The people, the kindness and the care

THE UWC THAILAND STORY





"The people, the kindness and the care"

- THE UWC THAILAND STORY, SO FAR

FOREWARD

In March 2014, Keith Clark (Executive Director, UWC International Office) presented a positive case to the UWC International Board for Phuket International Academy (PIA) to join the UWC movement. In March 2024, UWC Thailand proudly hosts the UWC International Congress, marking the tenth anniversary of Keith's presentation.

This is the story of the inspiring vision which shaped UWC Thailand into the school and community we know today, a journey which started in 2002.

UWC Thailand proudly celebrated UWC Day 2023 with a vibrant flag parade, spotlighting the rich diversity within our community (2023-24)

THE FOUNDER

In 2002 Klaus Hebben, a German businessman and philanthropist, settled in Phuket. Klaus believed in a holistic education: one that not only provided academic rigour but promoted social and emotional learning and mindfulness, one that would include sports and the arts, broadening student minds and creating an engaged, positive learning experience. He purchased an old rubber plantation and the construction of the Thanyapura Sports Centre and Mind Centre got underway in 2007, with space for a school which would provide ground-breaking education (following the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum) and with access to Thanyapura expertise and facilities.

A VISION REALISED

Phuket International Academy opened in September 2008, with eight primary school students, three teachers (including Caryl Medilo and Erica Lindberg who are still on the staff) and four administrative staff. By the end of the school year, Phuket International Academy had obtained its licence as a not-for-profit affiliate of Thanyapura. Simultaneously, provisional International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (PYP) candidate status had been granted, providing a curriculum framework and direction. Dr Scott Forbes was the first Head of School (2009), succeeded by Len Peters as Interim Head (2009-2010).







In the staff room, a photo captures teacher Erica Lindberg, who is still a valued member of our faculty, beaming at the camera (2008-2010)



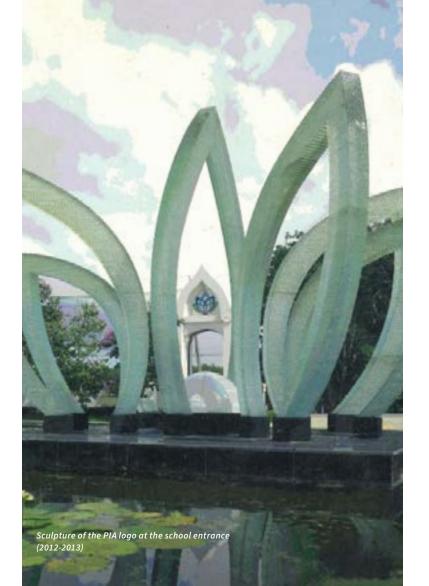
THE MISSION: BUILDING A STRONG EDUCATIONAL CORE

Klaus further built on his vision by inviting Lister Hannah, an experienced and widely respected international educator, to be Executive Chair of a newly created Management Board in August 2009, with a remit to ensure Phuket International Academy had the appropriate staffing and structure of an International Baccalaureate World School; to embed social and emotional learning and mindfulness; and to oversee the expansion of facilities to accommodate growth.

During the year Khun Kanitta Suksawaschon was appointed the school's first Thai School Director, a significant step in settling the school into its Thai context. From the outset, Thai Studies has been core to the curriculum and to the school day.

In early 2010, Klaus, with a group of advisers, worked on the vision and mission of both Thanyapura and Phuket International Academy, leading to the emergence of our motto:

Good Heart, Balanced Mind, Healthy Body









Under the headships of Robyn Klymow (2010-12) and Dennison MacKinnon (2012-14) the schools enrolment grew from 100 to almost 300 (Nursery - grade 10) adding a grade level each year; and the campus was being built out to accommodate a growing student body and staff.

