

Our Senior Prefects this year, in a few moments, will draw together and celebrate with you, in their own inimitable style, the extra-curricular successes enjoyed last year.

The success of the extra-curricular programme is due in part to the enthusiasm and talent of our students, however, simply it would not happen without the organisation, support and willingness of my colleagues.

However, I should like to focus at this point on our academic achievements. 2006-2007 was another exceptional year for the students of Portadown College.

At GCSE 44% of the grades achieved by our students were either A* or A with 96% of all the grades achieved by our young people were either A*, A, B or C – an increase of 2% on the previous year. When this is compared with the NI GCSE Average for 2006-2007 which is 72.4% you can truly appreciate what outstanding results these are.

Forty four students achieved 8 or more straight A or A* grades. Five boys Andrew Gordon, Mathew Greenaway, Gareth Herron, Benjamin Shepherd and Andrew Spence all sat at least 9 GCSEs and achieved straight A*.

Philip McDonald, Hannah Nevin, Rebecca Topley, Christopher R Irwin, Christopher W Irwin, Emma McAlister, Victoria Blair, Timothy Duke, Craig McKee, Jill Moffett and Ta Sun Poon all achieved 9 or more A Grades including 7 or 8 A*.

We are celebrating today, I should like to emphasise, the successes of all our students here. Not every student who works conscientiously and with great motivation is capable of straight A Grades. Large numbers of our last year's GCSE students worked maturely after Trial examinations, aimed for realistic target grades and achieved or surpassed these targets.

Portadown College values each young person as an individual; my colleagues and I are proud of your academic achievements. Nearly all the Year 12 group achieved 7 or more GCSE passes with a minimum of 3B and 4C grades and I am pleased to report that we welcomed the vast majority back into Lower Sixth to study AS levels with an enhanced enrichment programme and a broader A Level curriculum including 17 students from other schools.

It was particularly pleasing to welcome such large numbers from Craigavon Senior High as it demonstrates the flexibility of our 2 tier system.

At both AS and A2 levels the most common grade for Portadown College students was a Grade A. At A2 level 54 students achieved at least 2 A Grades with 28 students achieving 3 or more A Grades. Three students this year – Catherine Carville, Peter Nelson and Peter Thompson all achieved 4 straight A grades at A2.

One of the important benchmarks, we as a Grammar School have, is supporting and stretching our students at A2 to ensure that 90% of the grades achieved are A, B or C. I am proud to share with you that again this year we reached this target.

Our Lower Sixth students revealed just how well they had bridged the gap from GCSE to A Level and 47.4% of the grades achieved were A Grades with an outstanding 74 students

achieving 2 or more A Grades. I am also delighted to share with you that the number of students achieving 4 straight A grades at AS is increasing: this year 26 students enjoyed opening their envelopes to see 4 As deservedly written on the page.

Just as many of our students excel in a wide range of subjects so there are students, whose success, it is important we celebrate today, who excel in one subject or more in particular. This year a large number of students were accredited with full marks in GCSE, AS and A2.

They were in Art and Design David Meek at GCSE, Ruth Baxter and Rebekah White at AS Level, in Biology at AS Level Ruth Farquhar, in Chemistry at A2 level Ross McDonald, in Home Economics at AS Level Lauren Irwin, in GCSE Mathematics Mathew Greenaway, in AS Mathematics Jacqueline Adair and Joanne Weekes and in Additional Mathematics GCSE Timothy Duke. Clare Irwin was credited with full marks in her AS Music examinations; Joanne Weekes with full marks in her AS Physics papers and Peter Harris also achieved full marks in his AS Religious Studies examinations. Additionally large numbers of students achieved full marks in one or more modules and as you shall see during our Prize Giving Ceremony 8 students have been informed that they have been ranked 1st, 2nd or 3rd among all the students who entered CCEA Examinations.

The excellent results are well above NI Grammar School Averages and are a testament to allowing young people have a more meaningful role to play in selection at 14 at a time when they are beginning to see where their strengths lie and select the school accordingly.

Last year I used the analogy of no school being an island as a key part of my report, in my reference to Portadown College as one part of an education system, excellent throughout, that starts at age 3 or 4 in the local Primary Schools. I am delighted to report that last year saw once again a day when the teachers from our three contributory Junior High Schools spent time with colleagues in the College ensuring the transition from Junior High to Senior Grammar School is a smooth one for our students both in the curricular and social sense.

Last year the Headteachers of all schools in the Craigavon Two Tier System spent much time analysing our system, ensuring it is fit for purpose and ready to meet the challenges of an ever changing educational landscape. I should like, at this point, to pay credit to my colleagues for their openness, and their student-centred approach to preparing the two tier system for its next transition.

