

College Beat

**Innovation: Nurturing Ideas,
Igniting Futures**

DESS College Newsletter
May 2025



Contents

Innovation
Planting Ideas, Growing Impact
Inspired in Japan
Crafting Tomorrow
Sporting Triumphs
Setting Sail for Success
Performing Arts - A Year in Motion
Bells, Bids and Balance Sheets
Bringing Stories to Life
Conference Recap
Mind Games and Optical Tricks
Future-Focused
Year 12 Economics Students Explore Big Data at Heriot-Watt University
Wired for Innovation
Pi Day 2025
Looking Ahead with Purpose and Pride

Innovation

Nurturing Ideas, Igniting Futures



At DESS College, we believe that innovation is a mindset rather than a buzzword. It's the courage to question, the creativity to reimagine and the resilience to bring bold ideas to life.

This term, our community has been characterised by inventive thinking. Across disciplines and year groups, students have embraced challenge and curiosity, not just as academic exercises, but as opportunities to shape the future.

Take our GCSE and A-Level Design & Technology students, for instance, whose NEA projects tackled real-world problems with striking originality; prototyping everything from sustainable packaging to assistive

devices that speak to the heart of human-centred design. In our Year 7 House Competition, everyday materials transformed into seaworthy vessels, as students blended historical inquiry with engineering creativity to reimagine the Age of Sail.

Innovation also powered this year's Careers Week, where students connected with industry professionals and alumni, glimpsing the diverse journeys that lie ahead and learning that innovation often starts with asking the right questions. In our expanding robotics programme, the whirl of servos and lines of code echo a deeper purpose, preparing students not just to participate in tomorrow's tech landscape, but to lead it.

And beyond our walls, Year 12 Economics students engaged directly with big data at Heriot-Watt University, gaining insights into how information drives the modern economy and giving us another powerful reminder that innovation often begins with the ability to see patterns others miss.

We hope you enjoy this edition, and as you turn each page, we invite you to celebrate the creative energy, thoughtful exploration and forward-looking spirit that make DESS College a truly extraordinary place to learn and grow.

Matthew Cotgrove
Head of School

Planting Ideas, Growing Impact

Sustainability Leaders Recognised at Climate Competition

Six of our Year 9 Sustainability Leaders have earned well-deserved recognition after securing third place in the finals of this year's DC Interschool Climate Competition.

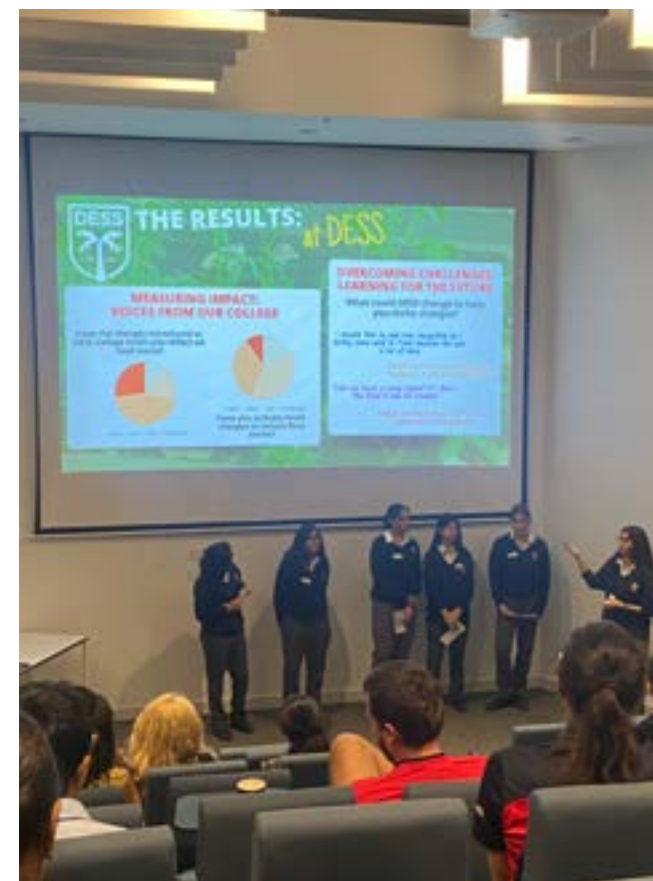
Their pitch? A sharp, practical plan to cut food waste across the DESS College campus. From smarter portioning and expanded recycling to a homegrown composting initiative, the team laid out a clear, collaborative strategy - and showed how it's already taking root.

