

Principal's Speech on the occasion of the Royal Visit 27 June 2011

Your Royal Highness and Chancellor, Lord Lieutenant, Chair of Surrey County Council, Vice-Chancellor, Visitor, Chairman of College Council, Former Principals, Distinguished Guests and Colleagues

Today we celebrate the Silver Jubilee of the merger of Bedford and Royal Holloway Colleges and the 125th Anniversary of the Founding of Royal Holloway College.

Chancellor, we welcome you most warmly back to Royal Holloway, University of London and thank you for joining us on this special day.

As well as celebrating the achievements of Royal Holloway and Bedford Colleges, we acknowledge also the contribution made by many colleagues from Chelsea, King's and Westfield Colleges, who joined the newly merged institution at Egham in 1985.

Today's College stands as a monument to two Victorian visionaries: Elizabeth Jesser Reid and Thomas Holloway.

Their legacy laid the foundations for the subsequent merger of the two institutions in 1985 to form one of the world's leading higher educational establishments: a pioneer in research and renowned for the quality of its teaching and student experience.

Few institutions have come to the fore over the past twenty five years as rapidly as Royal Holloway to acquire such national and international distinction.

This position was confirmed in the 2010 Times Higher world university rankings which placed the College in the top 100 institutions in the world, at position 88, out of approximately 6,000 higher educational establishments around the world.

The merger created the platform for an institution that was placed in the top ten universities in the UK in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise and has continued to perform at levels of research considerably higher than many larger institutions.

We excel in the creative disciplines, with a top ranking in music, and strength across the arts from English and drama, to media and culture. Our social sciences feature world class academics specialising in diverse subjects from south asian history to sustainability. And in the sciences, we make the world a safer place through work on road safety for children, information security and continuity of the food supply chain.

Our Founders, in opening colleges for women, were the first to address the challenge of widening access and we continue this tradition today with a variety of financial support packages and access programmes to enable prospective students from under-represented communities to gain the benefits of higher education.

Similarly, the founding Colleges had an international perspective from their earliest days, with Royal Holloway admitting its first Chinese student in 1887, within one year of its foundation. Today, we welcome over 300 new Chinese students each year.

Irrespective of their background, our students enjoy a high quality experience- taught by women and men who are leaders in their field and supported by the professional services and Students' Union. This experience is complemented by a comprehensive infrastructure, modern student accommodation and a superb location.

It comes as little surprise therefore that in August 2010, the annual National Students Survey, showed the College maintaining a high student satisfaction score for the fourth year in succession, with students giving an impressive 86% overall satisfaction rating for the quality of their academic experience, and placing us firmly in the upper quartile of the 129 universities in England surveyed.

In reflecting on the path we have followed since our foundation and the 1985 merger, I would like to pay tribute to my predecessors: to Professor Dorothy Wedderburn whose vision and determination was instrumental in the creation of today's institution, supported by Dr Roy Miller, the last Principal of the Royal Holloway College;

to Professor Norman Gowar whose confident leadership in the 1990s led to the doubling of the size of the College;

to Professor Sir Drummond Bone for taking the College into the new Millennium;

and to Professor Stephen Hill and Professor Rob Kemp, my immediate predecessors, for sustaining these remarkable achievements.

As we look to the future, we see one of the biggest challenges in higher education in our lifetime: managing the shift in the cost of student tuition, from state to student.

Whilst the policy is clear, the consequences- intended and unintended- are much less clear and we will need to remain flexible and responsive during what I am sure will turn out to be a prolonged period of change, but whatever transpires, our mission and purpose remains clear.

Royal Holloway aspires to play a leading role in the intellectual life of this country and wider world, we intend to reach ever higher standards of research and scholarship, and improved qualities of teaching and student satisfaction and together with increased participation from all parts of society, achieve an ever closer engagement with the economic and social life of our local and global community.

Chancellor, today when we celebrate our roots and look confidently towards the future, I would like to reflect on a quote from Thomas Holloway's Deed of Foundation, which I believe shows great foresight and is as relevant today as it was 125 years ago.

The Deed states that:

'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.'

We will preserve the great tradition inherited from our founding colleges and the principles upon which they were based, but, true to Holloway's deed of foundation, in these changing times, we must be prepared to adapt the way in which we deliver our educational objectives in the best interests of our students and the wider society we serve.

Chancellor, thank you for joining us on this day of celebration and we look forward to and will continue to value your support in our endeavours.

Thank you.