

Mr Chancellor,

As a Head of Unit presenting the citation for my former Head of Faculty Administration, this would be a fabulous, one-off opportunity to recall old battles about resources or organisational arrangements, particularly as I was clearly, always right. The fact that I have no battles to recall probably tells you the first and last thing that you need to know about Vanessa Hammond and her time here in the University. It is either that there were no battles because:

A: I was always right,

On the basis of a wider evidence base this seems unlikely, so perhaps more likely is

B: That Vanessa was always right but so expert and utterly professional in her dealings with everybody that there were few battles and when there were the other contestant was oblivious to the fact that that one was taking place, and that they were losing.

We will revisit this question later on.

Vanessa Hammond retired in 2012 after 17 years as the Faculty of Medical Sciences' Senior Assistant Registrar, later renamed Head of Administration. She was appointed to this pivotal position in 1995 having, by accident or design, the perfect training for the role. Born, brought up and educated in west London, she had the good sense to head out along the M4 to University at Bristol where she did two important things; a degree in physiology and

met her future husband, Geoff, who incidentally, many years later became another Head of Unit in the same Faculty. By the time he took that role, some decades later, he had a head start over the rest of us as he will have known that Vanessa is usually right.

So with the young Geoff taking his first academic steps as he completed a PhD in Bristol, Vanessa went out to work, initially in the Pharma industry and then in the charmingly named “Meat Research Institute” before they both exercised their penchant for travel and decanted to the icy winters and sultry summers of Alberta for a few years in the late 1970s. They returned to the UK in 1977, this time to Newcastle, where they would spend the rest of their working life and where Vanessa’s bespoke, ultimately perfect but seemingly accidental training programme for her future role continued. First of all she came into the NHS, a very useful step, taking a post in the biochemistry labs until, in 1983, she made the relatively straightforward switch across to the University where she would spend the next 29 years. The switch allowed her to undertake a PhD alongside her work in George Alberti’s unit. This proved to be a move of complete genius as, not only was it great training, but it also made her realise that being an academic was the work of fools – albeit highly intelligent ones! She also realised that whilst she may not fancy the prospect of a career in research, she really could organize things.... and people. With a swoosh of her always ample head of hair, she saw the light, and moved across to the dark side.

A career in the upper echelons of University Administration beckoned.

First of all she had to go undercover. A few years in the Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering allowed her to pretty much develop the prototype of the Unit Manager role which is now universally applied across

our University. She then re-emerged into the medical world spending a few years in the Postgraduate Institute for Medicine and Dentistry, an invaluable immersion in the world of medical careers. By now it was 1995 and with a training in science, academia, industry and medical education, she was ready. There was only one job for Vanessa and only one person for the job of Senior Assistant Registrar in the Faculty of Medical Sciences.

For 17 years, until she retired in 2012, she pretty much ran the show in a growing and increasingly successful Faculty. Yes, I know **we** academics all think that **we** are in charge of the University, and it is nice that we think that, but our senior administrators know that this is a mere pretense which they must maintain for our dubious benefit. Senior administrators are to their academic “masters” (I use the term masters very loosely), what senior civil servants are to their politicians: a level head, continuity, common sense and stability as the faces around them change.

For all of this time she kept each of the boys in check. Vanessa is relentlessly charming, as is her way, when talking about the four Deans/Provosts or Pro-Vice-Chancellors who worked for her. I think there were a few, what shall we call them, Boris Johnson moments that she had to deal with, but despite that she has not a bad word to say about them and neither they of her. On such foundations are successful institutions built.

So who is this administrative achiever, this Faculty phenomenon. Well if you put [www.sagegateshead.com/event/philharmonic-voices28788](http://www.sagegateshead.com/event/philharmonic-voices28788) into your web browser and click, and there she is! Is that not Vanessa Hammond ..... singing..... a song.... in the Sage. Yes, retirement has released the inner Vanessa, a one woman song and dance act. She is now in two choirs and recently she and Geoff rose and fell in a perfect waltz under the glitter ball of

the iconic Tower Ballroom in Blackpool. She is, she told me, “quite good” at ballroom dancing. I don’t doubt it. Eat your heart out Judy Murray.

I began with a question, the correct response to which was that the first and last thing you needed to understand about Vanessa was of her extraordinary professionalism in her role. I shall finish with something of a confession. I worked in the Faculty for that full 17 years, for the last three as a Head of Unit. It was not until about six months before she retired that I actually realised that she and Geoff were an item. Now that could be:

A: that I am extraordinarily unobservant

or

B: that Vanessa Hammond was so professional that there was no reason why I should have known

Both may of course be true, but when I compare all of the possible options from question 1 at the beginning of this citation and question 2 just now, I think you can see a common theme emerging of unswerving professionalism in the pursuit of excellence.

Mr Chancellor, for her distinguished service to this University I present to you Dr Vanessa Hammond as a candidate for an Honorary Fellowship.

*Citation by Professor Jimmy Steele, 13 October 2014*