International credentialing of Phuket International Academy followed apace with Primary Years Programme authorisation (2012), Council of International Schools (CIS) membership (2012) and accreditation candidate status (2014). In June 2014, Phuket International Academy received International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (MYP) and International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (DP) authorisation. The Thai Ministry of Education quality assurance authorities rated the school "excellent" (2013).

Students actively integrate Thai Studies into the curriculum and joyously celebrate Thai national holidays (2009-2011)

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING AT THE BEATING HEART OF THE SCHOOL

Driven by the vision of the school's founder, Klaus, Social Emotional Learning and Mindfulness were increasingly embedded in classroom teaching. The International Baccalaureate Organisation visited Phuket International Academy as it explored assimilating Social Emotional Learning and Mindfulness into their Approaches to Learning.

In 2011 Phuket International Academy presented at the International Baccalaureate Asia Pacific Conference, and Lister presented at the International Baccalaureate World Heads Conference, raising international interest in this innovative initiative.

In 2013, Phuket International Academy was recognised internationally as a centre for mindfulness training, and hosted a three-day Mindfulness in Education conference and also a meeting of the Mind and Life Institute.



SUSTAINABILITY AND SERVICE

In 2011, following a biodiversity study of the neighbouring Khao Phra Thaeo Non-Hunting Area, teachers were encouraged to take advantage of the experiential learning opportunities this created, setting in train a focus on nature, conservation, and systems thinking in education which has continued and grown in the school.

Individual teachers took the initiative to build local service opportunities: including gibbon rehabilitation; elephant conservation, Bodhi Dog rescue, supporting local schools, and beach clean-ups. It is a wonderful testament to our teachers and students that many of these early partnerships continue to this day.

Students explore the Khao Phra Thaeo Non-Hunting Area, with teacher Caryl Medilo, who is still a valued member of our faculty (2011-2012)





A LOOK TO THE FUTURE AND JOINING THE UWC FAMILY

In mid-2013. Klaus was introduced to the UWC movement and was immediately attracted by the UWC mission and values. He had already decided that the introduction of boarding was crucial in considering the long-term sustainability of the school. What particularly appealed to Klaus after visits to UWC Southeast Asia (UWCSEA), to Li Po Chun United World College of Hong Kong (LPCUWC) and to the UWC International Office (IO) in London in January 2014 was that the philosophies of Phuket International Academy and the UWC movement were so significantly complementary. Good heart, balanced mind, healthy body seemed to blend seamlessly into the UWC framework for action and educating for peace and a sustainable future. In short, Klaus saw the potential for fresh energy and a unique vision of what UWC Thailand could grow to represent with a global diversity of nationalities, cultures, and socio-economic backgrounds.

Following a visit by Keith Clark, the Executive Director of the IO to Phuket International Academy in February 2014, Keith presented our interest in joining the movement to the International Board at its March meeting; and in May 2014, Klaus submitted an official letter of intent to become a UWC.

"During my visit to Phuket in February 2014, it didn't take me long to realise that the school should be considered a credible future UWC college. The school had a character, a respect for diversity, it was the sort of school that would respond well to a bold mission and set of values, and, with its focus on wellbeing, mindfulness and health - all very much reflecting its sense of place - I thought the school could bring something new to the movement, UWC Thailand has proved itself to be a brilliant addition to the movement, and long may it continue."



Keith Clark, Executive Director of the International Office (2003-2015)

The school was invited to apply for preliminary acceptance, with a view to formally joining the movement within two years. Phuket International Academy's unique emphasis on social and emotional learning, student agency and character development, along with Klaus's philanthropic drive, were powerful and appealing to UWC.

In 2014, there were two further seminal developments which built momentum. Philipp Graf von Hardenburg joined Klaus as a partner and CEO of Thanyapura. A successful businessman, he also had international school board chair experience and was familiar with the UWC movement. He provided important support for Klaus, as did Julian Whiteley after retiring as Head of College at UWCSEA, Julian joined the Phuket International Academy Board bringing with him extensive UWC experience. In November 2014, Julian accepted the role of Director of Education for Thanyapura with a clear mandate to guide the school's journey to becoming a UWC.

