



Greetings from the Alumni Association - June 2025

Dear Friends

As the summer term ends, we take this opportunity to look back on a packed schedule of school events during the 2024/25 academic year. I hope you enjoy reading these highlights and continue to feel part of the BRA family.

As always, we take great pride in the music and drama achievements, and the sport and academic successes, of our pupils throughout the year.

In November, the Drama department put on three fabulous sold-out performances of *Legally Blonde*, with the Assembly Hall transformed into a pink wonderland. A cast of 60 pupils, accompanied by an incredible band of musicians, all performed with energy and talent. It is testament to the vision and skill of our producer/director Ms Tinman, choreographer Mrs Thornton, and musical director Mr Pyper, that the cast and crew were able to put together such a polished performance in a short space of time, and we are very grateful to them for their dedication to the pupils.

The Spring Concert in the Ulster Hall is always a highlight of the year, and under the guidance of our Director of Music, Ms McMullan, the School's Music Department once again excelled themselves. The event was a true feast for the ears, celebrating the talents of our wonderful choirs and various music groups. Earlier this month, the Music Department also hosted their Spring Serenade, a showcase of junior pupils. Both evenings showcased the talent, dedication and passion of our pupils, and we are grateful to Ms McMullan, Mr Davison, Mrs McConnell and Mrs McCombe and all our peripatetic tutors for supporting and nurturing their love of music.

There was huge excitement in school this year when the 1st XV Rugby team reached the semi-final of the Schools' Cup competition at Kingspan Stadium. A huge contingent of staff and pupils went along to cheer the team and coaches on, and to share in their disappointment when they were defeated by Wallace High School.

During the year, pupils were again offered a wide range of overseas trips, including a Form 1 trip to London, ski trips to Italy and Austria, a combined Classics and Geography trip to Naples, a combined History & Politics trip to New York, a French trip to Paris, a German trip to Munich, a M6 History trip to Dublin, and a Senior Scripture Union trip to

Warsaw. We currently have a group of Lower Sixth pupils and staff undertaking another section of the Camino de Santiago in Spain. These trips help broaden children's horizons and underpin their understanding of academic subjects, and we are very grateful to those members of staff who provided opportunities for pupils.

This term has also seen us welcome back former pupils for a series of Alumni Reunion lunches, celebrating the 50th, 40th and 30th anniversaries of them leaving school. These proved to be highly successful and were thoroughly enjoyed by all who attended, many of whom had not set foot in the School grounds since they left. We plan to continue these reunions next year and look forward to welcoming many more of you back to meet up with former classmates and teachers and take time to enjoy a tour of the School.

Government funding for education remains an issue and presents many challenges for schools, including Belfast Royal Academy. We unfortunately are relying more than ever on the support of voluntary donations to help match government funding and fundraise to make improvements to our facilities, purchase new educational resources and equipment and provide pastoral support to pupils in need. To this end, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has made one-off donations or has signed up as a member of the **1785 Foundation**. Funds from this hugely worthwhile fund contribute to a range of initiatives within school and go towards helping make a significant difference to the lives of current and future pupils, helping to enhance their educational, sporting and cultural experiences and provide equal educational opportunities for all pupils. We are extremely grateful for the support and generosity of the School community, enabling us to continue to provide the quality educational and extra-curricular experience you previously benefitted from.

We wish our pupils who have recently sat public examinations all the best for their futures – they are a tribute to our wonderful staff who ensure the children are well prepared and confident. We wish our Class of 2025 Middle Sixth Leavers a fond farewell and we look forward to seeing them return to school as alumni of the future.

I wish you all a relaxing and enjoyable summer on behalf of everyone at Belfast Royal Academy and look forward to welcoming you back in person on your next visit to the Cliftonville Road, perhaps at one of a number of events being held at the start of the next academic year to celebrate the 240th anniversary of the school.