The judges were especially impressed by the Eco-Garden: a thriving green space where students grow vegetables and herbs, supported by the Food and Nutrition team, Harness Foods, and staff across the school.

What stood out most, though, was the way the girls had brought everyone along for the journey, making sustainability something the whole community could be part of.

This result is a proud moment for DESS College and a powerful reminder of how student-led action, when well-supported, can bring meaningful change.

Congratulations to the team — and thank you for the inspiration.



Inspired in Japan

A Creative Arts Journey

This February, our Creative Arts students took their sketchbooks, cameras and curiosity on a remarkable journey across Japan to enjoy a week of exploration that blended tradition, innovation and artistic discovery in equal measure.

From the neon pulse of Tokyo to the calm beauty of Kyoto and the buzz of Osaka, students immersed themselves in a cultural landscape that continues to inspire some of the world's most exciting art, design and photography.

In Tokyo, we explored contemporary galleries, cutting-edge design studios and the futuristic installations at TeamLab Planets; a space where light, movement and imagination collide. Kyoto offered a quieter rhythm, inviting students to reflect on craftsmanship, nature and history through experiences like kimono wearing, snow-dusted calligraphy sessions and visits to ancient temples.

Along the way, students captured street scenes through the lens, filled sketchbooks with their impressions and participated in hands-on workshops that connected them more deeply to Japan's creative industries.

This wasn't just a trip. Thanks to the DESS College energy, it became a chance to see the world through a different lens, stretch our creative muscles and find fresh perspective. We're proud of the openness and talent our students brought to every stop along the way and can't wait to see how this journey shows up in their future GCSE and A-Level work.



Crafting Tomorrow

Students Bring Big Ideas to Life in Design & Technology

Through their NEA (Non-Exam Assessment) projects, students tackled real-world challenges with an impressive mix of creativity, critical thinking and hands-on skill. From space-saving furniture for urban homes to sustainable packaging and assistive devices aimed at making everyday life more accessible, every design told a story of purpose.



Months of research and development went into these projects, with students iterating, testing and refining their ideas. Whether using industry-standard 3D CAD software, precision laser cutters or classic hand tools, they demonstrated not just technical competence, but thoughtful innovation.

Many of this year's concepts addressed global issues head-on, including environmental



sustainability, inclusive design and the practical demands of modern living.



We're incredibly proud of our Year 11 and Year 13 students for the vision, dedication and originality they've shown. The future looks bright - and brilliantly designed!





Sporting Triumphs

Making Waves: DESS College Retains BSME Swimming Crown

In the final major swim squad meet of the season, 40 of our swimmers made a statement at the 2025 BSME Swimming Championships - and what a statement it was.

Competing against schools from across the Middle East, our team delivered a dominant performance across all age groups, from U13 to U19, and in both boys' and girls' events. By the end of a thrilling day in the pool, they had collected an impressive 30 gold medals, 9 silvers and 7 bronzes.

Standout FINA points performances came from Yahia (Year 7), Younis (Year 9) and Heidi (Year 10), helping secure the College's second consecutive overall title.

But beyond the medal count, it was the unity and team spirit that truly set the squad apart. From pushing personal bests to cheering from the poolside, this group has grown together all season - and they've finished it as champions once again.

Netball Triumph: U19A Team Secure Historic Double Victory

We are delighted to share some fantastic news from the netball court. In mid-April, the U19A team played their final game of the DASSA League season. After a tense, goal-for-goal battle across the first three quarters, the team took control in the fourth to secure a 42-35 victory in front of a lively crowd at DC.

This win marks a major milestone for the College, with the U19A team securing our first league title since the 2017-2018 season. It is a moment of immense pride and a testament to the hard work, talent and resilience of the players who have been such an integral part of the netball programme.



Congratulations to the entire squad on a remarkable season, lifting both the DASSA Cup and the DASSA League titles.

Swimming Success and Team Spirit Shine in Abu Dhabi



When members of our swim squad asked for a trip, we were more than happy to deliver, and in doing so, formed a fantastic partnership with BISAD and NAS Abu Dhabi.

BISAD kindly hosted a gala that gave 45 of our swimmers the chance to battle it out across a range of fun races and events. Afterwards, the team checked in at the Marriott Al Forsan Hotel, refuelling in style at the hotel's fabulous seafood buffet before gearing up for an evening of go-karting and zip-lining adventures.

