

BERTIL ANDERSSON: DCL

Mr Vice-Chancellor and President, it is a pleasure and a privilege to present to you, for a degree of Newcastle University, Professor Bertil Andersson.

Professor Andersson has been one of the outstanding academic leaders of the past decade. He joined Nanyang Technological University as its first Provost in 2007 and then became its fourth President in 2011, retiring at the end of 2017. Under his strong and ambitious leadership NTU has climbed the world rankings reaching 11th in the QS World rankings in June 2017, for the first time ahead of the National University of Singapore, and an amazing performance for a university just 26 years old.

But he is not just an academic leader he is also a scientist of considerable distinction who in 2010 won the prestigious Wilhelm Exner Medal for his contributions to plant biochemistry. Previous winners of this medal include 15 Nobel Prize winners. Professor Andersson's research is based on plant photosynthesis, and he has pioneered the idea of the artificial leaf that can produce clean, low-cost sustainable energy from sunlight. What could be more important than that?

But he is not just an academic leader and eminent scientist, he is also a visionary. Through his passion for higher education he has been prepared to make changes, to break down silos, to reorganise and recruit with an emphasis on collaboration and cross discipline interactions. He has brought the flipped classroom to NTU, exemplified by the iconic Hive building with its 56 smart classrooms fully equipped for collaborative learning and interaction. Early this year, after retiring from NTU, he joined the Board of Directors of EON Reality, a world leader in the design of augmented reality and virtual reality software, which assists people in learning and making decisions. His

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experience and vision will help EON Reality shape learning solutions for both industry and education.

So where does this leader, scientist, visionary come from? What makes him laugh? What makes him mad?

Bertil Andersson was born in Sweden to working-class parents who had no ambitions for their children and thought young Bertil's interest in reading was a waste of time. Fortunately, his grandmother, a tough lady, had different views and was determined that he should study. He did, and not wanting to fail in the eyes of his family, he worked hard, very hard, as he has throughout his career.

He went to high school and then Umea University, far from home, in the north of Sweden. He excelled as a biochemistry student and even found time to study some journalism, which might explain his love for travelling and story telling. He did his PhD at Lund University; he did research at the Australian National University (giving him an early sight of Singapore airport on the way) and by age 36 he was a full professor at Stockholm University.

Soon after that he became a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences and one of the youngest members to sit on the Nobel Prize selection committee for chemistry, becoming its chair in 1997.

In 1999, he became President of Linkoping University and five years later he became Chief Executive of the European Science Foundation. In this role, he was coordinating research initiatives across 30 European countries, a task made simpler by his ability to speak six languages.

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His successes in Europe did not go unnoticed in Singapore and in 2005, Singapore's National Research Foundation had the foresight to invite him to join its Science Advisory Board. Two years later, he was Provost of Nanyang Technological University.

Along the way, he has been a commando in the Swedish army; he has won medals for cross country ski racing as well as science; he has continued to research on the architecture of higher plant chloroplast membranes; he was the driving force behind Singapore's new Medical School jointly established between NTU and Imperial College; he has transformed NTU and entertained them with his renditions of pop songs from the 60s and 70s, particularly the Beatles and Abba. One of his favourite Beatles numbers is *Eight Days A Week* no doubt because of the extra time for work that this would bring.

What makes him happy, as well as music and of course his family and friends many of whom are here today? Well, I am reliably told that Sweden beating England at football makes him laugh. I am also informed that England beating Sweden at football makes him mad. You will be pleased to know then that during Professor Andersson's lifetime England has played Sweden on 21 occasions, England has won 5 and Sweden 7, with 9 drawn. So on the whole Professor Andersson must be a happy man.

Let me close by sharing a few comments and advice that he has given over the years.

In response to the question, "What advice do you give to your students?", in an interview with the Times Higher, he said:

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“Be active and creative. Don’t expect a barbecue chicken to fly into your mouth. Study hard but have fun.”

More recently, when asked about what was required to run a big university like NTU he has said:

“Big ears and a flexible mind”.

Mr Vice-Chancellor and President, in recognition of his outstanding leadership of Nanyang Technological University, his far reaching contributions to Science and his passionate commitment to higher education, I present to you, Professor Bertil Andersson for the award of Doctor of Civil Law, *honoris causa*.

*Citation by Ian Postlethwaite,
CEO & Dean Newcastle University in Singapore*

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