

## Honorary Fellows Dinner 2012

High Sheriff, Honorary Fellows, distinguished guests, ladies and gentleman, it's with great pleasure that I welcome you to this year's Honorary Fellows dinner and make my second address to you as Principal.

Let me first add my congratulations to our new Honorary Fellows and welcome you into this special group of people who, along with our Honorary Graduates, have been recognised for not only their achievements, but for their continued commitment and support of this College. To you all, welcome and thank you.

Let me begin where I ended my address at last year's dinner and remind you of the extract of Thomas Holloway's Deed of Foundation that I quoted:

“Education should not be exclusively regulated by the tradition and method of former ages; but it should be founded on those studies and sciences which the experience of modern times has shown to be the most valuable, and the best adapted to meet the intellectual and social requirements of the students.”

This is an important reminder of the centrality of students and their needs in our College. It was true 126 years at the founding of Royal Holloway College; it was true when Elizabeth Jesser Reid founded Bedford College in 1849 and it's still true today.

Perhaps what Thomas Holloway hadn't foreseen when he wrote his Deed of Foundation, was just how much the needs of students can develop in a rapidly changing external environment.

We are currently in the middle of some of the biggest changes to higher education in our lifetime. For UK and EU undergraduate students entering higher education from this summer, the government has transferred the cost of education from taxpayer to student.

They will not be required to pay fees upfront and will therefore continued to be supported by the taxpayer in the short-term, through loans. However, ultimately it will be the student who pays, and this is starting to create both significant and subtle changes in the needs of students and their behaviour.

These changes have been accompanied by a welcome lifting of the cap on the total number of UK and EU students we can recruit, but only those achieving at least AAB at A-level. At the same time, the government is

both capping and reducing the numbers of students we can admit with lower grades.

Yet further changes will occur next summer, when the cap on numbers will be lifted for students attaining at least ABB at A-level.

Together with other capital funding cuts, a freeze on research spending and the encouragement of private providers to enter higher education, much is changing in our world.

When I spoke last year, I said that institutions must be prepared for unforeseeable change- with a new government making radical policy changes, unintended consequences and 'policy on go' had to be expected.

Under such circumstances, I said it was not practical to create detailed contingency plans, instead, you had to be ready to act decisively and from a position of confidence. 12 months on, we've had to do exactly that.

Our confidence comes from diligent, past management of the College, which has left us with good financial reserves and strong, external reputation.

To ensure that we continue to attract the very best students to the College, we have used that strength to respond to a fast changing student recruitment market.

First, we've doubled our support for students from low income families; we've provided a generous package of support for students directly entering the College from care homes, and introduced £1,000 scholarships, to be known as Bedford Scholarships, to students obtaining at least AAB at A-level and making Royal Holloway their first choice.

For the longer term, we've started a substantial investment programme in the College, to improve the experience for students and staff, and I'll touch on some of these developments shortly.

But let me say at this point, much of this would not have been possible without the generous support of donors and friends of the College.

Let me now return to this time last year when we were in the middle of our celebrations marking the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Royal Holloway College and 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its merger with Bedford College.

Shortly after last year's Honorary Fellows ceremony, we welcomed our Chancellor, the Princess Royal, to mark the anniversaries, with a short ceremony, an unveiling of a plaque to be found in the Quad outside the Picture Gallery and to meet many of our staff and students.

Our celebrations reached their conclusion with a dinner for partners and funders at the Royal Society, with Baroness Diana Warwick, herself a Bedford alumna, and guest tonight, giving the main address.

There were other notable events in the life of the College during the year: we welcomed back the Picture Collection after a successful tour in North America; whilst our distinguished Choir toured California, ending with concerts at Stanford University and San Francisco cathedral.

These events served to raise our presence in the USA and were accompanied by alumni events in Beijing and Shanghai, where we now have more alumni than in any other overseas country. The presence of the Choir again marked the occasion and led to widespread coverage on national radio and in local newspapers.

Once again, I'd like to thank Santander Bank for their continued generous support of our Choir and I'm delighted that they now have a permanent presence on Campus with the opening of their bank branch this week.

The start of the 2012-13 session saw a record number of students arrive at Royal Holloway, taking the total student population to just over 9,000 for the first time. Particularly buoyant demand from China, caused a significant increase in masters students, putting considerable pressure on the Library and other facilities.