Kind regards

Hilary Woods
Principal

Alumni Reunions - 50, 40 and 30-year reunions and Special Anniversary Lunch

We were delighted to recently host a series of Alumni Anniversary Reunions for the Classes of 1975, 1985 and 1995. In addition, we hosted a special one-off reunion for pupils who had left before 1970 as part of our celebrations to mark the 240th anniversary of the school in 2025.

It was a joy to see former classmates being reunited back at BRA, reconnecting with each other and with former teachers. We were pleased that so many people made the effort to join us at these Reunion events, many of whom had not been back since leaving school. We grateful to everyone who attended, particularly those who had travelled far to attend, with guests arriving from across Europe, the United States, Kenya, New Zealand and Australia. Following on from the success of these, we plan to host similar events marking milestone anniversaries in 2026 - dates will be confirmed in due course.





BRA Class of 1995 - 30 Year Reunion
Lunch in the BRA Library - 6th June 2025

Belfast Royal Academy Reunion for School Leavers from 1970 & Earlier Years - in the School Jackson Suite - Friday 20th June 2025



Spring Concert, March 2025

The BRA Music Department can always be relied on to provide an entertaining night out, and this year's Spring Concert at the Ulster Hall was no exception. A highlight of the year, the evening showcased the incredible talent, dedication and passion of our pupils, staff and peripatetic tutors, and the audience loved every minute of it.



Each of the School's choral and instrumental groups took part, including the Junior and Senior Choir, Boys' Choir, Chamber Choir, Orchestra, Junior and Senior Strings, Wind Band, Junior and Senior Trad. The eclectic programme demonstrated the flexibility that staff and pupils have, as the audience were treated to pieces from the 15th century, sacred music in the form of Karl Jenkins' Requiem, and music from Avicii and Guns N' Roses. The pupils' enjoyment and sense of belonging was clearly evident throughout.

Amongst so many standout performances, our soloists were also superb and M6 solo performed so beautifully by Maria Watters brought a standing ovation from her peers and a generous and well-deserved response from the audience.



Thank you to everyone who ensured that the concert was a resounding success: our brilliant Music Department staff led by Director of Music Ms McMullan, Mr Davison and Mrs McConnell; our dedicated peripatetic tutors; Mrs McCombe who ensured that the Boys' Choir hit all the right notes, and our own pupils who led the Senior and Junior Traditional groups.

The 1785 Foundation

Named after the year the Academy was founded, the **1785 Foundation** continues to grow and is the ideal opportunity for Alumni to reconnect with the Academy and to share some of the pride and ambition that we have for our pupils.

BRA was founded to provide an exceptional education for young people from all walks of life, and the 1785 Foundation is one way through which the School demonstrates a strong social purpose and an ethos of caring for pupils from diverse backgrounds. The Foundation was formed to ensure that all pupils at the school have a rich schooling experience and can enjoy full engagement in art, music, sport and extra-curricular activities, regardless of financial background or family circumstances.

Members of the 1785 Foundation are passionate about furthering the School's vision – that all our pupils are given every opportunity and the support they need to fulfil their potential in school and life – and our mission, that we believe education has the power to transform lives. They achieve this by committing themselves to donate small, regular amounts of money, with four different categories of membership available: bronze, silver, gold and platinum. This enables the flexible use of funds to wherever the need is greatest, helping Belfast Royal Academy as we work to build a school that is ever more influential, inspiring and accessible for all.

The Foundation has now grown to 106 members, and we are most grateful to each and every member for their ongoing support. Over the past year, donations have been used to:

- Provide fruit and cereal barriers for pupils who arrive to school hungry, ensuring they can access a healthy snack and avoid the detrimental impact that hunger can have on their learning experience and outcomes.
- Provide funding towards the cost of sports kits, trips and instrument tuition, enabling children from disadvantaged backgrounds to access the full range of extra-curricular activities available.
- Fund counselling and support services, thus tackling mental health and wellbeing issues which have a profound effect upon education.

