

ANTHONY STEPHEN PUCKETT – HONORARY FELLOWSHIP

Chancellor Dharker, members of the University, distinguished alumni, and honoured guests,

We say that we are “From Newcastle. For the world”, but few exemplify this spirit more clearly than Steve Puckett. Steve is an Engineer of global eminence, a business leader, founder, and independent director with decades of experience at the highest levels in the energy sector. He works with clients including major international companies, blue chip financial institutions, global professional services organizations, and government authorities. But the important thing to us this evening is that he is a proud Newcastle graduate, shaped by the experiences, values, and education he gained at our university, and he has helped to shape our university in return.

Steve came to Newcastle in 1971 to study Chemical Engineering, propelled by a desire to benefit from what was by then a highly reputed and century-long tradition of education and research in science and engineering, but also attracted by the city’s vitality. Newcastle in the early seventies was vibrant. Change and modernity were evident: construction was everywhere; the Metro was under development; the university was just spreading its wings as an independent

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institution; even the decimal currency was new! Steve recalls an “edginess” that encouraged expression and individuality. But even at this early stage in his career, he wanted to give something back – he joined the student representative council, no doubt developing a tolerance for board meetings that must have stood him in good stead ever since! There’s also no doubt that the experience of this welcoming, lively community had a deep influence on his subsequent professional and community life.

After graduating, at a time when Steve says he had “more or less transitioned to adulthood”, he joined David Balfour and Sons – a Newcastle- and London-based firm of consulting engineers specialising in clean water provision. He worked on project development, collaborating with the World Health Organisation, and gaining experience of working globally. Terry Burke, a former colleague – himself a Newcastle University graduate – tells me that Steve’s enthusiasm and seriousness of purpose were clear but were coupled with humour and a capacity for loyal friendship. There may have been some competitiveness too: Terry claims that Steve’s regular victories on the squash court were down to his youth, height, and reach, but at least the winner had the grace to foot the bill in the pub afterwards!

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Steve was clearly enjoying life here, but soon a global energy business offered him the opportunity to develop an international career. After gaining experience in management, he won his first long-term international assignment to manage strategic planning for a \$5bn business in Japan. He moved up to global strategic planning at corporate level in the US, then to Hong Kong in 1991 where he made the key calls over business engagement with China. In 1994 he moved to a role with responsibilities for Asia Pacific, based in Singapore. Since 2000, he has been Chairman and Founder of Tri-Zen International, a strategic energy advisory consultancy, Managing Partner at Huntington Capital Partners, and a director of several early-stage businesses.

You might think that, with such varied work on the other side of the world, memories of those formative years in Newcastle would fade, but Steve has retained a passion for our university. When in Hong Kong, he helped to bring the many graduates who lived there into an Alumni Association. Later, in Singapore, he was approached to support plans to establish a group there too, starting from about a dozen influential figures, this reached out to the whole Newcastle graduate population of the Lion City, and the first meeting was attended by hundreds.

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Building on the strength of this community, just over a decade later we established Newcastle University International Singapore as an academic community offering courses to meet the needs of the marine sector and later Steve joined its governing board. He is now its longest serving member.

Since its creation, our Singapore portfolio has grown to include Chemical, Electrical, Marine and Mechanical Engineering, and the Newcastle Research & Innovation Institute. Across our Singapore and Malaysia campuses we have about 2000 students and 180 colleagues – but offering successful higher education outside the UK is challenging. Expertise in our board is vital to good governance, plotting out the future, recruiting to senior positions, and connecting us to governments, businesses, and other universities. Several of Steve's fellow board members tell me that he has been one of our strongest advocates, always putting the university's interests first and offering clear, candid views about the relevance of our programmes and our graduates' skills.

Steve has many distinctions. He is a Fellow and former Singapore Chairman of the Institution of Chemical Engineers. He was awarded the Institution's Council Medal in 2010 for services to professional development. He is also an Eminent Fellow of the Energy Institute and has received a Lifetime Achievement Award for contributions to Asia's energy industries. He has served as President of the

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British Chamber of Commerce in Singapore, and as Chair of the Chambers across Southeast Asia. He chaired the Singapore government programme to reshape tertiary curricula in the energy space and was a member of Singapore's Core Initiative to internationalize its engineering profession. He was created an OBE in 2014 for services to British business in Asia. In case you should think this over-achievement is limited to business, I should point out that he is also an honorary advisor to the British Theatre Playhouse and has been a board member of the Charities Aid Foundation - South East Asia and the Lien Aid Foundation – a charity bringing clean water to Asia's rural communities.

Steve's friend and former colleague Terry Burke says that it is his energy, enthusiasm, and loyalty that have brought Steve success. But it has brought us success too: Steve's experience of a welcoming, lively Newcastle University fifty years ago has come back to us, magnified through his decades of experience, and the beneficiaries have been the nearly three thousand students who have become Newcastle graduate engineers through the work of our colleagues in Singapore. From Newcastle. For the world.

I am told by Professor Richard Davies that Steve has been a "guest of honour" at our Singapore graduations. Perhaps it's time to stop treating him as a guest and make Steve one of the family...

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Chancellor Dharker, in recognition of his contributions to the global development of the university, for his advocacy for education and his championing of professional development, I present to you Anthony Stephen Puckett OBE, to be accepted into the Fellowship of Newcastle University.

Prof. J. S. Fitzgerald

Public Orator

4th May 2023