



### IT'S BEEN A BUSY HALF TERM...

Welcome to our first DESS College newsletter of this academic year. As always, the College site has been incredibly busy and the first half-term has flown by at its usual rapid pace. It has been an absolute pleasure to welcome everyone back after the summer break, in particular it has been wonderful to watch the students who are new to the College settle in so well. Our new Year 7 students have completed their induction programme and have already developed friendships with each other and built relationships with their teachers. The new Year 12 cohort have also made a great start to life in the Sixth Form; it fills us all with tremendous pride when we see students that, only a few weeks ago, were overcoming the challenges of the GCSE examination season, to be now walking tall with maturity and confidence around the Sixth Form Centre.

In this newsletter you will find a variety of articles that highlight just a fraction of the experiences that our students have already had in such a short space of time. I hope that you enjoy casting your eye over the stories that have been selected for you.

Wishing you a wonderful half term break.

Kind regards

Matthew Cotgrove  
Head of School

### HISTORY

Year 7 students recently enjoyed an exciting educational trip to the Queen Elizabeth II (QE2) ship and the Sharjah Maritime Museum. The students had an excellent time exploring the rich history and significance of the QE2, learning about its unique features and important place in maritime history, as well as making fascinating links between the QE2 and the Titanic, their current topic in History.

They also gained insights into the local maritime heritage of the UAE, including the traditional craftsmanship of dhow-building and the significance of pearl diving in the region. Through this hands-on experience, students explored the evolution of shipbuilding, from iconic vessels like the QE2 to the local dhows that played a vital role in the UAE's history.



### Marhaba Mornings

This year has seen a continuation of our hugely successful Parental Forum programme that we call "Marhaba Mornings". During the first seven weeks of this term, members of staff from a variety of disciplines and subject areas have put together informative sessions for parents to "lift the lid" on how we operate at DESS College. The purpose of these meetings is to provide more detailed information on how systems work at the College, to add a further layer of rationale to help parents understand why we do things in the way that we do, and to allow parents to ask questions about anything that they find confusing or do not fully understand. We know that our College is quite a complex operation – these mornings allow parents to develop a deeper understanding of how we are supporting their children at every point in their development. This year's sessions have included a focus on SEND, PE and Sport, the jump to GCSEs, life beyond DESS College and the RISE programme.

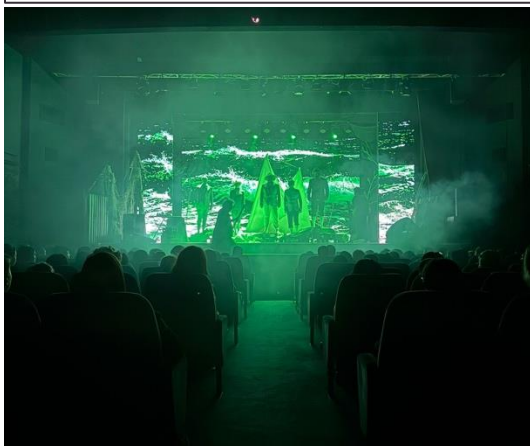


## ALL THINGS PERFORMING ARTS

**Fame:** Excitement recently swept through the College as auditions for the whole-school musical, *Fame*, concluded and the highly anticipated cast was announced. Students from all year groups gave their all in singing, acting and dancing, making the audition process an impressive display of talent and creativity. The audition process has been a fantastic opportunity for students to push themselves, whether they're seasoned performers or stepping into the spotlight for the first time. The chosen cast is now hard at work, with rehearsals already underway. Whether seasoned performers or newcomers, everyone is bringing their passion and energy to the stage, ensuring this production will be an unforgettable celebration of dedication and the performing arts and we look forward to welcoming you all to watch the final shows in February!

**Italia Conti:** Our Year 12 CAPA students recently had the incredible opportunity to participate in a musical theatre and self-tape workshop with industry professionals from Italia Conti International, one of the UK's leading performing arts institutions. The workshop provided invaluable insights into the world of musical theatre, with students honing their singing, acting and dance skills through interactive sessions. They also learned the art of self-taping, an essential tool for modern auditions. This hands-on experience not only boosted their confidence but also gave them a taste of what it takes to succeed in the performing arts industry.