After a good night's sleep, the students started the next day with a light recovery run led by Mr Young, followed by a plyometrics session with Mr Sing and Mr Galant. Then it was a quick turnaround after

breakfast and straight onto the coach to Yas Waterpark for an afternoon packed with fun and exhilaration.

It was an excellent trip that not only allowed our swimmers to showcase their talents in the pool, but more importantly created plenty of opportunities for team bonding and building lifelong memories.

Rosslyn Park 7s: A Week of Sport, Discovery and Team Spirit

During the first week of the spring break, our Rugby players made a real impact at the prestigious Rosslyn Park National Schools Sevens in London; the largest school Rugby tournament in the world.

We proudly took three girls' teams and one boys' team to compete among hundreds of schools from across the UK and beyond. The level of



competition was fierce, but our students rose to the challenge with resilience, teamwork and passion on full display in some superb performances.

Beyond the pitch, the tour offered an unforgettable experience. Students headed to the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium to watch Saracens take on Harlequins in a heavyweight Premiership clash, witnessing a thrilling second-half comeback and seeing international stars up close. They also toured Twickenham Stadium, the home of English Rugby, gaining a real sense of the sport's rich history and elite atmosphere.



Adding to the sporting experience, the group visited Stamford Bridge, home of Chelsea FC, offering a sharp contrast in sporting culture but an equally inspiring insight into life at the highest level.

No visit to London would be complete without a little sightseeing. Students enjoyed the London Eye, explored the capital's buzzing streets, and sampled a taste of independence in one of the world's most exciting cities. A further highlight came with a visit to a Champions League quarter-final second leg match, providing an unforgettable evening of



top-tier football under the lights, full of drama and excitement.

This was far more than just a sports tour. Students returned with stronger friendships, closer team bonds, and memories that will last for years to come.

A special thank you must go to the staff who gave up their time to lead the trip, and to the friends and families who travelled to London to support our teams.

We are incredibly proud of how every player represented DESS College, not just through their performance, but through their attitude, conduct and sense of community. Planning is already underway to raise the bar even higher for College Rugby next year.



Setting Sail for Success Year 7 House Competition

This term, Year 7 students launched into an exciting Age of Sail House Competition as part of their MSC (Moral, Social and Cultural Studies) curriculum.

Across all forms, students put their creativity, teamwork and STEM skills to the test, designing and racing their own model boats using only everyday materials such as plastic bottles, lolly sticks and tin foil.

The competition brought the Age of Sail vividly to life, giving students a chance to apply scientific thinking and engineering skills while learning about a time when ships ruled the high seas and exploration changed the world.

After a series of lively and good-spirited races, it was Captain Page and the crew of E7B (Mr Page's MSC class) who sailed to victory. Their innovative designs and impressive racing tactics earned them the title of strongest fleet.

Congratulations to all our young sailors for their creativity, teamwork and adventurous spirit, and a special well done to E7B for leading the way. We are already looking forward to seeing where their next voyages of learning will take them.



Performing Arts

A Year in Motion



Musical in a Day: Italia Conti Returns



Students in Years 8 and 9 took part in a high-energy “Musical in a Day” workshop led by visiting professionals from the Italia Conti Academy of Theatre Arts. Year 8 tackled the modern soundtrack of &Juliet, exploring vocal technique, movement and characterisation. Year 9 brought Mamma Mia! to life with ensemble choreography and a deep dive into dramatic storytelling. The workshop gave students a window into life in professional theatre, and a chance to rehearse and perform at pace.

Key Stage 5 Showcase

The KS5 Showcase brought together students from our MUSPRA and CAPA programmes for a powerful evening of performance. Highlights included music from Dear Evan Hansen, a creative twist on Barbie, and a medley of Queen hits that closed the show in style. Level 2 MUSPRA students lit up the room with Don't Stop Believin', and video tributes from alumni now studying at Italia Conti, Urdang and Leeds Conservatoire served as a reminder of the creative journeys our students are on.



With university offers from leading conservatoires and performing arts schools including ArtsEd, Emil Dale and Bird College, the evening marked a celebration of student success, ambition - and serious stage presence.

Year 10 Devised Drama



GCSE Drama students in Year 10 have been immersed in the creative process this term, developing original theatre pieces as part of their Devised Drama examination. Working from three stimuli; Fairy Tales, Inventors and Greek Gods, students created thought-provoking, imaginative performances that explored both personal and universal themes. They were assessed not just on performance but on collaboration, research and their ability to respond to feedback; all key skills that will continue to serve them long after the final curtain.