With the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, this vital support for pupils is more important than ever. Every small, regular donation to the Foundation makes a difference to a pupil's time at the Academy, so to our members, thank you for your ongoing support for Belfast Royal Academy.

For further information on the 1785 Foundation and details of how to join please click [here](#) to visit the **Support Us** section of our website.

Sporting Achievements

Hockey

In March, Girls' Hockey celebrated two wins in two days, when BRA - captained by Anouk Bosket - won the Senior Shield Ulster Hockey against Ballymena Academy.



The following day, the 2nd XI team - captained by Sophie Hollywood - won the McDowell Shield on penalties against Wallace High School.

We are very proud that Leah Callaghan (Form 5) was selected as one of Queen's University Belfast Hockey Future Stars. Leah played for the Ulster Hockey U16 team, and we are very proud of her fantastic achievements.

Thank you to our coaches, Mr Stephen Watt and Ms Karen Brady for their dedication and commitment to the team.

Rugby

In February, the 1st XV played Wallace High School in the semi-final of the Danske Bank Schools' Cup. The team and teachers were given a magnificent send-off when the entire school community - pupils, staff and parents - came out to cheer them on, both as they left school and at Kingspan Stadium. Unfortunately the game did not go their way - a heartbreaking loss but one to very proud of.



L6 pupil, Connor McVicker, was selected to represent Ireland U18 Schools in their up-and-coming summer camps and tour to South Africa in August. Connor also played with the Irish U18 Schools' team in the U18 Six Nations competition, and was awarded the Danske Bank Schools' Player of the Year at the Ulster Rugby Awards. We are very proud of Connor's amazing achievements. Other Lower Sixth pupils had great levels of success as well. James Murray and Jayden Irwin both represented Ulster U18 in matches this year. Well done to all our teams for a brilliant season and thank you to the Rugby coaches for their contribution and hard work. We look forward to next season!

Swimming

Two pupils, Ines Scott (I6) and Jan Boersma (Form 4) were selected to travel with an Ulster Schools Swimming Association squad to train at the London Aquatics Centre in Spring 2025. They qualified based on their performance at the KS4 Championships in April 2024.

Jan Boersma also competed at the Irish Open Swimming Championships in April at the National Aquatic Centre in Dublin. Racing against Ireland's best swimmers, Jan competed in five events, achieving personal best times in each. We are very proud of Jan's terrific performances.

Athletics

BRA athletes had success at the Irish Schools' Athletic Championships in Tullamore earlier this month. This is a major competition with more than one thousand athletes from 392 schools from every county in Ireland. Special congratulations to Zac Fox (Form 2) who became Irish Champion in the Minor Long Jump event (right) and Chukwuweta Okonkwo who came second in the Minor High Jump event (left).



Thanks to all the PE staff and coaches who supported the pupils in Tullamore and at the Ulster Schools' Athletics Championships in May.

Triathlon

Form 4 pupil, Evan Tosh, had a fantastic year. Amongst his many appearances in multi-discipline events, in May Evan placed 2nd overall and 1st Youth at the XTERRA Malta off-road triathlon event, qualifying him for the XTERRA World Championships in Italy in September. He rounded off the school year by representing Team Ireland at the World Triathlon Multisport Championships in Pontvedra, Spain. Tremendous racing!



BRA Annual Cricket Match

The 2025 annual cricket match between the School XI and Old Boys' XI was held on an incredible hot and sunny 20th June in Castle Grounds. During the interval, and on behalf of the Old Boys' Association, Dr Graham Crothers presented the new Robin Reid Trophy to the Principal, which features a cricket bat belong to Robin Reid and was donated by his wife, Mrs Judith Reid - a lovely gesture given Robin's positive impact on former pupils as a teacher, sports coach and mentor.

At the end of play, the Trophy was presented by Mrs Reid to Alex Armstrong, who captained the winning School XI team.

