



FELLOWSHIP OF THE UNIVERSITY
HONORIS CAUSA

DR JOHN HOGAN

9 MAY 2025

DR JOHN HOGAN: HONORARY FELLOWSHIP

Chancellor Dharker, members of the University, distinguished alumni, and honoured guests, John Hogan, whom we are honouring this evening, describes the origins of his long career in University Administration as “a happy accident.” In 1986, when he was finishing his doctoral studies at Sussex, Higher Education was experiencing a period of austerity and permanent lectureships were scarce, (Plus ça change...) Thus, John felt it wise to explore other options. Academia’s loss was undoubtedly Administration’s gain. His outstanding career in Professional Services included roles at Warwick and Durham, culminating in the 20 years he spent as Registrar at Newcastle University.

The University Registrar typically has three principal areas of responsibility: governance, operational management, and acting as chief advisor to the Vice-Chancellor.

The Governance role is particularly complex. In addition to being a member of the University’s Senior Leadership team, the Registrar is Secretary to Council, the governing body which must hold the University’s leadership to account. Our Emeritus Vice Chancellor, Professor Chris Brink, describes the challenge posed by this dual role, as “about as difficult a balancing act as you could possibly imagine” adding that “John walked this tightrope with aplomb.”

Critical to John’s ability to juggle potentially conflicting commitments, are his personal integrity, clarity of thinking and exemplary work ethic; qualities highlighted by our current Vice-Chancellor, Professor Chris Day, when acknowledging the fantastic support that he received from John. These qualities were also appreciated by successive Chairs of Council, two of whom we are delighted to have with us this evening.

At one time or another, the Registrar was responsible for most of the professional services which underpin and enable the core business of the University. These are many and varied and include Academic Registry, Careers, Libraries, HR, Legal, Planning, PR and Marketing, Estates, IT, Data Protection. To manage such a diverse and complex portfolio successfully requires an equally diverse and complex skillset. So I thought I'd audit John against some of the key skills and qualities highlighted in a fascinating report compiled for the Association of Heads of University Administration entitled "Never a Dull Moment: The Role of the Registrar."

First, resilience and tenacity.

There are many examples I could draw on but the one that stood out was the trip to South Africa that John undertook with Emerita Professor Ella Ritchie, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the time and Cathryn Harvey, who was then Academic Registrar. Whether it was braving a decidedly dodgy looking off-licence to purchase bottled water for the group or adjusting to the discovery that the car collecting them from the airport had two handguns on the dashboard, John took it all in his stride. Ella told me that key to the success of the trip was John's willingness to embrace all new experiences, aligned to the fact that he was, "a fantastic advocate of English Higher Education, loves learning new things and enjoyed learning and understanding new contexts."

The second key skill set covers leadership and people management.

Examples abound of John's supportive and empowering leadership; the many ways in which he made people feel valued, and the loyalty and affection this inspired in his team. The one that most stands out is the extraordinary series of videos he made during Covid. For those of

us adjusting to the strange experience of working from home, the sight of John, wearing a face mask, but still in his suit, popping up at various locations on campus, was extraordinarily uplifting. Each new episode was eagerly awaited. Where would he turn up next? A memorable highlight was the episode where he “helped” colleagues from Estates flush toilets and run taps to protect our empty buildings from legionella. His somewhat manic “whack a mole” approach to the task was reminiscent of Basil Fawlty at his best. It was absolutely hilarious. But at a time of great uncertainty and challenge, these videos provided a reassuring and positive connection with the physical University, which was greatly appreciated by staff.

Lesley Braiden, one of several exceptional Academic Registrars who served under John, describes him as a man of great integrity, who was “warmly treasured by his colleagues” adding that he was also a great raconteur, whose amusing anecdotes, brief quips, and “ability to capture the moment in a memorable way,” ensured he always had the rapt attention of his audience.

The third, and arguably most subtle skill required by a Registrar is political acumen.

Whether navigating the political intricacies of the University, interpreting the demanding requirements of external regulators or temperature-checking the wider political climate, John’s incisive intellect enabled him to assimilate complex policy documents rapidly and translate them into practical decisions and actions. His tenure as Registrar coincided with a period of unprecedented Government reform of Higher Education policy, so these skills were absolutely vital.

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What else can I say about John? He is passionate about clarity of expression and good grammar – there were no rogue apostrophes or impenetrable acronyms on his watch, (I'd better check this carefully before I give him a copy!). As you might expect, he has embraced retirement with the same energy and passion he brought to his work. There has been a lot of international travel, most recently to Japan, and he has written a book about the Political Transformation of the UK in the Nineteenth Century. He has diligently sampled all the real ales he was gifted on his retirement. He has also rated them and written tasting notes. Well, surely there's another publication to be worked on there - who needs the Campaign for Real Ale guide when you could have John's?

I'd like to conclude with two insightful reflections on John, one from our current Chancellor, Imtiaz Dharker, and another from our former Chancellor, Professor Sir Liam Donaldson.

Imtiaz was our Chancellor throughout lockdown and most of her contact with John was virtual. This is Imtiaz writing to John upon hearing news of his impending retirement:

“ I was told early on you were a legend, and with each clear, crisp message I discovered why. You gave me news of what was happening at the University... I couldn't have hoped for a better long-distance interpreter of a language I'm unfamiliar with: the language of governance in a great institution, the detail of caring for the wellbeing of students and staff, taking responsibility in a time of transformation for them, recognising their achievements.”

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And here are Sir Liam's reflections:

"I came to see him as the very essence of Newcastle University. He stood up for its values, he ensured that it was at its best in facing the outside world, and most of all, he made the inside world, and the people who worked in it, one team. And it was a great team, superbly led by John."

Chancellor Dharker, in recognition of his outstanding service to Newcastle University, and for the warmth, wit and wisdom he has displayed whilst delivering it, may I present to you, our Emeritus Registrar, Dr John Hogan, to be formally accepted into the Fellowship of Newcastle University. Welcome home, John.

Jill Taylor-Roe

Senior Public Orator

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