

Honorary Fellows Address

Honorary Fellows, distinguished guests, ladies and gentleman, it's a great pleasure to welcome you to this year's Honorary Fellows dinner and to update you on some of the highlights of the past year before we eat.

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

To you all, welcome and thank you.

At the end of my address last year, I reflected upon the changes that were taking place in Council, our governing body.

At the time, Sir Andrew Burns and David Beever, both here tonight, were stepping down as Chair and Deputy Chair respectively and their successors, Stephen Cox and Iain Ross, were starting their new roles.

The changeover in responsibilities was remarkably smooth and I would like to thank both Stephen and Iain for their vision, leadership and encouragement.

They have been ably assisted by Jeremy McIlroy, Chair of our Finance Committee, David Spence, Chair of Audit Committee and many other independent, staff and student members of Council.

The role of governor, demanding considerable time and commitment and, unremunerated, is a critical part of our structure and, as in many institutions, is largely unrecognised.

Therefore on behalf of all our staff and students, I would like to thank them for their work and support of our College, without which, so much would not be possible.

The past 12 months has been an exciting, if not challenging time for the College.

One year ago, we were doing exactly what we have been doing today, looking carefully at our expected admissions figures and trying to assess how close we are to our student number target for this coming September.

The 2012 entry of undergraduate students from the UK and EU countries was the first cohort to enter higher education in the UK under the new fee regime, where government has effectively transferred the bulk of the cost of education from taxpayer to student, albeit with taxpayers picking up a substantial element of the student loan system and covering the annual cost of loan subsidy, fee exemptions and defaults, which some estimate to be over 30% of the loan book.

This dramatic change in fee level was accompanied by a relaxation of student number controls for students with A-level grades of AAB or better (or their equivalent).

Not surprisingly, the undergraduate admissions scene was extremely volatile last summer, with some 60,000 students choosing not to enter higher education in 2012 and resulted in some institutions having very significant shortfalls in admissions.

At Royal Holloway, we filled almost exactly to the limit, the number of regulated places we were allowed to fill and secured a respectable proportion of high quality AAB students, although below our estimates.

Since then our attention has been focused on attracting more of the very best students by improving our Open Days, completely redesigning our Undergraduate Course Prospectus and refreshing our web site.

We have also gained good insight into what makes students choose Royal Holloway and what detracts from our offering: two messages stand out.

First, many people do not know who we are.

And second, they do not know where we are and what our location has to offer.

Issues that we are addressing with our new strategic plan.

Last year's Honorary Fellows ceremony was quickly followed by our annual Magna Carta lecture, given by the Rt. Rev. Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury.

We enjoyed a full house for his lecture which itself marked the final years in the run up to 2015 and the 800th anniversary of Magna Carta.

We will be working closely with our partners the Magna Carta Trust, Egham Museum, Runnymede Borough Council and Surrey County Council to ensure 2015 is a landmark occasion; and I am delighted to announce that Professor Justin Champion will take on the role of Director of the Magna Carta project here at Royal Holloway.

For much of last summer, College life was dominated by preparation for and the support of hosting of one of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games Villages.

The presence of international athletes on campus was a great privilege and further enhances our reputation as the UK university with the most international outlook- a finding made now for two years by the Times Higher Education World Rankings.

With the euphoria surrounding the Games, it might be easy to overlook the record number of nearly 3,000 students who graduated from the College last summer and in our first winter graduation; every one of whom achieved their own 'personal best' and the academic equivalent of a gold medal place with a degree from a distinguished university with high academic standards.

There were also plenty of real gold medals, not least for our own graduate and Honorary Fellow, Sophie Christiansen, winning three golds in her equestrian events and bringing a gold post box to the campus in the process.

Our sporting year concluded with a wonderful ceremony to mark the success of our many sporting scholars, at which we awarded an honorary degree to Sir Steve Redgrave.

Around the same time, we were delighted to be able to host the launch of the Surrey Poppy Appeal when it was a pleasure to welcome the Lord Lieutenant, one of today's recipients of an Honorary Fellowship.

At the heart of campus life are our academic departments where staff teach our students and undertake ground-breaking research.

In the sciences, we continue to excel, reflected by increases in student applications, another successful Science Open Day and Science Festival and punching above our weight in competitive research funding and research outputs.

For example, Dr Nigel Raine, in the School of Biological Sciences, has had a busy year with his research into bee populations and the impact that multiple pesticides can have on their health-work that was published in Nature last October and featured widely on national radio and television, playing a critical role in informing the current scientific and political debate on the continued use of multiple pesticides.

In the Information Security Group, our work in cyber-security has gone from strength to strength. Earlier this year, the Group was one of the first Academic Centres of Excellence in Cyber-Security Research recognising nearly 25 years of pioneering research and innovative programmes.

And just last week, the Group was awarded £3.8 million by the Engineering and Physical Science Research Council to form a centre for doctoral training to train 30 PhD students over the next 3 years and so improve our national capacity to resist cyber-attack and protect our electronic borders.

As we enter a further round of spending controls, it will be important that small and medium-sized universities, like ours, with demonstrable excellence, continue to receive their fair share of research funding and that funding bodies do not take the easy route and simply allocate funds by virtue of size.