Whilst we now have a plan to increase significantly the space in the Bedford Library, the additional income generated by these student numbers allowed us to act quickly to repurpose part of the back office space in the Library to create 90 additional study spaces, as well as providing additional toilets and group study space. This work was completed during the Christmas vacation and goes to show just how quickly we can move when motivated.

The additional income also allowed us to accelerate the redecoration and re-furnishing of many seminar and classrooms; work that'll continue during the summer and be extended to other areas such as toilets.

As part of our response to the new, emerging higher education environment, we launched activities with three new partners this year, designed to help grow the College and diversify its income.

Our partnership with Study Group International saw the creation of an international student study centre, dedicated to preparing overseas students for study at Royal Holloway. With their extensive marketing function, Study Group are a key part of our strategy to diversify the source of international students and the subjects they study.

With pressures on immigration and the granting of visas, we've developed a partnership with Kaplan Asia-Pacific to deliver some of our programmes overseas, initially in Singapore and later more widely in south-east Asia. This will enable students who are unable to travel to the UK to benefit from a Royal Holloway degree.

And within the UK, we have partnered with Pearson's, to validate their BTec top-up degrees. These programmes will enable students, who require the specialised help offered by an FE college, to demonstrate their academic ability to degree level and thus avail themselves of the same life-changing opportunities that are open to students who attend the campus.

In addition to these external partnerships, we've given careful thought as to how we can support further our campus-based students. For them, we've recognised the importance of the many campus-based activities students can participate in and at the start of this academic year we launched the Royal Holloway Passport.

The Passport is an extra curricula award that students can earn through participation in activities from sport, to artistic performance, to voluntary service. It codifies the skills and experience gained by students, making them explicit, so that they are more valued by both students themselves and their potential employers.

As ever, at the heart of what we do, are inspiring academics who work at the forefront of their disciplines and who make a significant impact on the lives of our students and the wider world. These activities cover science, the arts and humanities, and management and social science.

Science continues to grow in strength at Royal Holloway in terms of student numbers, research outputs and public awareness.

This year we saw record numbers attending our annual Science Open Day, and there are ambitious plans for a larger science festival next year.

Our second, annual Rare Disease Day, not unintentionally held on the 29 February this year, also proved popular with academics, members of the public and school pupils.

Amongst our science researchers is Dr Courtenay Norbury who this year started a Wellcome-funded project to study language development in young children. The project will screen all children in Surrey at school starting age and was launched this year with a reception hosted by the speaker of the House of Commons, John Bercow.

The long-standing strength of the Information Security Group was confirmed with its recognition as one of a small number of Academic Centres of Excellence in Cyber Security research, funded by GCHQ. This status is already proving beneficial, with new funding from a range of agencies to tackle the growing problem of cyber crime and security.

In the Arts and Humanities, Professor Helen Nicholson's work in the Department of Drama and Theatre is exploring the impact that art, drama and dance can have in helping advanced dementia sufferers and how care managers can use this to organise regular, practical, creativity sessions in residential homes as part of therapeutic care.

Many of our staff in this area create and perform work outside the College, at a national and international level. Typical is Dr Mark Bowden from the Department of Music, whose new score premiered at the Rambert Dance Company's 'Season of New Choreography'. This followed the world premiere performance of a composition by Mark at the Vale of Glamorgan Festival following his appointment as Resident Composer for the BBC National Orchestra of Wales.

In management and the social sciences, Professor Chris Hackley from the School of Management has published work and was interviewed on Channel 4 news on the perceived lack of impact of government funded responsible drinking campaigns.

Whilst his colleague, Dr Ashok Jashapara has evaluated the effectiveness of 'Critical Care Paramedics' in the South East Coast Ambulance NHS Trust and their importance in improving patient survival rates.

There are many other examples of exciting work, but time, and your dinner, prevents me from mentioning them all. However we can be proud of this work and delight in the much public acclaim it receives in what I think is exceptionally good media coverage organised by our press and media team.

However it will be the recognition by fellow academics that will create greatest pride amongst our staff, as we enter the run-up to the 2013 periodic review of national research, through the Research Excellence Framework, or REF, as it's known.

In many ways, our success in the REF has already been determined by the decisions in previous years to recruit staff and invest in support facilities.

Our strategic focus is set therefore on our performance through to 2018.

For this reason, the College has recently started a review of its long-term strategy, which we hope to publish in just over 12 months.

