

All Change at the Top, as longest standing Vice-Chancellor in country retires

Posted on Tuesday 7th April 2009

Vice-Chancellor of the University of Birmingham, Professor Michael Sterling, retires this week following more than 19 years as a Vice-Chancellor, eight of those at Birmingham.

Professor Sterling hands over the reins to Professor David Eastwood, currently Chief Executive of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), who commences in post from 13 April 2009.

Professor Sterling has been instrumental in building Birmingham's academic reputation and bringing the University from a position of financial insecurity to one of economic stability.

He has also driven forward an ambitious programme of organisational change, the ethos of which was to put academic endeavour at the heart of decision-making, reduce bureaucracy and enable the University to quickly grasp opportunities.

19 former individual academic schools are now shaped into five unified Colleges, with Heads of College now appointed who sit around the decision-making table with the Vice-Chancellor.

Professor Sterling has been at the forefront of estates developments, creating a new skyline for the campus which includes the Institute for Biomedical Research, the Business School, the Sport and Exercise Sciences building and new halls of residence including Mason Hall and the Shackleton hub.

As an engineer by background, two initiatives that Sterling is particularly proud to have secured for Birmingham are the HEFCE-funded National Higher Education STEM Programme, to increase the number of graduates with skills in science, technology, engineering and maths disciplines to fulfill the needs of employers and boost the UK economy, and establishing the Energy Technologies Institute alongside Nottingham and Loughborough Universities.

Professor Sterling has also attended 160 degree ceremonies and congratulated more than 50,000 graduates.

Whilst at Birmingham, Professor Sterling was Chair of the Russell Group of research-intensive universities at a crucial time in higher education history, when the White Paper on tuition fees was being debated and subsequently passed. He also served as President of the Institution of Electrical Engineers and sits on the Prime Minister's Council for Science and Technology, where he chairs the sub-committees on Energy and Water.

One of the more unusual duties to perform before his retirement was posing for an official portrait created by artist Paul Brason, which will grace the corridors of the Aston Webb building for years to come. A total of seven sittings were required to fully capture Professor Sterling's character.

On his retirement, Professor Michael Sterling said: "After 19 years as a Vice-Chancellor, I certainly feel excited at the prospect of a different lifestyle, but also consider it a privilege to have been part of a period of intense change for higher education.

"I have greatly enjoyed my time at Birmingham, as has my wife Wendy, who has been a committed supporter of all the University's endeavours. I am delighted with Professor

David Eastwood's appointment as my successor and am confident that Birmingham will go from strength to strength under his leadership.

"I will certainly miss the ethos of a university and camaraderie of the team."

Professor Eastwood has been Chief Executive at HEFCE since September 2006. Former posts include Vice-Chancellor at the University of East Anglia and Chief Executive of the Arts and Humanities Research Board. An historian by academic background, Professor Eastwood previously held a Chair in Modern History at the University of Wales Swansea, where he was also head of department, Dean and Pro-Vice-Chancellor.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS:

Photos of Professor Michael Sterling and Professor David Eastwood together are available. Please contact Rachel Burrows (details below) to request images. Also available are shots of Professor Michael Sterling with artist Paul Brason and the portrait painting that was unveiled at the retirement dinner on 3 April.

Mini biography of Professor Michael Sterling:

- Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Birmingham from October 2001 to April 2009
- Previous posts include Vice-Chancellor of Brunel University (1990- 2001), Professor of Engineering at the University of Durham (1980-1990), and Lecturer and Senior Lecturer at the University of Sheffield (1971-1980)
- Began career as an electrical engineer in 1964, joining AEI (Later GEC) as a student apprentice with a scholarship to the University of Sheffield to read electronic and electrical engineering
- Graduated from University of Sheffield with a first class Honours degree in electronic and electrical engineering and a PhD in computer control
- Member of the Prime Minister's Council for Science and Technology, where he chairs the sub-committees on Energy and Water
- Chairman of STEMNET (Science, Engineering, Technology and Mathematics Network)
- Former Chair of the Russell Group of research-intensive Universities and former President of the Institution of Engineering and Technology (formerly the Institution of Electrical Engineers) and the Institute of Measurement and Control
- Board Member of Advantage West Midlands, where he is also a member of AWM's Innovation and Technology Council and Chair of the regional Information and Communications Technology Steering Group
- President of Elmhurst School for Dance
- Professor Sterling is married to Wendy, and has two sons. He lives in the Cotswolds and enjoys DIY, gardening and watching rugby.

Mini biography of Professor David Eastwood:

- Currently Chief Executive of the Higher Education Funding Council for England, position held since 1 September 2006
- Previous posts include Vice-Chancellor of the University of East Anglia, Chief Executive of the Arts and Humanities Research Board, Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the University of Wales Swansea (where he also held a Chair in Modern History, was head of department and a dean).
- Co-founded the National Centre for Public Policy while in Swansea.

- Former fellow and senior tutor of Pembroke College, Oxford (1988-95)
- Honorary Fellow of St Peter's College, Oxford, from where he graduated in 1980, and of Keble College, Oxford from 2006.
- Holds an Honorary D. Litt of the University of the West of England in 2002 and the University of East Anglia in 2006.
- Former membership of national bodies and committees include the Research Support Libraries Group 2002-03, the Roberts Review of the Research Assessment Exercise, the Tomlinson Group on 14-19 Education 2003-04, the Advisory Board of the Higher Education Policy Institute, the Councils of the John Innes Centre and the Sainsbury Laboratory and the Board of the Quality Assurance Agency.
- Formerly chaired the 1994 Group of universities and Universities UK's Longer Term Strategy Group. He is also a Commissioner and Deputy Chair for the Marshall Aid Commemoration Committee.
- Fellow of the Royal Historical Society since 1991, serving as its Literary Director from 1994-2000 and as chair of its Studies in History Board from 2000-04.
- Professor Eastwood is married with three children. He enjoys music, politics, walking, sport and good wine; and includes writing on football among his many publications.

The University of Birmingham:

The University of Birmingham is a truly vibrant, global community and an internationally-renowned institution. Its work brings people from across the world to Birmingham, including researchers and teachers and more than four thousand international students from nearly 150 different countries.

The University is home to more than 30,000 students. With more than 7,500 postgraduate students from across the world, Birmingham is one of the most popular universities for postgraduate study in the UK.

The University has been at the forefront of research and innovation and is currently ranked 11th in the UK for research excellence.

The University is the eighth largest employer in the Birmingham/Solihull sub-region and plays an integral role in the economic, social and cultural growth of local and regional communities; working closely with businesses and organisations, employing approximately 6,000 staff and providing 10,000 graduates annually.

The University contributes £662 million to the City of Birmingham and £779 million to the West Midlands region, with an annual income of more than £388.6 million.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

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