

Chancellor

Alan Clarke has played a wide variety of roles in the North East of England which have contributed enormously to this university's ambition to be a Civic University. A scouser by birth, and brought up in Knotty Ash, Alan continued his education in the North West including study at Lancaster and Liverpool universities. In Liverpool he gained a rather wonderfully titled 'Masters of Civic Design' – a degree title we should contemplate here. But since 1977, he has spent his career in the North East.

Liverpool and Newcastle/Gateshead have some similarities in terms of their histories and the challenges for them to regenerate following the decline of their traditional industries. Both now boast thriving waterfront arts and residences. Both have strong communities with fierce local pride, for whom humour is important – though Alan thinks perhaps Geordie humour is a little gentler, though far from genteel.

From 1977, for a total of 25 years, Alan played various roles in different councils around our region, becoming well attuned to the inherent competitiveness between closely adjacent organisations. He spent 16 years with Newcastle City Council where he ended up as Chief Economic Development Officer. He then moved to Sunderland as Assistant Chief Executive in 1995. Then back up north again to Northumberland County Council where he was appointed Chief Executive in 2000, a role in which he stayed till 2003. He worked across the piece, then, in urban and rural administrations on both sides of the river Tyne and beyond, to the Weir. It was perhaps fortunate that when he was asked the killer question at interview for the post in Sunderland – “which football team do you support?” – he was able to answer, truthfully, 'Liverpool'. This was swiftly followed up with “but who's your second team?” to which he quickly responded 'Tranmere Rovers' – a plausible response for a scouser – but showing a shrewd slight of foot. This unwillingness to take public sides in parochial local contests is one of the reasons why he succeeded so well in his most recent job.

Alan has just finished almost 10 years as Chief Executive of One North East, and it's in this role that he's come into closest and most frequent contact with us here. He particularly enjoyed playing a role at a truly regional level– allowing a strategic approach to economic development but staying close to the local level of detail.

The current government has abolished this regional agenda – replacing the Regional Development Agencies with the Local Enterprise Partnerships. While Alan concedes that some UK regions lack the coherent identity needed to make a regional focus work, this isn't true in the North East – here we form a natural region with which folk identify – just as our neighbours do in the nation-region of Scotland. The acronym 'ONE' reflected a true regional identity and a capacity for unity shared with few other regions in England.

Nonetheless, forging collaborations between competitors – whether councils or universities – is something of a Dark Art. It is helped by financial incentives or levers, and works best if such levers can be used to create contexts which work for everyone. Alan's strategy for regional development included initiatives for tourism in the rural areas and for more traditional industry elsewhere. Moreover he placed a high value on intellectual capital, not just traditional industries and services, which brought our universities into the heart of the regeneration strategy and helped foster a number of Centres of Excellence here in Newcastle.

Alan's enormous contributions have been recognised with the award of a CBE, and One North East under his leadership has left the region some really important legacies. One such legacy was the expansion of Nissan and the development of electric cars.

Another legacy was in the area of tourism: Passionate People – Passionate Places is a wonderful strapline and associated with a series of exciting pictures and videos, enormously helped by local lad Ridley Scott giving his services very reasonably. There's a further tale behind that one, though, as Alan had a hard battle to win the hearts and minds of the local tourism providers when responsibilities were shifted from local tourist agencies to ONE. Passions of a different kind were stirred up then. It was mark of his personal leadership style that this initiative succeeded so admirably.

Another and most crucial project, central to ONE's mission was Science City. Newcastle is one of only six cities in the UK to have this designation, and the project involves a partnership between ourselves, Newcastle City Council and initially One North East. Although the initial three-way partnership had to change with the dissolution of ONE, I suspect that Alan must himself be rather pleased that his various roles around the region have left such legacies for the sciences as well as for the arts and commerce.

Indeed his interests in the arts have left a further legacy for us here in Newcastle. ONE commissioned Joseph Hillier to create the series of Heads that now adorn our student forum. These capture and reflect very nicely the vision and the brains of our honorary fellow, and we are delighted that he will wander through our campus with pleasant memories of Newburn Riverside.

Alan is devoted to his family and effusive in his thanks to his wife Deborah for the support she has provided to him and their children. They seem to have shrewdly spawned a long-term support team of their own as they have one daughter who is a lawyer and one who is a doctor, and a son studying to be a vet – so they have most bases covered. His doctor daughter in turn may be interested to hear her dad's observations of health service management since he started as a Non-Executive Director with South Tyneside Foundation Trust this summer. Now Scots amongst you may recognise the acronym NED as a term of abuse, but within health trusts NEDs are extraordinarily busy with a range of duties. They've been quick to bring Alan on to audit as well as other duties and we are delighted that his many talents will be put to such good use in this important sector.

Mr Chancellor, in recognition of his contribution to government, business and the knowledge sector in the north east of England, I ask that you award to Alan Clarke an Honorary Fellowship of Newcastle University.