

Graham Forbes



Addressing fellow graduates in the Elphinstone Hall

Born in Edinburgh and after degrees in Russian in Aberdeen and theology in Edinburgh I was ordained in the Scottish Episcopal Church. I was Provost of St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh for 27 years. Throughout my ministry I combined my ecclesiastical duties with a variety of public appointments; in 2004 I was awarded the CBE for "Public service in Scotland". My doctorates are honorary, including my LLD from this University.

What would I bring to the role of Senior Governor?

Leadership Skills

These skills have been exercised in a variety of settings from a Cathedral to the Court of Edinburgh Napier University (ENU); from government inquiries into the safety of MMR (the triple vaccine) to chairing the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission (SCCRC) which investigates miscarriages of justice; from chairing Scotland's mental health watchdog (Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland – MWCS) to Scotland's charity regulator (OSCR); from chairing the UK government's Ethics Committee on Pandemic Influenza (before and during the swine flu pandemic) to 3 years as HM Inspector of Constabulary.

I currently chair Northern Ireland's Parades Commission and am the Hon Portuguese Consul for Scotland.

Commitment to Higher Education

8 years chairing ENU's Court and 3 years as Chair of the Scottish University Chairs demonstrate that commitment. I always love Napier's graduation ceremonies with students, families and partners clapping as each graduand (of all ages and backgrounds) crosses the stage and shakes the Chancellor's hand: for many the graduand is the first in the family to reach HE. The transformational power of education through widening access is there for all to see. I am also committed to a university being a place of research. This was a key component of ENU's 2020 Vision.

Change was achieved in the creation (in 2013) and the implementation of ENU's 2020 Vision. ENU has become #1 modern university in Scotland (according to The Times, The Sunday Times, The Guardian), and the most recent NSS score ranks ENU first in Edinburgh for student satisfaction. As Chair of the Committee of Scottish University Chairs, I was particularly involved in reviewing and then insuring that all our institutions adopted the new Scottish Code of Good HE Governance Code, in addition to working with Ministers, senior officials and the Scottish Funding Council.

As ENU Chair of Court / critical friend it meant that combination of challenge and support for my Principal and her team, giving her the operational freedom to forge ahead, whilst ensuring proper accountability and oversight. Key was ensuring that all voices were heard with equal respect: the voice of our students and of our staff, as well as the lay perspective lay court members bring. Key too was ensuring that Court members focused on the big picture and that we had the right balance of skills and experience, flexible and sustainable, poised to respond to current and future challenges, as the University's response to COVID illustrates.

Experience

The above list of chairing roles evidences a track record of chairing effectively in a disparate range of (mostly national) bodies.

In terms of managing senior staff I have had the privilege of working with and appraising: a university vice-chancellor; a senior psychiatrist; a human rights lawyer (professor); a criminal lawyer; a senior civil servant. As a member of the General Medical Council I also chaired the Remuneration Committee.

Time needs to be spent nurturing and developing a diverse board. After my 8 years chairing OSCR, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities wrote to me: "OSCR's Board is currently one of the most diverse of any public body in Scotland, a credit to your commitment to broad engagement ..."

I have navigated the waters of decreasing government funding, concerns about USS, preparations for the REF, as well as the special challenges of Brexit and COVID.

Governance

As Chair of OSCR, I was responsible for the regulator promoting the highest standards of governance across Scotland's charitable sector and for authorising enforcing action when required. For the Senior Governor, Court's role in governance is vital, working with the Principal and his team and holding them to account.

International

Aberdeen University gave me the opportunity of studying in the Soviet Union. Both sons who went to Aberdeen also had that privilege of studying abroad. An international perspective is vital for widening horizons – both for staff and students going abroad to study and those from overseas enriching our common life. With ENU I visited our partner universities in Hong Kong. As the Portuguese Consul, I am well aware of the European dimension and the consequences of life after Brexit.

And finally

Four of the disciplines taught at the University have been central to so much I have done. Medicine: representing Scotland on the General Medical Council for 12 years. As chair of MWCS I saw the ever-growing need for better mental health provision.

Law: chairing SCCRC was challenging. Not every case considered was as complex as "Lockerbie" nor had international ramifications, but few were straightforward. Chairing OSCR focused my thinking on charity law and governance.

Theology: theology forces me to think and reflect critically.

Music: St Mary's Cathedral alone in Scotland maintains the Anglican daily choral tradition and our choristers are taught at St Mary's Music School.

One of my haunting memories, as a Member of the Armed Services Pay Review Body, was talking to villagers in Helmand, Afghanistan. The village elders explained the school was closed and the teacher executed. Why? He had taught the girls in the village. The 2040 Strategic Plan for the University embraces a vision of teaching and learning and research which faces the big challenges, such as climate change or education for all, and looks out across our world even to that village in Helmand, and beyond.

As Senior Governor, I would play my part to help make that vision shape all the University does.

The Very Revd Dr Graham Forbes CBE