Students painting a mural on a long wall in front of the Gymnasium (2013-2014)





UWC SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

- 1. UWC Atlantic (Vale of Glamorgan, United Kingdom, 1962)
- 2. Pearson College UWC (Victoria, British Columbia, Canada (1974)
- **3. UWC South East Asia** (Dover and East Campus, Singapore, 1975)
- 4. Waterford Kamhlaba UWC (Mbabane, Eswatini, 1981)
- 5. UWC-USA (Montezuma, New Mexico, USA, 1982)
- 6. UWC Adriatic (Duino, Italy, 1982)
- 7. Li Po Chun UWC (Now Territories, Hong Kong SAR, China, 1992)
- 8. UWC Red Cross Nordic (Flekke, Norway, 1995)

- 9. UWC Mahindra (Pune, Maharastra, India, 1997)
- 10. UWC Costa Rica (San José, Costa Rica, 2006)
- 11. UWC Mostar (Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2006)
- 12. UWC Maastricht (Maastricht, Netherlands, 2009)
- 13. UWC Dilijan (Dilijan, Armenia, 2014)
- 14. UWC Robert Bosch College (Freiburg, Germany, 2014)
- **15. UWC Changshu China** (Changshu, Jiangsu Province, China, 2015)
- 16. UWC Thailand (Phuket, Thailand, 2016)
- 17. UWC ISAK Japan (Karuizawa, Japan, 2017)
- 18. UWC East Africa (Arusha and Moshi, Tanzania, 2019)

TRANSITION TO UWC

There followed several watershed years for the school, a time of challenge and opportunity. Steps were being taken to become a UWC, the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme was being introduced and Council of International Schools accreditation was underway. Boarding was opened in 2014, and was operated separately by Thanyapura until 2020. There was a small intake of mainly student and non-student athletes into boarding that first year, and then restricted to just Phuket International Academy students in 2015.

International Baccalaureate's core offering, Creativity, Activity, and Service (CAS) was being introduced and an International Baccalaureate Coordinator was appointed to ensure that there was a properly structured and expanding programme of community service.

One outstanding project that was initiated at this time was mangrove restoration, expanded to growing seedlings at the school several years later and continuing to the present.

When a UWC Task Force visited in February 2015 to review progress made on the initial application, they helpfully identified matters still to be addressed in the school's application.

Between November 2015 and February 2016, Julian seized the challenge and submitted a new application (following new UWC criteria) for UWC membership. At the same time, Phuket International Academy became a fully accredited Council of International Schools international school, a tribute to Riki Teteina, Head of School (2014-16) and the staff, and further strengthening positioning for UWC acceptance.

At the same time, Phuket
International Academy held its first
and only graduation. This was a
fitting finale to the nine year journey
of becoming a full grade school
with an enrolment of 335 students,
a Council of International Schools
accreditation, a full International
Baccalaureate continuum school,
and now culminating in becoming
UWC Thailand.



A UNITED WORLD COLLEGE IS BORN

In June 2016, Phuket International Academy was given final approval by the International Board to become a UWC; and on 1 October 2016, Queen Noor of Jordan officially opened UWC Thailand with much celebration and the planting of a local cashew tree to mark the occasion.

Julian Whiteley had been crucial to the school joining the movement with his experience and understanding of the UWC movement and his willingness, while Interim Head (2016-17), to work closely and tactfully with both staff and students in this first year. There was a growing convergence of understanding across the school about the school's new status and living the mission.

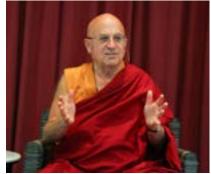
The first group of 19 National Committee (NC) students who arrived in 2016 came with expectations shaped by the UWC vision that had attracted them to apply for admission. From the outset, it was clear that the growing diversity of ethnicities and nationalities at the senior end of the school was going to have a profound impact. One of the most visible ways was to see National Committee students "buddying" with primary school students and sharing their different cultural backgrounds and experiences. Meanwhile, this sharing was starting to pervade the discussions, assemblies and festive celebrations.

