we studied every subject you can think of. But life at ECP has taught us many valuable life lessons as well. We learned to save money, by finding where they sell the cheapest coffee in Fenix, we learned to bake bread at one of our team building events and we learned a certain level of self-control, after they opened the new KFC in the food court in Fenix. Together, we have successfully survived multiple predictions of apocalyptic events and we are here, all grown up, ready to keep up with the pace of the world and we couldn't be more excited that we can finally tick the box next to "finish IB exams" and go off and have some well-deserved free time.

But we would never even be here, if it wasn't for all the support we got over the six years from our teachers. We thank you, from the bottom of our hearts, for standing by us and for understanding that that we really were tired every day of the week at any time of the day. I could be here the whole day listing out all the great things you have done for us over the years, but here is just a small fraction of them.

Thank you Ms Buchanan for never letting us miss any deadlines and for successfully hunting down anyone who managed to do so, no matter how hard we were trying to hide from you.

Thank you Mrs Švejdová for helping us organise a beautiful graduation ball, which none of us expected to be as great as it was.

Thank you Mr Baxter for motivating us to be on time every morning and for teaching us some extremely high level analysis of Blob trees.

Thank you Mr Hill for not giving up on us after reading hundreds of drafts of our personal statements and for making sure we got into our dream schools.

Thank you Ms Reardon for buying us donuts when we were sleepy on a Friday morning.

Thank you Ms Kerr for rescuing us on Fridays afternoon during Chemistry period 8 and thank you Dr Athwal for having mercy and letting us go a little early.

A big thank you to all the language teachers for making sure that we never die of hunger when visiting a foreign country and that even though we sometimes struggle with the basics of the language, we can always start a conversation on the topic of nuclear power with the locals.

Thank you Mr and Mrs Gavriněv for keeping us in great shape with the annual cooper test, which we all unsuccessfully tried to avoid at some point in the six years.

And thank you Dr Brown for your creativity and for always having an endless supply of metaphors to add to your speeches.

But as I already said, we would still be here tomorrow if I were to thank every one of our teachers individually, so I apologise to those I haven't mentioned and I would just like to say a big thanks to every single member of the teaching staff here at ECP, you have been great role models for us through the six years we have spent here. You have been amazing to us and I can't see how we would ever pass the IB without you.

But of course, we cannot forget about our families, our boyfriends, girlfriends and our best friends, who have been by our side through every single mental breakdown the IB has caused us and had to listen to us go on about CAS and IAs and EEs and UCAS, without probably ever understanding what we were talking about. Thank you for all the support you have given us, mainly in the last few months and accept our apologies for possibly being a little grumpy during this time.

And in the spirit of reflecting, I must conclude we have successfully met all the possible learning outcomes during our six years at the ECP. We collaborated, we showed perseverance and commitment, we engaged in global issues and we showed great strength and growth. I really hope Mr Paterson is proud of us.

We are now officially ready to enter what they call “the real world”. And even though we will now run off to all the different parts of the world, we will never forget the time we spent here together, the friendships that we made and all the fun and misery we have been through as a class. We are very lucky, since our frequent use of social media will make it very easy for us to stay in touch, but we are still looking forward to any future reunions, whether it’s here, in London, in Amsterdam, in Manchester, in New York or where ever we may run into each other.

And as it has been said this year already, masks off and now we shine!

Thank you all very much for listening and have a great rest of the evening.

Samanta Rožánková, student year 6

Professor Slavík Prize

Professor Slavík taught at the old Prague English Grammar School. He taught Czech, but his lessons were also lessons of philosophy, civil rights and literature. Literature as we hadn’t known it before. He taught us to evaluate the architecture of the respective works and elements of their structure and not just to speak about what was going on in a book, which, in poetry particularly, is quite nonsensical.

He had no need to punish any of his pupils because his lessons were so interesting that nobody disrupted them.

Being a real democrat, he couldn’t refuse an invitation from four of his pupils to work against the dictatorial Communist regime. Their activities included writing various leaflets and destroying the young Communists’ files on all the pupils, where their remarks or opinions expressed against the regime were recorded.

Very probably, because of the arrest and torture of another member of the teaching staff, the activities of those pupils and their professor were revealed. They all were arrested and tried by the Court of the State, a Communist Court of a Communist state, of course, where Profesor Slavík was sentenced to seven years in prison, which he served in the uranium mines. Nevertheless, when all of us were gathered together in one room, along with criminals and murderers, after a court case that lasted several days, we embraced each other and for the first and last time, addressed our Professor by his Christian name. Because we had become friends.

I remember this very clearly because I was one of those four pupils.

After Professor Slavík’s seven years in prison, we saw each other very often, which meant that the Communist regime had not won. When Professor Slavík died, he was nearly a hundred years old.

Jiří Berounský

former student of Prague English Grammar School