BSME Dance Competition

Our Elite Dance Company represented the College at the BSME Dance Competition at DBS Jumeirah Park, performing a powerful piece inspired by female icons: Queen Victoria, Cleopatra and Boudica. Blending contemporary and theatrical styles, the dancers used movement to tell each story - from Boudica's warrior energy to Cleopatra's strategic power. The piece was developed collaboratively by the students and praised for both its ambition and execution.



Performing Arts Awards



Now in its sixth year, the Performing Arts Awards returned in style, celebrating student achievement across Dance, Drama and Music. Held at the Al Habtoor Hotel, the Sparkle and Shine-themed event began with a glitter-filled reception and live music from the Barbershop Boys. Awards were presented across a broad spectrum, from LAMDA and instrumental performance to ensemble groups including the DESS College Dance Company and FAME.



Guests enjoyed a buffet dinner alongside live performances from Grace Baker, Banafsheh Saklatwalla, Zialla Simon and the Chamber Choir. The night culminated with the Performing Arts Award for Excellence, which was presented to Grace Baker for her outstanding contribution this year and for securing a place at Leeds Conservatoire of Music. A final set by DJ Jack brought students onto the dance floor for a fitting close to the celebration.



Bells, Bids and Balance Sheets

Year 10 Takes on the ADX

"How do you make a small fortune in the stock market?... You start with a large one!"

As part of Global Money Week; the UAE's first nationally coordinated campaign to promote financial literacy, a group of Year 10 Business students swapped the classroom for the capital, heading to the Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange (ADX) for a first-hand look at how the markets move.

Led by Zoud, The National Financial Wellbeing & Sustainability Initiative, the visit offered students a guided tour of the exchange, where they explored the role of the ADX in the national economy, the mechanics of trading and the wider importance of financial literacy.

A highlight of the day? Ringing the market bell - a moment that underlined the UAE's drive to embed practical financial education into the student experience.

More than just a trip, the visit was a timely reminder of the value of understanding money in a rapidly evolving economic landscape. Our thanks to ADX and Zoud for making this hands-on learning opportunity possible.



Bringing Stories to Life

World Book Day

"A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies... The man who never reads lives only one." – George R.R. Martin

We marked World Book Day on Wednesday, 23rd April with colour, character, and a shared love of storytelling. From enchanted forests to dystopian futures, the school corridors were alive with literary figures as both staff and students dressed up as their favourite characters in a celebration of imagination in full flow.

The Arabic and Islamic Department were crowned winners of this year's staff costume contest, with the Science and Inclusion teams not far behind. But the real prize was the sense of fun and togetherness that filled the day.



Beyond the costumes, World Book Day is our chance to reignite a passion for reading. From themed classroom activities to the popular Book Swap, where students could exchange a well-loved book for a new story to explore, the day was filled with opportunities to celebrate the magic of reading.

Thank you to everyone who took part and made the day so memorable.



Celebrating Our DESCREATES Competition Winners

Congratulations to all our winners in the DESCREATES Writing and Artwork Competition.

With so many powerful stories and stunning pieces of art submitted, being chosen as a winner is a real testament to your creativity, imagination and talent.

Well done to everyone who took part and helped make this year's competition such an inspiring celebration of the arts here at the College.



Conference Recap

Addressing Climate Anxiety in Youth

Psychology students recently attended a powerful and thought-provoking conference at the University of Birmingham, Dubai, exploring the theme of 'Addressing Climate Anxiety in Youth'.

The day brought together educators, researchers and, most importantly, young people, to examine how the climate crisis is shaping the mental health and worldview of the next generation.

A central theme throughout the conference was the growing emotional toll that climate change is having on young people. Students spoke candidly about their fears, frustrations and hopes, with one participant describing it as a "never-ending loop of despair". Another captured the emotional intensity by stating, "an attack on the environment is like an attack on ourselves."