When Julian departed in 2017, Jason McBride took over as Head of School and continued to build on the UWC framework Julian had left him, along with the scaling-up of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme to meet the academic needs of expanding numbers. The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme cohort was bringing a more settled academic rigour that rippled down through the Middle Years Programme and the Primary Years Programme.











EMBEDDING THE UWC ETHOS

Klaus's scholarship generosity provided a strong base from which to build a culture of giving in the school. The UWC Pledge was introduced with all Grade 12 students donating and signing a commitment to donate "time, talent and treasure" to the UWC movement even after their school years had concluded. Graduation 2017 marked the first as UWC Thailand. Of the 19 students graduating, 10 were the Kurt Hahn scholars Klaus had generously funded the previous year, our very first UWC graduates.

A further key development in embedding the UWC ethos was ensuring that Social Emotional Learning and Mindfulness, Service and Sustainability, and Outdoor Education were not only led by Directors but that time was specifically built into the classroom timetable across the Primary Years Programme and Middle Years Programme; that they were structured age-appropriately; sequentially developed; and collaboratively planned. The Mindfulness Centre opened in 2018, a very visible sign of the commitment to Social Emotional Learning and Mindfulness; and in 2019, staff created their own International Baccalaureate Learner Profile to incorporate the social and emotional dimension.

From 2016, with an increasingly structured and expanding approach to learning, the school's geographic setting provided particularly exciting experiential learning possibilities. Building sustained partnerships with various service projects underpinned the comprehensive cross-school learning which was being established. New horizons beckoned: Grade 11 Project Week started to go beyond Phuket to the whole of Thailand.

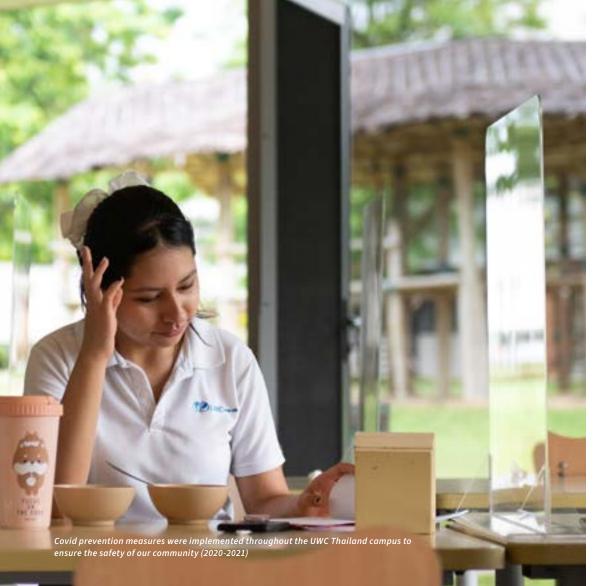
Across the school, community building, social justice, conservation, sustainability, and giving back to the community were constantly recognised.

Outdoor education, while often closely linked with service learning, added the further dimension of physical challenge. A structured adventure camp programme across the grades was developed, often integrated with environmental and service programmes. The Duke of Edinburgh International Award was introduced and integrated from 2016. The sports programme was given more focus and structure, encouraging participation both recreationally and for competition. The Mantas logo was created to engender pride and identity for our teams.

Living together 24/7 lies at the heart of the UWC ethos. The Family Group structure was instigated for boarding students encouraging student voice and sharing, and host family arrangements were extensive with over 40 families participating. The Boarding Team and students worked closely on developing meaningful weekend programmes.

Larger numbers of National Committee students, effective leadership and teachers, increasingly good academic performance (including for the first time a Diploma Programme student scoring a 45), engaging, experiential education, and student agency, all contributed to a growing reputation and enrolment growth from 375 in 2016 to 480 by 2019/20.





