

Christopher Richard Watkin Edwards DCL

Mr Chancellor,

It ought to be a Public Orator's dream to introduce to you someone who really needs no introduction. There can be no-one currently associated with this University who does not know at least something of the values and achievements of our former Vice-Chancellor, Professor Christopher Edwards. Many people present – myself very definitely included – will freely acknowledge how much they have benefitted from Professor Edwards' leadership, encouragement and mentoring. Yet it is precisely because I was appointed Public Orator by Professor Edwards that I must register my apprehension as I commence this citation: what if my speech is such a disappointment that it undermines the claims that I wish to make about Christopher's judgement and foresight? Too late to step down now, I suppose

Few people who have had the pleasure of hearing Christopher's lyrical Home Counties dialect would suspect that he is, in fact, an Irishman by birth. Although his family hail from Hertfordshire, Christopher's father served in the Royal Air Force, and during World War II he was stationed near Irvinestown, County Fermanagh. Thus it was in a cottage in the grounds of Necarne Castle that Christopher Richard Watkin Edwards first saw daylight. Two years later the same venue witnessed the first of several close-run encounters with mortality, when Christopher's unquenchable curiosity led to him falling headfirst into a barrel full of water. Fortunately

his elder sister chanced upon him seconds later, and extracted him before he'd had time to quench more than his thirst.

Having survived a number of similar misadventures during a happy childhood back in Hertfordshire, Christopher went on to read Medicine at Cambridge, whence he graduated with Distinction. However, upon taking up his first House Officer post at the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital, it was his dancing skills that first stood him in good stead, when his choreographic manoeuvres caught the eye of a bonny female House Officer. Sally and Christopher were married not long afterwards in London, and just last weekend they celebrated their 40th Anniversary. Throughout their four decades together to date, family life has been one of the principal sources of Christopher's boundless energy. He often speaks of his deep gratitude to Sally for her encouragement and support, and of the delight they share in their children and grandchildren.

Christopher's reputation as an outstanding clinician and scientist was firmly established during eleven busy years at Bart's in London. He then moved to a Chair in Edinburgh, where his work on hypertension, renal medicine and endocrinology gained international acclaim. Ever the dedicated clinician, Christopher established a tradition at Western General Hospital which came to be known as "morning prayers": this took the form of a review of clinical cases with all medical staff, held at 8:30 prompt every morning. Consultants usually dreaded "morning prayers" more than the Junior House Officers did; after all, Christopher expected Consultants to diagnose with speed and accuracy. Colleagues recall Christopher's almost uncanny abilities in this regard, even under the most challenging of

circumstances. On one memorable occasion, his unerring eye led him to diagnose the family dog - Biscay - with a rare endocrinological disorder known as Addison's disease. Just as in humans, this rare condition is betrayed by darkening of the gums and excess salivation. When Christopher presented Biscay to the vet, the latter confessed never having even heard of Addison's disease, and opted to "phone a friend". The friend in question turned out to be the Professor of Veterinary Medicine at Edinburgh, who was well aware of Christopher's formidable reputation for diagnosis. He therefore gave the vet the soundest advice imaginable: do what Professor Edwards tells you!

It was during Christopher's 15 years in Edinburgh that his one Achilles heel emerged. Christopher appears not to have heard the following piece of sound advice from P G Wodehouse:

"Golf, like the measles, should be caught young, for, if postponed to riper years, the results may be serious".

By then in his forties, Christopher should have known better than to turn his hand to golf. Although many senior physicians would hang on Christopher's every word at work, he soon found himself struggling in vain to find anyone willing to tie their fortunes to his on an 18-hole green. A Senior House Officer took pity on his hapless boss, but even his enthusiasm dimmed when Christopher raised his 3-iron for a swing only to have the head fly off and hurtle just millimetres from his partner's head.

Returning to London in 1995, Christopher embarked upon one of the most demanding tasks of his career. In those days medical training in the Metropolis was dispersed amongst five separate medical schools. Christopher spent 18 months developing a strategy to merge these five, to create the Imperial College School of Medicine. The scale of the challenge may be appreciated by observing that the merger would more than double the size of Imperial College as a whole. Many of the obstacles which Christopher overcame were cultural: the existing hierarchy at Imperial were not used to the ways of medics, not least their complex working relationships with the National Health Service. For their part, staff in the existing medical schools were jealously proud of their independence. Christopher's job might be compared to trying to broker a five-way marriage between happy singles who are strongly committed to monogamy! Yet he achieved it, and did so with huge distinction. He then nurtured the newlyweds through their first three years together. A decade later Imperial College School of Medicine is a huge success. It has grown by more than 30% since the merger, and now boasts the largest research income of any medical school in the UK.

It is to the enduring good fortune of this University that Christopher Edwards chose to spend the last six years of his full-time career here, as our Vice-Chancellor. I have already mentioned Christopher's extraordinary skills in clinical diagnosis; from his record of achievement here, as at Imperial College, it is clear that he is just as skilled at institutional diagnosis. While other UK universities reorganised and de-organised, Christopher moved swiftly to establish and consolidate three large faculties here, all of which have since moved from strength to strength. He thought

big and inspired others to do the same. Whereas the University did not have a capital works programme when Christopher arrived, by the time of his retirement last year he had presided over £100M worth of investment in new buildings and other 21st Century infrastructure. Far from raiding the coffers, these investments were paralleled by a growth in annual turnover from £189M in academic year 2000 to 2001 to £318M in 2006 to 2007; this is fully three and half times more growth than could be explained by inflation alone.

Thinking big is not just about financial performance: I would argue that Christopher also succeeded in expanding our scale of ambition by several orders of magnitude. Heeding invaluable advice from his highly imaginative Deputy, Professor John Goddard, Christopher launched two major strategic initiatives, Science City and the Cultural Quarter, which are already setting the tone for the future of this University. He also equipped Newcastle University with strategic partnerships overseas, most notably in the Far East and Australia. His commitment to raising ambitions was not restricted to academic strategy: under his leadership, and in at least one case with a generous donation from his own pocket, student sports at Newcastle have flourished. Newcastle University has now achieved its highest ever ranking, at 9th place in the British Universities Sports Association League - ahead of Cambridge, Bristol, Manchester, Liverpool and Sheffield. Kevin Keegan would be well advised to retain Christopher Edwards as an advisor!

In parallel with all of his achievements in Newcastle, Christopher continued to play a pivotal role in medicine. As a governor of the Wellcome Trust, he was instrumental in promoting the creation of clinical research centres at a

number of UK Medical Schools, to which the Trust then committed funding for research training fellowships. He was also heavily involved in the Wellcome Trust's decision to establish the Sanger Institute, which became the UK hub of the international public-sector human genome project. In his busy retirement, Christopher now serves as Chairman of the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital Foundation NHS Trust, and also spends one day a week in the lab at Imperial College, enthusiastically pursuing his lifelong interests in the physiology of the kidneys.

Mr Chancellor, there is no token any University could offer which would be commensurate with the contribution which Professor Christopher Edwards has made to this Institution. Still less could we adequately repay his extraordinary lifetime achievements in science, clinical practice and academic leadership. But what little we have, we must offer. I therefore ask you now to bestow upon Professor Christopher Edwards the degree of Doctor of Civil Law, *honoris causa*.

Citation by Professor Paul Younger