**The Tempest:** Last week, Year 7 students embarked on an exciting trip aboard the iconic QE2 to watch a captivating performance of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The historic setting of the ship added a unique atmosphere to the magical play, transporting the students into the world of Prospero, Ariel and Caliban. For many, it was their first experience of live theatre, and the blend of Shakespeare's timeless tale and the grand surroundings made it truly unforgettable. The trip not only enhanced their understanding of the play but also inspired a deeper appreciation for literature and the arts.



**LITERACY** is the foundation upon which all other learning is built. The ability to read, write and communicate effectively is not just an academic skill - it is a vital life skill that empowers our students to succeed in the world beyond the classroom. This half-term, the English Department coordinated two key events that underscored the importance of both written and spoken language. First, we celebrated International Literacy Day, an event dedicated to highlighting the importance of literacy worldwide. Our students participated in spelling and vocabulary challenges, a dictionary scavenger hunt and listened to teachers read their favourite novels and poems. It was wonderful to see students come together to share their favourite books, discuss new ideas and reflect on how literacy has shaped their learning journeys. The event was not only a celebration but a reminder that literacy is a key driver of academic achievement and personal growth.

Additionally, several DESS College students took part in the prestigious BSME Debate Competition, where they engaged in debates on a range of complex topics. The ability to articulate thoughts clearly, listen actively and respond thoughtfully are all crucial elements of literacy. Debating offers the perfect platform to practise these skills. The experience of preparing for the competition helped students improve their research abilities, sharpen their critical thinking and build their confidence in public speaking. It was an inspiring reminder of how literacy extends beyond the written word.

As we reflect on these events, it is clear that literacy, in all its forms, is not just about academic success - it is about empowering students to be informed, engaged and articulate citizens of the world.



## INCLUSION

### Guest Speaker Dr O'Brien from Insights Psychology - ADHD Keynote Presentation:

Last month, DESS College had the privilege of hosting Dr Leanne O'Brien, a leading expert on Neurodevelopmental Differences in young people. Dr O'Brien delivered an inspiring keynote speech to our Support Teacher cohort, sharing her knowledge and expertise in ADHD and Executive Function. Her insights and expertise were truly invaluable and thought-provoking and we look forward to having her back again in the future.

### New Parents of Student with SEND - Inclusion Information Marhaba Morning:

The Inclusion Department was pleased to welcome the parents of our new KS3 students with SEND into DESS college. The event provided an opportunity to introduce key members of staff from the department and outline how we will support students, as well as the channels of communication. It also allowed parents to network with each other and hopefully will lay the foundations for a fruitful working relationship to ensure all students at DESS College feel a sense of belonging.



## MFL

**Dual Linguists :** At DESS College, studying French and Spanish is highly regarded. Not only do we recognise the importance of foreign languages in terms of university applications and job opportunities, but we also understand the value in exposing our students to the unique cultures of French and Spanish-speaking countries. This is why we feel it is essential that all our students experiment learning both French and Spanish in Year 7. At the end of Year 7, students are asked to make a decision; they either specialise in just one language in Years 8 and 9 or they decide to continue as a Dual Linguist. The latter is becoming an increasingly popular route. Being a Dual Linguist requires high levels of dedication and motivation and it entails a compulsory weekly after-school lesson. In recognition of our Dual Linguists' resilience and hard work, one student in each class will receive a Polyglot Prize at the end of each half term. Congratulations to Samridh Kundu, Chloe George, Saesha Khosla, Joseph El Khoury, Myca Tan and Niamh Carbery who won the Polyglot Award this half term!

**The Languages Society :** The Languages Society meets every Tuesday lunchtime in CF4. It is a place where students can come and express their love of languages, explore cultural differences and improve their linguistic ability and confidence. Members of the Languages Society develop their leadership skills by planning activities and competitions to promote languages around the College. This half term, our Languages Society created a Pronunciation Race House Competition for our Year 7 French and Spanish classes.

Many congratulations to our winners!



