

Mr Chancellor,

I am truly honoured to celebrate the Newcastle University legacy left by Professor Chris Brink, our Emeritus Vice-Chancellor, who challenged us all to rethink the role of a university in civil society. His deep thinking led us to question not just ‘What are we good at’ but equally importantly ‘What are we good for’. In 2007, this was the start of a journey our former leader inspired us all to undertake.

Chris believes a good education can make life better. ‘What are we good for’ is now enshrined in our values. We at Newcastle University are committed to improving life for everyone, forever, by creating good ideas and solutions through our research, teaching, learning and engagement. Under Professor Brink’s leadership we focussed our efforts to address three big societal challenges: ageing, sustainability and social renewal.

Professor Brink developed his original vision of the civic university with a unique lens on the world, a cup of South Africa’s finest rooibos tea. His fondness for this herb, taken in a carefully warmed cup, led to a tea pot of this special brew taking centre stage in his portrait, which you can see immediately behind me.

I was reminded in preparing for this citation that Professor Brink should not be given any surprises and, like any well behaved academic, it was at this point my ‘selective listening ears switched on’ and my ‘selective understanding’ kicked in. But rest assured, as a fellow scientist, I have left no rock unturned in my research for evidence in preparation of this public citation. In fact, I was overwhelmed by the response I received to my request for stories especially

unknown tales to be shared. But with brevity in mind and knowing I would like to keep my job, I may at times talk in English code, somewhat of a curiosity to Professor Brink. I will though avoid our ritualistic talk of the weather as I know this was an amusement he endured on many occasion as he waited at the bus stop for his daily journeys to and from his office.

Professor Brink is a logician who gained his PhD from Cambridge, has an interdisciplinary DPhil, Master's degrees in philosophy and mathematics, and a Bachelor's degree in computer science. It is no wonder he is renowned for his clarity of thought and is an outstanding perfectionist. He has another gift too in that he remembers everything he reads, well almost everything according to his wife, Tobeia. So how did this come about? Well, as young boys, Chris and his older brother had the duty to clean the yard on Saturday mornings. This was in arid Upington, south of the Kalahari Desert and the yard would have to be raked. According to the story, it was not unusual for the brother to come back to the wheelbarrow with his rakings, only to find Chris sitting in the wheelbarrow. He would be found reading an old scrap of newspaper that he had picked up, and have done nothing else. Apparently this still happens, if Chris is asked to do something that involves a piece of newspaper, chances are he can be found ten minutes later still reading the paper – the older, the better.

Those that have worked closely with Professor Brink have always marvelled at his rigorous approach and attention to detail in all that he did, he led by example. This extended to his reputation for unfailing punctuality. It turns out this trait was influenced by events that happened at a younger age too. One day, his parents had gone to Cape Town for business and Chris was left in charge of his younger siblings. He had to get them up and dressed so they could walk to school on time, as usual. But he overslept. So to get them to school on time he bundled the whole lot into his father's bakkie (utility van) and drove

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them to school. At school they discovered that the littlest one was wearing a jersey that his mother had not finished knitting yet! Perhaps this experience also explains why he is such an impeccable dresser. So this story is why I was reliably informed he is over punctual and organised. Mark I'Anson, Chair of Council, also reflected on Chris's famously tidy desk, commenting further how, as a renowned clear thinker, his notes were always concise and he remained calm in the face of challenges. That said, Mark couldn't help wonder if in retirement his children might present some new challenges to his preference for an organised life!

Chris left his homeland in South Africa to take the helm of Newcastle University, joined by his wife Tobeia and three children, Carmen, Hestia and Peter. Before taking up his position here at Newcastle, Professor Brink was Vice-Chancellor of Stellenbosch University, where he led a transformation agenda on widening participation which attracted national and international attention. During his 5 year tenure at Stellenbosch he dealt with the extremely difficult debate over tuition in English and raised the number of Black students at the University by 70%. In particular, the number of African black students rose by 91% over that time and he succeeded in building a more inclusive institution despite fierce opposition.

Olivia Grant, our former Chair of University Council, explained how, when appointing Professor Brink, his referees described his level of intellect, ability and deep humanity with a degree of respect she had never seen before. She described his clarity of thought and ability to challenge all to be the best they can as exceptional. Professor Ella Ritchie, his former Deputy Vice-Chancellor, shared how his diligence and sheer grit in driving forward the widening participation and access agenda won national and international acclaim. Ella expressed how personally she had learnt a lot from working with Chris. His

determination to get things done to the highest standards has also made our campus beautiful and the place to be for inspiration.

Professor Brink has a reputation for showing great compassion and offered kindness when things went wrong for people. From first-hand experience, I have witnessed his peaceful way of resolving difficult situations and empowering folk around him to speak up. His ability to connect with everyone will be remembered with much fondness especially when done so through taking tea.

A true leader is one that instils confidence in others to lead also and what better example than his successor, Professor Day, who became our Vice-Chancellor at the start of this year, and was Chris Brink's first senior manager appointment as Pro-Vice-Chancellor for the Faculty of Medical Sciences. Professor Brink challenged the way we think, questioned how we should act and above all motivated us to want to make a difference in ways that impact positively on civil society. He brought his idea that once where Newcastle took coal out of the ground and built ships to make gold we must transform this old economy and create a world-leading hub for new gold, that is, the knowledge economy. In 2016, Professor Brink received the Freedom of the City of Newcastle upon Tyne, the highest honour the City can give.

In 2008 in an interview with the Guardian newspaper, the reporter asked Chris, 'What was it that made the son of a carpenter such a champion of social equality?' As I draw this citation to a close I would like to share a personal reflection on this question. Simply put he was ahead of the curve in recognising that the question we as a university should be asking is not just 'what are we good at?' but also 'what are we good for?' He has inspired and created a new generation of academics so people like me who are the first in their families to

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attend university can enthuse others on the wider benefits a good education can provide. Widening and raising the participation of socially disadvantaged students in Newcastle University was one of his key goals.

Last month we learned we are one of only eight research-intensive Russell Group universities to be awarded the Teaching Excellence Framework Gold status. Led by Professor Suzanne Cholerton, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Learning and Teaching, Chris and all our colleagues should be congratulated for this achievement. The evaluation panel particularly highlighted Newcastle University's outstanding support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds as well as for those with specific educational needs.

All that remains for me to say is thank you to Professor Brink for choosing to bring your family to Newcastle and lead our University to transform your vision into reality. Thank you to Tobeia for making that journey and also choosing to make our city your family home. We wish you well, Chris, in your retirement and trust you can spend more time reading newspapers in wheelbarrows whilst listening to Dean Martin in the background. We hope you will continue to visit us and perhaps find time to take up new hobbies like birdwatching so you can study the many different species of ducks and geese. Finally, should you decide to do so then I believe your experiences reflecting on the 'years spent amongst the English' would be an enjoyable read especially if you share the secret of how to make the popular 'garden gnome' speak.

Mr Chancellor, in recognition of his outstanding achievements made here at and for Newcastle University, I present to you Professor Chris Brink for the award of Doctor of Civil Law, *honoris causa*.

*Citation by Professor Selina Stead, Public Orator*

*14 July 2017*