

## Tribute to Dr Jonathan Nicholls

**Spoken by Nicola Owen, AHUA Chair, at the AHUA's Spring Conference on Tuesday 5 April 2022 at the University of Glasgow**

Good afternoon colleagues. Before we start the Business Session, I wanted to pay tribute to Jonathan Nicholls who died last month, in recognition of all he did not just for the AHUA but for Higher Education and indeed, the wider world.

We were all deeply shocked and saddened to learn of Jonathan's untimely death on 15 March after a cycling accident, as I'm sure many of you were too. Jonathan was a huge figure in our HE world - particularly for us in the AHUA. He joined the Executive as a co-optee in 2005, becoming Deputy Chair in 2006 and ultimately Chair in 2013 until 2016.

Jonathan held Registrar posts at three universities: Warwick from 1999 to 2004, Birmingham from 2004 to 2007 and then as *Registrar* at the University of Cambridge until his retirement at the end of 2016. I say 'retirement' but of course, tending roses and reading the paper was not for Jonathan! First he joined Shakespeare Martineau for a spell and then worked for a year as the Interim Secretary at the Open University before entering local politics, where he was elected as a labour councillor for Warwick District Council. And all this in addition to numerous voluntary roles on boards and governing councils, including that of the University of Sheffield.

Outside work, Jonathan set himself some ambitious physical targets, doing his first marathon at the age of 55 in tribute to his friend, Tony Rich. And shortly afterwards, a cycle ride from Land's End to John O'Groats.

Jonathan was a man of vision, responsive, full of good ideas, common sense, charming and delightful to work with. Intellectually he was a little intimidating with a brain the size of a planet, but once you got to know him you appreciated just how supportive he was. And testament to this are all the stories we've received and heard since his death from people who have benefited hugely from his interest in their careers, his willingness to support, advise and provide opportunities.

When Jonathan took up the Chair's role, he had a number of ambitions for the Association which included: supporting and expanding development programme for leaders and future leaders; developing the AHUA's communications; and ensuring that the Association became the 'go-to' organisation in the sector for professional issues (a phrase he didn't particularly like, but which has stuck ever since). Those ambitions continue to this day with our extensive range of professional development programmes, our ever expanding communications activities, including the recent appointment of a Communications and Media Officer, and the recognition by many influential external bodies that AHUA offers a range of expertise and experience in professional services not found anywhere else. We are proud to be able to continue his legacy in these areas.

At the end of his three years as Chair, Jonathan hosted the Spring conference in Cambridge and in anticipation of it, wrote: "I hope that our Conference will be a place for reflection on the shaping values of higher education, a time for enjoyment and delight in new and old friends, a time away from the office, and a time for renewing our purposes as leaders in a cause that matters more than ever, however uncertain the journey ahead". Let us bear those words in mind as we reflect, enjoy and renew during this conference this week.

Jonathan was in many ways the first 'career Registrar': his influence across the sector was immense and his loss will be widely and deeply felt by many. Our sincere condolences go to his wife, Sue, his children and grandchildren.

Thank you.