AN INFLECTION POINT FOR THE SCHOOL, AND THE WORLD

The school was increasingly holding its own, yet with a growing awareness of how much the school still depended on Klaus's incredible support.

The school was then hit by the "perfect storm" when it was struck by two existential challenges in early 2020.

The first was when Klaus informed the school that he would be withdrawing his financial support (with the exception of scholarships) by the end of the school year in June. UWC International reacted by informing the school that it would lose its UWC status at that time - given that Klaus as founder had been instrumental to approval to join the UWC movement.

Head of School, Jason McBride, along with other core members of the community, rallied the parent body to raise the funds necessary to save the school, and to retain its UWC status. The response was truly remarkable, resulting in sufficient funding being raised to secure the school as a going concern, reflecting the community's profound belief in and passion for UWC Thailand.

UWC Thailand, meanwhile, had appealed the UWC International Board's decision. With a new governance structure emerging, there followed a decision in April 2020 to reinstate UWC Thailand to the movement for an initial two years, while under strict monitoring conditions, with a mid-way review to occur in March 2021.

By then of course, the global Covid pandemic, and with it lockdown, had hit Phuket. The next three months saw a 30% drop in student enrolment, from the high 400s to the low 300s and with an associated financial impact again threatening the school's existence. Desperate measures were needed. By the end of May, 29 staff had been terminated or rescinded. Non-Thai teachers agreed to take a 50% pay cut for the last three months of the school year, Thai staff a 25% cut and their annual bonus.

Jason's strong leadership throughout these unfolding crises was critical, so too the response of a remarkable school community which continued to pull together. Moving successfully from in-person to on-line learning (both synchronous and asynchronous) almost 'overnight' represented the biggest single shift in school pedagogy in a lifetime and a great tribute to the professionalism and capacity displayed by the teachers.

With the pandemic still current, by August 2020 and the beginning of the new school year, a new governance structure for UWC Thailand emerged. Klaus had always planned to place the school in a Foundation and ownership of UWC Thailand then transferred from Thanyapura to the not-for-profit Thai Foundation, Education for a Sustainable Future (ESF), with Khun Sirivibha Dusiyamee Berger (known to many as Khun A) as chair, and Klaus as an ESF board member. A Transition Board was put in place to take the necessary steps to reshape the school's governance structure.

The funds raised in the community allowed for one large outstanding loan to be paid off and a reserve of funds to be created. Klaus, with extraordinary continuing generosity, donated the school buildings and land, and also wrote off a number of other loans; the combined total exceeded US\$25 million. In addition, he maintained his donation of scholarships. The school was emerging with a more stable base from which to confront the many challenges the pandemic continued to impose on school operations.

Despite all the Covid-related disruption, in October and November, UWC Thailand completed virtual accreditation visits for both the International Baccalaureate and Council of International Schools, the culmination of the school Self-Study begun in 2019. In both instances the resulting reports delivered in February 2021 were very strong, substantial reassurance when the school had been operating under such challenging circumstances.

"It is your actions that prove who you are and who you want to be and UWC Thailand, in good and challenging times, leads the way in developing a united, peaceful and sustainable world now and for the future."

UWC International Baccalaureate Review

This good news came as a great relief and boost for all the staff at a time of such protracted stress. It also provided substantial reassurance for the new School Board as it began its responsibilities in January 2021.

The first serious business the new Board had to address was the selection of a new Head of School. After a global search, Lural Ramírez was appointed starting in the upcoming school year. This marked a fresh start. Not only was the school coming out of Covid, but Lural, as UWC Thailand's first female head, brought new perspectives along with an energetic commitment to see the school thrive.

