



FELLOWSHIP OF THE UNIVERSITY
HONORIS CAUSA

RICHARD DALE

9 MAY 2025

RICHARD DALE: HONORARY FELLOWSHIP

Chancellor Dharker, members of the University, distinguished alumni and honoured guests, Richard Dale has made an outstanding contribution to Newcastle University and to the North East through his financial knowledge, management skills, and boundless enthusiasm. He has received many accolades for his work, including winning the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants Prize in 1988, Finance Director of the Year at the North East Accountancy Awards in 2015, and the Northern Finance Director Award for Outstanding Achievement in 2017. Above all, he is known to us as the former Executive Director of Finance at Newcastle University.

Richard was once described by our Vice-Chancellor Professor Chris Day as “the chief financial officer who has overseen the biggest expansion our University is ever likely to see.” This expansion included the development of Newcastle Helix, the opening of campuses in Malaysia and Singapore, and the construction of the Dame Margaret Barbour Building and the Park View Student Village. There were also many other projects that Richard was involved in such as The Henry Daysh Building refurbishment, the development of Kensington Terrace, and the INTO joint venture to name just a few. Overall, he handled the finances of over 80 capital projects amounting to an astounding £476 million pounds worth of investment. It’s an incredible legacy which we are celebrating tonight.

Richard was born in Walsall, and later moved with his family to Lichfield. Academically capable, he became the first in his family to attend university when he studied for a mathematics degree at Durham University. Although Richard has a natural mathematical talent, I can reveal that when he was growing up Richard had a couple of alternative careers in mind. After abandoning his original plan to drive a steam train, he decided that he wanted

to be a librarian. He had already been accepted to do a postgraduate librarianship qualification at Aberdeen University when fate intervened, and Richard was elected to a sabbatical role in the Students' Union at Durham.

This was at a time when there was no professional management of the Students' Union, and the Sabs did absolutely everything from managing the accounts to recruiting staff, so Richard worked, and in some cases battled, with senior University management on behalf of the student body. His time as a sabbatical officer gave him an abiding understanding of how HE institutions worked and convinced him of the importance of the Students' Union. These insights were to serve him well in the future.

His time as a sabbatical officer changed his career plans, and immediately after graduating, Richard, as he puts it, "fell into" a career at British Telecom. Initially he was based at Swan House here in Newcastle and set to work designing telephone exchanges. After a couple of years, Richard applied for some in-house leadership training but was told he wasn't eligible. Frustrated, he stormed out of Swan House, strode furiously into the city centre, and happened upon a Newcastle Polytechnic recruitment fair. He promptly signed up for a part-time "accounting for non-accountants" course, and after a year took his exams in the freezing cold Guild Hall, achieving joint first place nationally.

This new qualification got him noticed by BT's District Head of Finance, and he was put in charge of the management accounting team at the age of only 26. His reputation grew, and before long he was headhunted for a role in BT's London office. As well as the move being a significant moment in his thriving career, it was in London that Richard met his wife Yvonne. At the time, she was working for BT as the PA to Richard's boss, so their paths had crossed a

few times, but after a few weeks Richard made his move. Yvonne tells me that Richard's chat up line was "so when are you going to teach me how to play bridge?" Not only did the line work – Richard and Yvonne were soon married – but both also developed a life-long passion for the game.

Richard's BT career was varied and successful. At one point, a new BT opportunity meant a move to Atlanta for Richard and Yvonne. They both loved the city, and as well as them making some lasting friendships, Richard also became a huge fan of country music. After returning to London, Richard went on to be CFO of BT's global outsourcing business which had a turnover of £3 billion. Eventually, London lost its allure, and so Richard and Yvonne relocated to the North East. After decades at BT, Richard decided to move on to a new challenge, and joined Newcastle University as Executive Director of Finance.

I've already mentioned some of Richard's achievements during his time at the University, but I was interested to learn from him that he was proudest by far of the refurbishment of the Students' Union building and the general reviving of its fortunes. Simon Gerry, the CEO of the Students' Union at the time recalls that it was "near bankrupt" at one point. But when Richard arrived, he made it clear to Simon that he understood the value that the Union could bring to the University, and he agreed to lend his practical support by attending meetings of the Students' Union management committee.

His support for the Students' Union exemplifies something I've heard from many of Richard's former colleagues, such as Karel Thomas the current Executive Director of the British Universities Finance Directors Group, and Humphrey Penney formerly of BT. Both said that Richard was not the kind of CFO who only concerned himself with the bottom line. John

Hogan, our Registrar Emeritus, thought the same and said to me that Richard “Never took a narrow view of finance...he saw it as an enabler...and was always very clear about the primary purpose of the University.”

Richard was enthusiastic about almost every aspect of working at the University, but particularly anything related to students. He loved attending graduation, as to him that was one of the most obvious manifestations of the primary purpose of the University. He was also a great supporter of the Newcastle University Theatre Society and would go to see its productions at the Edinburgh Fringe. Richard has also never lost sight of the fact that he was a first-generation entrant into HE, and so he keenly supported the University’s work on widening participation.

Richard retired from the University in 2022 but hasn’t been putting his feet up since then. He’s been a non-executive director of the Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust since 2022 and is also a member of Council at Durham University. On top of that, Richard has continued to bring the same zeal to local community radio and can be heard doing the breakfast show three times a week on Lionheart via DAB or online.

As well as Richard’s many career achievements, there have obviously been challenges as well. The biggest of these was undoubtedly the Covid-19 pandemic, which was an unprecedented threat to the University. On Richard’s retirement, Vice-Chancellor Professor Chris Day said that “[Richard] has steered us through the impact of Covid-19 with great care and prudence, safeguarding the health of our finances during one of the most difficult periods in our history. We owe him an enormous debt of gratitude.”

RICHARD DALE: HONORARY FELLOWSHIP

In challenging times and in times of growth, Richard kept his eye on our mission and purpose, supporting and resourcing the creativity and hard work of our community, researchers, educators and, above all, our students.

Chancellor Dharker, in recognition of his distinguished service I am proud and honoured to present to you, Richard Dale, to be accepted into the fellowship of Newcastle University.

John Williams

Public Orator

9 May 2025