It is important also that we understand the very considerable benefit that European research funding brings to this and other UK universities; funding that is disproportionately higher than its cost and would be lost in withdrawal from the EU.

Elsewhere in the College, the Arts and Humanities have maintained a strong track record of innovation and achievement.

As our Chair of Council has already said today, in Music, we were honoured by the award of the only Regius Chair in Music.

Unlike many other Regius chairs, the Royal Holloway case for a Chair was based not on a single individual, but on the sustained, high quality of music teaching, research and performance within the College and is therefore a testament to the whole of our music offering.

Of course, such a chair has to be awarded to an individual and it was with great pleasure that, after an international competition for the best candidate, we awarded it to our own head of the department of Music, Professor Julian Johnson.

In English, Ben Markovits was named in Granta's 2013 list of best young British novelists, whilst Professor Dan Rebellato, head of our Drama and Theatre department, produced an acclaimed trilogy of plays set around the Arab Spring.

Dan and his students are also now able to enjoy a stunning new Studio Theatre just opened on the north side of the A30 on Egham Hill. The theatre is a fitting tribute to the high quality staff and students in the department and provides a platform for future great work, as well as an opportunity to engage and encourage local young people to explore creativity in the arts.

Indeed, part of our long-term vision is to help develop a stronger cultural offering in West Surrey, through performance by our own departments and groups such as the Chapel Choir, as well as encouraging creative work outside the university across the age range from schools to local artistic companies.

With recent focus on the economic impact of the arts and humanities, we should remember that it is the equally important social and cultural contribution the Arts make that will help persuade world class companies and their staff to locate in Surrey.

Of course they want the business infrastructure, but they also need good transport links, excellent schools and higher education, accessible services and retail facilities, and a stimulating and thriving cultural environment.

While much of our academic work takes place here on the campus, in the School of Management, this month saw the launch of a new programme to be delivered in Singapore.

Registrations have exceeded our expectations and we look forward to working closely with local partners as we develop this new venture and extend the opportunities of a Royal Holloway degree to highly qualified, able students who are unable to travel and live in the UK for study.

Outside the classroom and laboratory, the majority of our students continue to maximise the opportunities that a campus experience affords.

Last year I mentioned the introduction of the Royal Holloway Passport, an extra-curricular award that recognises the importance of the interpersonal and organisational skills developed from activities as diverse as voluntary work in the community through to captaincy of the American Football team.

The scheme has encouraged many students to take on new challenges, build their confidence and make themselves more attractive to employers.

Through the generosity of former students, one such group of 23 students was funded to travel to New York this Easter to take part in the Model United Nations competition, with over 200 other teams from around the world.

The hard work and preparation of our team was well rewarded at a ceremony in the United Nations itself where the Royal Holloway delegation was named as an 'outstanding delegation'; recognition that has been achieved now for two consecutive years.

Finally, turning to the future, we have been spending time thinking about how we build on the legacy of Thomas Holloway's entrepreneurial flair and Elizabeth Jesser Reid's social concern, as well as our present day strengths.

After wide internal consultation and, careful consideration of what our partners and local community have told us, we are preparing a revised strategic plan that will set out our agenda for the next 10 years.

We have been particularly careful not to ignore all that is good about our College: the excellent staff and students, the high quality research, our magnificent location, to name a few.

Indeed, our plan will overtly build upon all our strengths aiming to make, what we do, and how we do it, better.

So what then is the challenge?

It is what I have already mentioned: to be better known...

- better known by prospective students and parents for the high quality education we offer;
- better known by funders and researchers for our research impact;

- better known by small and medium-sized businesses who would benefit from closer association or even co-location to a wealth of knowledge and expertise;
- better known by the many international businesses located in this part of Surrey and beyond;
- and better known by our own community from Englefield Green to the wider County, for the positive impact we can make in our towns and communities.

To achieve this, we will need to develop deep partnerships with a range of organisations and groups that bring mutual benefit.

In the past year, we have made great strides with a closer working relationship with Runnymede Borough Council and improving our partnership with local schools and colleges.

As we look to the future, we will continue to extend the range of partners with whom we do business; a process we have already started with Surrey County Council.

Our other major challenge, as the Chair of Council mentioned earlier this evening, is the physical estate.

We have initial plans for a £35 million new library in the heart of our campus and we will be consulting on these plans very shortly.

At the same time, we are finalising our masterplan for the campus which will feature a range of developments.

Two of those developments particularly pick up the theme of partnership and impact.

First, alongside our new drama studio, we are considering how we can bring together the remainder of our performing arts to create better facilities for our musicians, film makers and creative writers, as well as offering better opportunities for schools, colleges and enterprising artistic groups to engage with our academics and facilities and thus enhance the cultural offering that will make Egham, Runnymede and Surrey an attractive location.

Second, building on our strengths in areas such as cyber-security and gene therapy, we are considering how we can facilitate better interaction with small businesses through an improved and extended enterprise centre.

Both of these are big and ambitious projects; but we are not deterred by their scale as we know that an improved cultural offering and more opportunities for small, knowledge-based businesses is something that will have a positive impact on the College and the wider community.

Exciting and challenging are two words that I have used in each of my three Honorary Fellow addresses. To that vocabulary, I will add 'ambition' and invite you all to join with us in fulfilling that ambition.

Thank you.