This year my analogy is one of a ship which has set sail with a clear vision of its destination, the ship is Portadown College and the destination is excellence in all things. Kurt Kahn the German educator and founder of the Outward Bound Movement encapsulated this empowerment of young people in the following quotation

There is more to us than we know. If we can be made to see it, perhaps for the rest of our lives we will be unwilling to settle for less.

There is however, uncertainty about what this transition I referred to, a few moments ago, in education may entail; the new Education Minister Caitriona Ruane has stated publicly and unequivocally that she does not support academic selection. This is not the time to open a debate about the various counter-arguments to her deeply held political and social beliefs; I should however like to state publicly that the system we have in Portadown engages young

people and their parents much more meaningfully than in other systems of which I have experience in choosing the right pathway for our young people. Craigavon Senior High School provides a complementary but very different type of curriculum and style of teaching and learning for large numbers of its students and for those studying the academic pathway in Craigavon Senior High the pathway to A Level study is here in the College; young people are not seen as failures in this system; each young person is valued and an appropriate curricular pathway established to align with aptitudes, interests and career aspirations.

Our destination in the College is clear and shared by all our stakeholders. We do and will continue to have the welfare and futures of each of our young people at the heart of all we do. Our values permeate everything we do and support us in ensuring each young person reaches his/her potential. Clarity at Ministerial and Departmental level is now required; our young people deserve a bright, clear future. As Senior Schools in Portadown with the transition from a heavily prescriptive National Curriculum to a more student-centred Entitlement Framework, we can and shall provide an education tailored to the needs of our students.

Portadown College has introduced Learning for Life and Work, Journalism and Astronomy GCSEs, Health and Social Care and Moving Image Art 'A' Levels this year; we welcome the opportunity to exercise autonomy at a curricular level and look forward with the support, guidance and expertise of our Board of Governors, Senior Management Team, all staff, parents and students to further financial, curricular and structural autonomy under the guidance of the ESA.

Physical changes are planned too for our College. Work began last year on the plans for a new school estate; we are entering a very exciting time in the planning stages for a new purpose build Senior School to reflect a C21st curriculum. I'd like to pay tribute to the Design Team and in particular Mr Victor Trueman, a member of our Board of Governors who, so willingly, gives of his time and support, Mr Harry Wallace our Chairman for his wisdom and support, Mr Paul McGilton the Southern Education & Library Board Architect and Mr Gregory Butler from the SELB with responsibility for Shaping the School's Estate.

This is, has been and will continue to be a major challenge for the next four years; ensuring we translate the ethos, values and vision of the community of Portadown College into physical buildings is a weighty responsibility. I am confident, however, that as my teaching and non-teaching colleagues become more involved as planning progresses an inspiring physical resource which will benefit generations of young people in Portadown will emerge.

As well as these planned physical changes we had changes in our teaching team last year. At the end of the year we said a fond farewell to Mr Robert Lobb, Vice Principal, Mrs Mary Parr, Senior Teacher, and Mrs Judith Thompson teacher of Modern Languages. These were all valued colleagues; they all made outstanding contributions to the education of our young people. Their journey with us in the College ended in June, however I know that an exciting new era has dawned for all three former colleagues and I wish them health and happiness as the next chapter in their lives begins. I'd like to add just a few additional words of gratitude to Mr Robert Lobb who supported me greatly both publicly and privately in my first year in Headship. I learnt a great deal from you, your legacy of creating and maintaining a culture of self-discipline among all our young people is well respected and student-centred.

Just as our College evolves, so does the world beyond its doors. One of our central aims is preparing young people for the world of work and to make significant contributions to society generally.

Last year an exciting relationship began between the College and 2 local employers, ASCNI and Almac; ways in which the knowledge and skills of our young people could be developed in strategic partnerships with these companies were discussed. Consequently, ASCNI advertised, on our website, and theirs a number of posts over the summer period. Students completed application forms, were called for interviews which they found stretching but extremely useful and one student Matthew McMullan has been employed by ASCNI. This work complements his A Level studies and Andrew Gregson, the Managing Director, has been greatly impressed by his problem solving skills, his maturity and his focus. I see this as a very exciting initiative on which to build and Almac continues to work with us about how this model of partnership may suit their Company and I am delighted to report that just last week I began discussions with Ulster Carpet Mills.

I look forward to working with increasing numbers of local employers to help grow in our young people the key competencies looked for by employers. I believe that we have some of the very best students in Northern Ireland and am delighted to see them being appropriately remunerated for meaningful, stretching part-time work which will enhance their career opportunities and give them a significant advantage over their peers from other areas in Northern Ireland or indeed more globally.

Before I pass over to our Senior Prefect Team – I trust it is clear from this Report ladies, gentlemen and our young people, Portadown College has had another outstanding year. We continue to live by and live up to our College Motto “Fortiter et Humaniter” with Courage and Pride.