

## **The Open University**

**50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Charter Day - 23 April 2019**

**Remarks by Sir John Daniel, O.C. – Vice-Chancellor 1990-2001**

### ***The Open University: Guiding Star of my Working Life***

Students, Graduates, Colleagues, my Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is thrilling to be here. We fêted the OU's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary during my time as Vice-Chancellor and I still use one of the sturdy commemorative umbrellas commissioned by the BBC in case it rained on the live broadcast of our Charter Day Ball. Happily, Walton Hall was blessed with a lovely evening and fireworks added extra colour to a memorable celebration.

The Open University has been the guiding star of my working life. I first set foot on this campus in 1972, as an unpaid summer intern in the Institute of Educational Technology. It was an uplifting experience. I glimpsed the future of higher education and wanted to help make it reality. In 1969, Lord Crowther, our first Chancellor, had articulated the OU's novel ambitions: to be 'open to people, open to places, open to methods and open to ideas. These 'four opens' inspired my subsequent career.

After two decades in Canadian distance-teaching universities, I was delighted to return here as Vice-Chancellor in 1990 to lead the OU into this millennium through an exciting period. The higher education reforms of 1992 provided a springboard that allowed the OU to double student numbers, from 100,000 to 200,000; to amass solid reserves; and to serve 150,000 students online by 2001. We added new buildings - and I am touched to see that a lasting legacy of those years is the beautifully tended knot garden outside this building that my late wife, Kristin, designed with the Estates team.

When the OU was established 50 years ago, ideals of openness and equality were in the air. Today, sadly, the trends are to close and divide. But in this post-truth and post-trust world of widening inequality, the OU's vision is more compelling than ever. Our challenge is to reinterpret for these times our timeless ambitions for higher education: to be open to people, open to places, open to methods and open to ideas.