Even amid the pandemic, students persist in their service engagement, planting hundreds of mangroves (2021)

As boarding reopens, students opt for a change of scenery and decide to camp in the field (2021)







By April 2022, the school had finally returned to normal operation: in the past two years, the school had successfully negotiated the worst existential threats it could have faced. It was quite an achievement. The statistics speak for themselves: 123 days of online learning, 202 days of hybrid learning. Boarding had been particularly hard hit, with 136 days of full boarding house lockdown.

Despite these challenges, when UWC ISAK Japan was unable to host students due to immigration restrictions during Covid, UWC Thailand went above and beyond to integrate into their student cohort 24 ISAK Japan transfer students during the 2021/22 school year. These students, would do a year and half of their UWC education at UWC Thailand, with UWC ISAK Japan's partnership throughout, and proudly joining UWC Thailand's class of '23 graduates.

When asked what his most distinct memory after these years on the frontline of dealing with the pandemic's impact on the school, Secondary School Principal Jon Field said "the people, the kindness, and the care." This is an impressive testament to the imbued spirit of the school community reflected in its motto.

There is no question, the Covid years had taken a toll. With the separation from Thanyapura in 2020, accounting and several other office functions had to be taken on by the school at much the same time as school operations were being pared to the bone to survive financially. As Covid conditions eased, Lural's challenge was to rebuild from the operational base that had survived and there followed a wholescale transformation of school operations.

Emerging out of the consuming pressures of online and hybrid learning, and with the reassuring recognition on the quality of education being delivered reflected in the International Baccalaureate and Council of International Schools Reports, there was now the space and incentive to revisit strategic planning and rework the UWC Thailand educational model. Widespread collaboration resulted in a re-centering of the school on its Sustainability, Global Citizenship, Mindfulness and Transformative Learning commitments.

Along with the new Strategic Plan approved by the Board came the establishment of two Steering Groups, one for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging and the other on Sustainability, to guide school-wide efforts in these areas.

By the end of the school year in June 2022, the school had emerged fully from Covid with a stable platform and a sense of restored "normality", and with a growing momentum and appetite for further development.





A TIME TO THRIVE

With Phuket also getting back to normal and the school's good reputation increasingly widespread, a new Master Plan emerged to meet commitments to the UWC International Board to provide staff housing on or adjacent to campus and a further Boarding House. By July 2023, Thanyapura and UWC Thailand had become fully independent legal entities, with the separation of previously shared core services and infrastructures, in itself another mammoth and complex task.

With normality restored, the school's standing with the International Baccalaureate was reflected when the school engaged in an enhanced partnership with the IB. The school was now set to run the International Baccalaureate pilot programmes in open book exams in Diploma Programme Economics, the new Language and Culture course in the DP, and in regards to the Primary Years Programme of Inquiry. The experiential education programme, constrained over Covid, now sprang back to full action as well.

Meanwhile Lural, as Head of School, set out to build the school's standing within the global UWC movement. Through her leadership and engagement, a crowning honour for UWC Thailand as a UWC was to be chosen to host the 2024 UWC Congress, coinciding with the 10th anniversary of Keith Clark's visit to Phuket which started the school formally on its UWC journey.

After years of striving, UWC Thailand's status as a UWC had been reaffirmed.

Covid, which had placed significant constraints on the service and outdoor programmes, was now a thing of the past. A highlight coming out of Covid was receipt of the Richard Krajzar Award of \$10,000 - recognising the school's outstanding work with Good Shepherd's Ban Ya Literacy project for Burmese migrant children.

The UWC Thailand community comes together to celebrate Multicultural Day (2022)



By the 2022 school year, Project Week and the full extent of service activities were back in action, and Project Week itself had expanded to include projects further afield. The school's standing with the International Baccalaureate Organization was again reflected when it was asked to pilot the revised Creativity, Activity and Service programme.