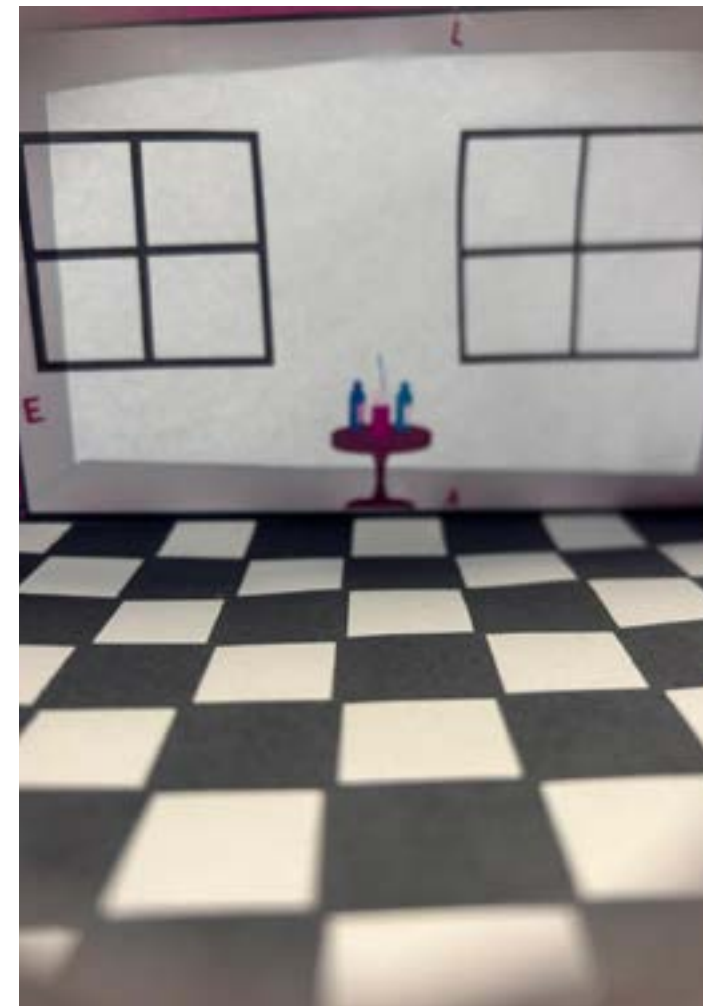
Discussions explored both the direct impacts of climate change, such as extreme weather and displacement, and the indirect effects, including anxiety, grief and a growing sense of helplessness. The role of social media was highlighted as a double-edged sword: while it can amplify awareness and activism, it can also heighten fear and encourage doomscrolling.

The conference also considered the wider costs of climate change, not only the financial implications for communities and governments, but also the significant emotional and psychological burden borne by young people.



Despite the seriousness of the topic, the day ended with a sense of solidarity and determination. What shone through most was the resilience, passion and clarity of the youth voices in the room.

With the right support, young people are not just anxious about the future - they are ready to lead it.



Mind Games and Optical Tricks

Year 10 Psychologists Get Creative with Visual Illusions

This term, Year 10 Psychology students swapped textbooks for cardboard and creativity as they explored the fascinating world of visual perception through a hands-on group project.

Tasked with designing their own 3D visual illusions, students applied key concepts from the AQA curriculum, delving into how our brains interpret - and sometimes misinterpret, what we see. From the famous Ames Room to the Muller-Lyer and Ponzo illusions, their projects demonstrated how depth cues, prior knowledge and cultural expectations shape our perceptual experience.

The project also gave students a chance to explore Gregory's constructivist theory of perception in action, revealing just how easily the brain can be tricked by the visual world around us. More than just a display of creativity, it was an engaging, collaborative way to bring theory to life, and a reminder that not everything is quite as it seems!

Future-Focused DESS Careers Week 2025 Opens Doors and Minds

Careers Week 2025 at DESS College was more than just a calendar highlight, it was a powerful celebration of ambition, curiosity and the real-world connections that turn potential into opportunity.

Over the course of the week, students were immersed in experiences designed to spark ideas and shape aspirations. From dynamic employer round tables to practical student challenges, every interaction was crafted to stretch thinking and bring career pathways to life.

A special first this year was the launch of our DESSConnect Alumni Coffee Morning, a chance for current students to engage with those who once stood in their shoes. The message was loud and clear: the journey from school to success looks different for everyone, and the support of a connected, generous alumni network makes all the difference.



One of the standout moments came courtesy of Al Khayyat Investments, who hosted a group of A Level Business, Economics and BTEC Enterprise and Entrepreneurship students at their cutting-edge fulfilment facility. The visit offered a rare behind-the-scenes look at how a major UAE business delivers efficiency, scale and innovation across its operations, and provided a chance for students to see the intersection of logistics, strategy and vision in action.



