

Jacqui Henderson

MR CHANCELLOR,

Jacqui Henderson, whom we are honouring this evening, has been described as one of the most influential training and education practitioners in the UK. A passion for education has motivated her throughout her life, and she has been a tireless champion of disadvantaged young people and adults in our region and nationally. Among her many achievements, she served with great distinction as Chief Executive of the Training and Enterprise Councils' National Council, was Chief Executive of UK Skills and the first Regional Director for the Learning and Skills Council in Greater London. Jacqui has more recently taken on the role of Chair of Northumberland Clinical Commissioning Group. She is also Chair of Northumberland County Council's Leadership Forum, a Non-Executive Director of UK Skills and of Policy Connect. She personally funded 'Find your Future', a network which seeks to support young women in Northumberland to fulfil their potential.

So, where did it all begin? Jacqui is a proud north-easterner through and through. There is a beautiful portrait of her as a spirited young girl, seated next to a coal fire, wearing an alice band and knee-length socks, staring out defiantly at the world. The painting was by her father Jack Harrison, a miner who was one of the Ashington group of self-taught artists who are now posthumously famous as the Pitmen Painters. Jacqui showed great academic potential at the North Junior School in Ashington. Jacqui was one of only four girls at her school who passed the 11+. She won a place at Bedlington Grammar School but, since her parents said it was 'a great shame' that it was she – and not her older brother –

who was the bright one, left school at the age of 15 without taking her 'O' levels. Jacqui met her future husband Arthur at a young age: they walked to the church in Woodhorn to be married at the same church as their parents, and soon had two children, Stephen and Susan.

Both Jacqui and Arthur prized education and encouraged their children to succeed: Stephen went on to become a psychiatric nurse, and Susan went into nursing before rising to become Director of the Apprenticeship Academy at Northumberland College. While the children were still young, Jacqui was inspired to qualify as a teacher and worked in FE education for 16 years in Ashington, Blyth and South Shields. In 1990, she helped to set up the Northumberland Training and Enterprise Council. By 1998, she had built her reputation to such an extent that she was headhunted to become CEO of the TEC National Council. 'I protested' she recalls, 'don't you know I'm a woman, and from Northumberland!' She and Arthur moved to London, where Jacqui's new challenge was to oversee the national contractual arrangements and relationships between 72 TECs and the Department of Education and Employment (DFEE). It was something of a poisoned chalice, since no one mentioned that the organisation was in a difficult financial situation and that the Government was about to undertake a full review and ultimately to close them all down and move to a new model: the Learning and Skills Councils.

Jacqui worked closely with senior ministers and civil servants and established good working relationships with David Blunkett who was the Secretary of State (a fellow straight-talking Northerner) and Michael Richard who was then Permanent Secretary. She navigated the challenging negotiations with TEC leaders during this transitional period with considerable skill and

political acumen. As Cathryn Harvey, our former Academic Registrar, who has known Jacqui professionally for almost 40 years, says ‘Jacqui is a hugely skilled political operator. She is very charming, but this comes with a determination and ability to negotiate. Jacqui inspires and motivates people. She has brilliant ideas and is extremely creative, but, just as importantly, she ensures that her ideas are delivered, always to a very high standard and with ‘smart’ objectives. Jacqui was a fair and firm manager. I used to joke that if she had asked me to clean the toilets with a toothbrush, I would have done so! The combination of really strong support to her staff and the clarity of her expectations provided a really good framework for us all, and she commanded great affection and great respect’.

After the TECs were disbanded, Jacqui and Arthur returned to the North East and she immediately undertook a range of voluntary roles including Chair of Northumberland County Council's Leadership Forum. In 2012, she became Chair of Governors of Northumberland College, where she has a long-standing association. At the time of her appointment, the College had Notices to improve and was in danger of closure. She introduced many new initiatives, working with local employers to improve the employability of all students. She also took over, unpaid, the full-time role of Principal for three months at the request of the Governing Body whilst the College recruited a new Principal. Lynn Tomkins, Chair, Skills 4 UK Ltd, says: ‘Jacqui worked tirelessly to turn Northumberland College around. In 2013 Ofsted noted her contribution and the overall success rates for students placed the College in the top 10 nationally.

Jacqui has been a lay member of Council, Newcastle University’s governing body, since 2005, and she says that she will always be grateful to Olivia Grant for the invitation to join Council. She was Deputy Chair from 2009 to 2011

and has been Vice-Chair and Chair of the Remuneration Committee since 2011. She is also a member of the University Court, Honorary Degrees Committee and Audit Committee and was for some time Council's representative on Senate. One of Jacqui's pivotal roles for the University was her period as Chair of the University and Students' Union Partnership Committee from 2006 to 2015. She steered the committee and the Union from difficult times when NUSU was facing potential bankruptcy, to its current position where it has been voted in the top 10 Unions in the country in the National Student Satisfaction Survey. The University recently completed an £8m refurbishment of the Union's facilities, a project championed by Jacqui. Her contribution to student experience has gone well beyond the formal role of committee work. In return, the Union has honoured her contribution with a lifetime membership.

Our Registrar Dr John Hogan pays tribute: 'Jacqui has been a stalwart of the University's governance oversight since her appointment to Council in 2005 and especially in her role as Vice-Chair. During the period of Jacqui's involvement with the University, she has provided superb support to two Chairs of Council, to three Vice-Chancellors other members of the Executive Team, including myself. She has been challenging but supportive, bringing great clarity to discussions on student experience. The University owes Jacqui a great debt for the amount of unpaid time, effort and skill she has brought to the governing body. John adds 'I always felt I could trust her completely to be discreet and offer wise advice. She is a strong person who is never afraid to say what is right but does so in a way that is constructive, firm but fair.' It is a compliment Jacqui returns, saying 'Newcastle University is in a really good place: the staff are fantastic and ready to adapt, and the key things are right – it's an ambitious university that wants the best for its students'. And by the way, of our Registrar, she adds 'he is a rock'.

Jacqui was awarded a CBE for services to education and training in January 2001 and a special President's Award in 2004 for her work with black and ethnic minority groups from the European Federation of Black Business Women. She was also honoured with a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Sunshine Fund this year. As her husband Arthur says, 'I don't know anyone who works harder than Jacqueline, nothing stops her, not even a broken ankle'. It turns out that she broke her ankle just before an invitation to receive her President's Award in London at a posh Park Lane hotel. She was ushered in via the hotel kitchen using a wheelchair, and astonished the hundreds of people present when she rose, rather miraculously, to a standing position to make her acceptance speech.

Jacqui and Arthur have been married for nearly 60 years. He has given her the most amazing support throughout her professional career. Together, they have travelled the world on various conferences and work-based assignments, including Japan, Chile and Canada. They now have six grandchildren, and there are legendary Sunday afternoon teas in Ashington with up to a dozen family members at a time. Arthur says he cannot see Jacqui slowing down any time soon, but there are good signs that their holidays to warmer climes are becoming more frequent. The final tribute comes from her daughter Susan, who says 'My mother Jacqui has always, and continues now, to champion the power of education to change lives, open doors and expand horizons. Alongside her professional achievements she is a wonderful person, kind, caring, principled, funny and hardworking, an all-round 'good role model'.

MR CHANCELLOR, in recognition of her dedicated service to Newcastle University, including her outstanding contribution to Council and to Newcastle

University Students' Union, I commend Jacqui Henderson CBE to you for the award of an Honorary Fellowship.

Professor Helen Berry

Public Orator

9 October 2017