## GEOGRAPHY

On Monday, 16<sup>th</sup> September we invited Climate Fresk to return to the College to run a workshop with Year 7 students in Geography, looking at the causes and devastating consequences Climate Change is having on the world. Students developed both their understanding of the complexity of the causes of climate change whilst also demonstrating their enormous empathy for those in the world suffering as a result of the changes occurring to our planet. Students responded with enthusiasm, setting targets for how they could modify their individual behaviors and habits to become a small part of the solution to meeting the COP targets of limiting the rise in temperatures to 1.5 degrees. Climate Fresk were very impressed with the students maturity and are looking forward to returning to the College later in the year to work with our Year 13 A Level Geography students.



## PASTRY WORKSHOP WITH CHEF ALANNAH DOE

Year 12 BTEC Hospitality students recently had the incredible opportunity to participate in a bespoke pastry workshop led by the 2020 Caterer Awards' Pastry Chef of the Year, Alannah Doe. As well as a remarkable background which includes five-star Hospitality Hotels such as the Savoy Hotel in London, the Jumeirah Hotel Group and Address Group in the UAE, Alannah also runs her own business, Alannah's Pastry Boutique, where she continues to innovate in the pastry world.

During the workshop Alannah guided Hospitality students through essential industry techniques to create a decadent selection of Craquelin Choux pastries. Students experienced first hand how to temper chocolate, which was formed into lacework and a range of garnishes, along with mastering piping skills and perfecting presentation. This hands-on experience not only enhanced their culinary skills but also inspired students to prepare for the upcoming Hospitality Lunch to be held in November 2024, which is part of their Events in Hospitality Unit.

The event was a truly enriching experience that showcased the flair, creativity and passion of our Year 12 Hospitality students.



## MEDIA

The Creative Media students have been making great use of our podcasting equipment, quickly evolving into confident, articulate speakers. What begins with shy and hesitant students transforms into dynamic discussions, as they master the art of presenting their well-structured, scripted dialogues. Throughout this process, they gain hands-on experience in setting up equipment, balancing sound and connecting to the necessary software. Below, we see Lulu and Sofia deep in thought as they engage in a focused podcast discussion!

**Lights, camera, action!** Students have been introduced to a variety of light options to enhance their creative projects. Some of these include light painting (see Josh holding the lightsabres!), studio lighting and utilising the outdoor reflectors. It's all for the purposes of capturing the picture perfect photograph to avoid shadows and over-exposure in the final images. The students appreciate and critique each others photographs, which improves the students' communication and develops community in their small groups.



## FURSAN AL-ARABIYA

We are excited to introduce Fursan Al-Arabiya which is returning for its second year, continuing its mission to support students in their Arabic studies. This dedicated group of talented Year 9 and Year 10 students from Arabic B classes have generously volunteered their time to assist their peers in preparing for Progress Week.

Whether you need help with writing, speaking, or understanding your homework, the Fursan Al-Arabiya Team is always ready to lend a helping hand. Their expertise and passion for Arabic have significantly impacted our students, both high attaining learners and those seeking extra support.

The Fursan Al-Arabiya Team members are not only knowledgeable about the subject matter but also skilled at creating a supportive and encouraging learning environment. They provide clear and concise explanations, offer helpful tips and strategies, and foster a sense of camaraderie among their peers.

By sharing their expertise and experiences, the Fursan Al-Arabiya Team is helping to develop the leadership skills of its members while also inspiring others to pursue their passion for Arabic.

We encourage all students to take advantage of the Fursan Al-Arabiya Team's support and guidance. Their dedication and commitment to helping others learn Arabic make them a valuable asset to our school community.



## NEWS FROM OUR ARABIC A DEPARTMENT

**International Competitions:** For the second year in a row, our students have qualified for the finals of both the Chevron Reading Competition and the UAE International Arabic Poetry Competition.

**Personalised Learning:** We have developed standardised progress monitoring tools for all four language skills. This allows us to provide tailored support and track student growth throughout the academic year. Parents will also have access to an electronic version through the student portal.

**Fursan Al Arabiya Program:** This program encourages students to excel not only in Arabic but also in leadership and other areas. Honorees have their photos and achievements displayed on our wall of fame.

**Standardised Testing:** We are proud to be one of the first British schools to replace end-of-term exams with international standardised tests in our Arabic A department. This has enhanced the reliability and validity of our assessments whilst also leading to excellent results and increased recognition from the KHDA; we have the ability now to lead this initiative within the region.