It was a week of smart questions, surprising insights and serious inspiration — made possible by the 70 guest speakers, alumni, employers and staff who gave their time so generously. Most of all, it was the enthusiasm and curiosity of our students that turned a packed agenda into something truly meaningful.

As we look ahead, the success of Careers Week 2025 reinforces a simple truth: when schools connect students with the world beyond the classroom, futures get brighter.



Year 12 Economics Students Explore Big Data at Heriot-Watt University

Our Year 12 Economics students recently enjoyed an eye-opening visit to Heriot-Watt University, where they explored how big data is transforming decision-making in the real world. From tracking consumer behaviour to understanding global market trends, students discovered how economists and businesses use data to uncover powerful insights.

The trip provided hands-on experience with industry-focused data skills, helping students see the real-world value of the concepts they study in class. It was an inspiring day, and students left with a deeper understanding of how data is shaping the future of the digital Economy.



Wired for Innovation How Robotics is Reshaping Learning

Step into a DESS robotics lesson and the hum of concentration is unmistakable. Our students are learning, prototyping, testing, recalibrating and collaborating - and thanks to the introduction of brand-new, custom-built robotics tables and kits, they're doing it with purpose and precision.

It's a hands-on, minds-on approach that goes well beyond textbook theory. Robotics here isn't a bolt-on, it's a springboard for creativity, critical thinking and resilience. Whether programming a robot to navigate a maze or engineering a mechanical arm, students are developing the skills that tomorrow's world will demand.

The expansion of our robotics programme means more dedicated lessons, deeper dives into STEM learning, and a sharper focus on real-world applications. It's about equipping students with the ability to design, code, problem-solve - and lead.

The future of engineering, computer science and design is already unfolding in our classrooms. And our students? They're not just keeping pace. In true DESS College style, they're driving the change.



Pi Day 2025

Adds a Slice of Fun to Campus Life

At the end of last term, our campus was buzzing with excitement as we celebrated Pi Day by bringing a love of mathematics to life in new and memorable ways.

A highlight of the day was our annual Pi recital competition, where students put their memory skills to the test by recalling as many digits of π as they could. Congratulations to our winners: Vakhera, who claimed first place with an impressive 500 digits, Kourtney, who secured second place with 159 digits and Celine, who followed closely in third with 158 digits.



The College record remains an incredible 1,012 digits, set last year by Jeff in Year 12. The challenge is there for anyone feeling brave enough to try and beat it!

Alongside the recital, students also took part in a lively treasure hunt around the campus, solving puzzles and hunting for clues in a celebration of maths, curiosity and teamwork.

Thank you to everyone who took part and helped to make Pi Day another fantastic and fun-filled College event.

Looking Ahead with Purpose and Pride



As the final chapter of the academic year begins to unfold, the pace at DESS College is anything but slowing down. Summer may be on the horizon, but in true DESS fashion, the weeks ahead are packed with experiences that reflect the vibrancy, achievement and community spirit that define us.

For our Year 13 students, the next few weeks mark an emotional and celebratory farewell. Graduation last week was a highlight; a time to reflect on their journey, honour friendships, and look ahead to the adventures waiting beyond our walls. Before they left, there was one final chance to compete and connect as they took part in the traditional Morning of Sport - a lively, spirited celebration of camaraderie and College pride.

Year 11 students gathered for a special Good Luck Assembly, sending them into the exam season with encouragement, confidence and plenty of support from staff and peers alike. Both Year 11 and Y13 events will be covered in the next issue.

Elsewhere, the end-of-year energy is just as palpable. Prize Days for Years 7 to 12 will soon shine a light on student success, recognising not only academic excellence but the wider contributions that make our community so rich; leadership, resilience, service, and creativity.

House Day will bring students together in full colour and full voice, as teams compete, collaborate and celebrate another memorable year of inter-house spirit. And for our Year 10 students, real-world learning takes centre stage as they head out on Work Experience placements across the city, gaining insights, independence and inspiration for the future.

Beyond our College campus, horizons continue to expand. Students will venture to Kenya, Iceland and the historic Battlefields of Europe, each trip a unique opportunity to connect learning with life, explore global contexts and grow in empathy, confidence and understanding.

We'll also be marking Eid al-Adha together as a school, honouring the diversity and traditions that make our community so special.

From awards to adventures, assemblies to explorations, there's still so much to celebrate. The final weeks of term are a powerful reminder that education at DESS College doesn't wind down; it finishes strong, with purpose, pride and plenty of unforgettable moments still to come.



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