Students relish the outdoors during the first Community Weekend of the 2022/23 academic year (2022)

During the school year, students immerse themselves in a wide array of activities and learning opportunities (2022-2023)

The experiential education programme, constrained over Covid, now sprang back to full action. A three-day outdoor experience before Diploma Programme graduation was introduced and bookended the induction experience at the start of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme. The school was able to secure a permanent base to develop its own Outdoor Education Centre at the PlayYard, a commercially operated venture on the north east coast not far from the Causeway to the mainland. The school was able to negotiate a long-term lease to conduct classes, store their sailboats and kayaks, provide a base for camps and expeditions, and to host regattas.

By 2022, the school maintained 30 sailboats and over 60 students were registered for after-school and Saturday sailing classes. The UWC Thailand sailing squad was established for competition purposes; and fellow outdoor educators across UWCs in Asia were attracted to UWC Thailand for professional development in sailing and kayaking.

Sports sprang back to full life post-Covid, expanding and adjusting the structure of the sports offerings, encouraging greater participation and competitive sports at all levels. Membership with the ASEAN Sports and Activities Conference (ASAC) took sports to another level of competitive challenge and allowed UWC Thailand junior and senior athletes to travel across Southeast Asia to represent their school with pride.

The fundamental importance of mental health and wellbeing which the Covid-experience had particularly stressed led to a re-emphasis on school-wide/community wellbeing, and in 2022 the school appointed it's first Director of Wellbeing.

The school has always been a place of diversity and inclusion, with its own special programmes embedded from the start. In 2018, the school received its largest donation of \$1 million for a Future Women Leaders Scholarship Fund; and in recent years has worked with UWCSEA, private donors, and the wider movement to provide crucially needed scholarships for Afghan girls and for students coming from areas of conflict under its Conflict Zones scholarship programme.

The school has also always had a special place for students with more complex learning needs. The Arrowsmith Programme was introduced in 2015; and by the start of the 2023/24 school year, this commitment to special learning needs had evolved to a more formal Learning Support Department, offering occupational and speech therapy, extending the sense of belonging for many families in the school.

SPRINGBOARD TO A BRIGHT FUTURE

All monitoring of the school by the UWC International Board was fully lifted in December 2023, in recognition of the progress made since 2020, when it was first imposed, and in recognition of the need to look to the future while drawing on the strong legacy of the past. The programme at the school has a rich breadth and depth, reflecting its place as a leading international school in Thailand - one true to its mission and its values in action.

The blessing of our new shrine on campus to honour Lord Brahma and the Land Lord God, Phra Phum, preceded the announcement from the International Board of our removal from probation by only two short days. Symbolising knowledge and the protective spirit of our environment, the shrine serves as a profound symbol of our respect for the long-standing cultural traditions of our home and our unwavering commitment to the core values of our strong UWC community and local culture. And thus, our roots in local tradition hold us firm and our global view gives us strength to go forth and as we seek peace for the world.

And so we come full circle, embracing our Thai culture and celebrating our diversity as we have from the start - when the vision was a nugget of an idea, pursued by Klaus and realised through the UWC mission. As we look to welcome the global UWC community to our campus for Congress 2024 we do so more aligned than ever with the movement's mission and vision. Our deliberately diverse community reflects 95 unique national identities and 50 mother tongues. The UWC International Congress in Phuket and on the UWC Thailand campus provides the most fitting way to acknowledge our incredible journey as a school, as a community - together with our global UWC family.

Alongside attending classes, students engage in socialising, leading events, initiatives, and participating in both on-campus and off-campus community engagement projects (2023-2024)









ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The telling of our story so far owes much to the research and writing by Lister Hannah, and the many interviews he has conducted with members of our community, past and present. This work will be finalised in 2024, and will form an important part of our school's archive and history to be enjoyed by future generations, keeping alive the mission which inspired our founder's vision to join the UWC movement in 2014.

EDUCATION LIKE NO OTHER

UWC Thailand International School 115/15 Moo 7, Thepkrasattri Road, Thepkrasattri, Thalang, Phuket, 83110, Thailand

www.uwcthailand.ac.th