## SPORT & PE

It has been a very busy start to the sporting year with 93 different ECA clubs and over 87 teams training. Matches have started for boys and girls Football, U19 and U16 boys and girls Basketball and Senior Water Polo. There will be a number of tournaments, touring teams, tours and events on the horizon this term and we are all looking forward to a packed calendar.

We have already begun the year with a very successful U19 DESS College 7s tournament, with players from Dubai and Abu Dhabi joining us for some friendly competition in preparation for the upcoming 7s Rugby season. A wonderful event across two evenings under the lights on the beautiful DESS College Rugby pitch.

It is going to be a busy and exciting year of sport and we very much look forward to welcoming all our community to the DESS College site.



## REPTON ACADEMIC OLYMPIAD

Eight students from DESS Primary and DESS College were split up and formed teams (named after world-renowned universities) with students from other schools in Dubai. In their teams they competed in rounds including Science, English, Mathematics, teambuilding and general knowledge.

Year 8 students Bonnie Zhang (team Oxford) and Nathan Fryer (team Imperial), and year 7 students Herbie Sargeant (team Cambridge) and Manal Shamsi (team Harvard) represented DESS College. Manal received a medal for her team winning the general knowledge round. Nathan walked away with two medals - his team won the Mathematics round, and they also came in third place overall.

The students had an amazing time competing with and against other Dubai students.



## PSYCHOLOGY PLAYDOH HOUSE COMPETITION

In the Psychology department this half-term, students took part in a Playdoh House competition, which supported the Brain and Neuropsychology module in Year 11. Students were provided with Playdoh and were given 25 minutes to create a model from anything they had learnt in the topic of the Brain and Neuropsychology. Examples included synaptic transmission, motor neurons or the brain itself. The class teacher chose the top four pieces in their class and shared those images on the Departmental Teams areas.

It was then up to the Head of Department to then choose first to fourth places across all of the Year 11 Psychology classes. As a Bronze Event it counted as one of the departmental House Competitions and contributed to the overall points score in the ongoing House Competition 2024/25.



## ESPORTS

We are excited to share the growing success and popularity of the eSports arena, which has become a hub for students to connect, compete and collaborate. Used several times a week for ECAs, the space offers a fantastic opportunity for students to develop teamwork and communication, and build positive relationships in a fun, modern and state of the art environment. Our recent Year 7 and Year 8 House competitions have been particularly popular, promoting a sense of belonging and friendly competition. Beyond gaming, this initiative supports student wellbeing, helping them build resilience and a competitive spirit whilst forming positive relationships with peers.



## Information Advice & Guidance (IAG)

**World Heart Day.** As part of the World Heart Day celebrations, we welcomed Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi to the College on Friday, 27<sup>th</sup> September. Their experienced medical staff hosted careers sessions and facilitated CPR training with our Sixth Form Medical Society students. They also led a first aid refresher for our staff focusing on CPR and use of the mobile defibrillators, which we have at the College. A huge thank you to the staff from Cleveland Clinic for this fantastic opportunity.

**Trip to Clyde & Co. Law Firm.** On Tuesday, 1<sup>st</sup> October, six of our Year 13 aspiring law students attended an immersive careers event at the offices of Clyde & Co. This was an excellent opportunity for the students to interact with law graduates and learn more about the firm. A big thank you to Clyde & Co. for providing this invaluable experience for our students.

**Work Experience.** Although the summer may feel like a lifetime ago, for many of our Sixth Form students the work experience placements which they were involved in have left a lasting impression. Participation in these placements allowed the students to develop their employability skills and gain insight into potential career sectors. In many cases, these experiences have been critical in shaping the pathway that the students choose to pursue following Year 13.

Many of our parents, friends and connections in the wider DESS community supported this initiative by offering work experience opportunities. We would like to extend our gratitude for the vital role you've had in exposing our students to the world of work and guiding them on the right pathway.

**Student Learning Leaders.** Well done and thank you to the 62 Year 12 students who have volunteered as student learning leaders this term. Our student learning leaders have been busy supporting Year 7 and Year 8 lessons in a range of subjects across the College. What a fantastic opportunity to help younger students and gain leadership experience towards their MVP portfolio.