It's started with careful consideration of our academic strengths and opportunities, which will result in an academic strategy by the end of the calendar year. After that, we'll consider the supporting strategies needed to ensure that our finance, HR, IT and estate systems and infrastructure are in good shape.

This doesn't mean planning blight. We are still very conscious of the needs of today's students and in the immediate years ahead.

For this reason, as I've already mentioned, we've commissioned detailed planning work on a significant increase in library space and the relocation of the Careers Service to give it greater visibility and significance amongst students.

We've started work on the rebuilding of the Drama Studio, due for completion in early 2013; extended the Management Building to incorporate new staff offices and seminar rooms; refurbished the Students' Union; and we've started planning work on the final phase of the redevelopment of the old boiler house to create general purpose space to be used for performance, examinations and student events.

Although waiting Council approval, we've also finalised plans for a £5m refurbishment of all 450 bedrooms, pantries, bathrooms and corridors in the Founders Building, bringing them up to a modern standard that is sympathetic with this fine building.

Although a lot of money, I believe it'll be well spent. On more than one occasion, I've heard student guides say, with pride, at our Recruitment Open Days, how much they love the Founders Building and what an

honour it is to get a room, and live in such a special place. It is, no doubt, one of our finest assets and deserves to be well treated.

Much of this development work is playing catch-up on an estate backlog. As we finalise our academic strategy, we will develop a parallel estate development plan that will ensure our infrastructure and facilities meet the needs of our staff and students into the future.

So far I've focused on the academic side of College life, but I'm mindful of the very important role played by our professional service staff, without whom, much would not happen.

This group of staff, many of whom have given long years of service to the College, are often at the sharp end, dealing with the needs and problems of our students, academic staff and visitors.

They're frequently called upon to work on initiatives and projects that go well beyond the day job: planning for the St. George's merger, managing the impact of loss of HEFCE grant replaced by higher tuition fees and preparing for and working in the Olympic and Paralympic village, to name just a few!

I'd therefore like to pay tribute to all of them: from tonight's catering staff, to staff in Royal Holloway International and the Registry recruiting the best students from around the UK and the world; from our security staff who keep the campus safe 24/7, to those in research and enterprise who are helping us prepare for the REF.

Again, there are too many to name, but all play a key role in the running of our College.

At a personal level, I'm supported by an excellent senior management team of deputy and vice-principals, deans and associate deans, heads of academic departments, the Registrar and Secretary and directors of the professional services.

Between them, they have many years of HE experience and I know this College can rely on them to help navigate us through the challenging times we face. In Maire Davis, we have honoured today somebody who has played her part in this important group.

Finally, I'd like to offer, on behalf of the whole College, sincere thanks to the many individuals who give their time free as members of Council, our governing body. Their wisdom, expertise and guidance are invaluable and

have contributed to our past success and will be instrumental in shaping our future.

Two individuals have given more than most. David Beever, whom we have also honoured today, has, over 17 years, played key roles in the life of this college, as a member of Council, as chair of the Finance Committee and as deputy Chair of Council. Andrew Burns' oration earlier today highlighted his great contribution.

The other is Andrew Burns himself, who as our immediate past Chair of Council, has played a major role in guiding the College in recent years.

Andrew brought vast experience to the role of Chair, no doubt, finely honed in his many diplomatic missions dealing with the challenging and strong-minded individuals- not so different to a university.

As an incoming Principal, one is always a little apprehensive about one's Chair. Will they be supportive? Do they understand the difference between governance and management? Can they see the big picture? And will I enjoy their company?

Such are the concerns of a new Principal.

In Andrew, I found the most supportive chair of Council; we had mutual respect of our roles and delighted in seeing the broader issues and developing a vision for the College.

All of this one would expect of a good chair: but the added bonus was that he was and continues to be such enjoyable company.

So Andrew and David, many thanks.

They were, of course, hard acts to follow and so it was with great delight that Stephen Cox agreed to take the role of Chair and Ian Ross, his deputy.

Both have already made their mark and are working with the management team on planning the way ahead.

I've no doubt, it will continue to be an interesting journey!

But as I hope you've seen from this brief report, we've started from a good position; we've seen and responded to the challenges of a rapidly

changing educational environment and we approach the planning of the next stage of development of the College with confidence and ambition.

Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your time and now please enjoy your dinner and the rest of the evening.