

Dr Nicholas Sanders, Chancellor's Medallist

Oration by Ken Sloan, University Registrar

People used to say that 'a week is a long time in politics.'

Then the summer of 2016 arrived.

Now, if someone were to tell me the entire Government had collectively resigned four minutes ago, and were to be replaced by a team of enthusiastic circus performers, I'd be tempted to believe them.

Yet, even if our national interests *were* in the hands of trapeze artists, lion tamers and clowns, I would trust that their installation into Downing Street would be smoothly achieved. I would be reassured that due process had been followed.

Because, if the last few weeks have told us anything about Britain, it's that we are exceptional at governance. In less than a month, we lost a Prime Minister and gained a new one. And despite the pace in which this happened, it felt like a seamless transition.

For many years at Warwick, we have been lucky to be able to call upon the expertise of someone who has actually worked at 10 Downing Street. Someone who, more recently, has been instrumental to the efficiency of our own governance structure. I am delighted to be able to recognise Dr Nicholas Sanders for his contribution to Warwick.

Nick joined our Council, the University's Governing Body, in 2004, after a notable career in the Civil Service, with a marked focus on education. For over 15 years, he was a Director in the Department for Education and Skills. His in-depth knowledge of education policy would prove invaluable to any academic institution. And, as a former Director for Higher Education in the Department, he joined Warwick with a lofty and respected reputation within our sector. My own awareness of Nick came some years before he joined Warwick's Council. I worked for some time in the Office of a former Warwick Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir Brian Follett; Brian saw Nick as a valuable, incisive and informed civil servant and welcomed Nick's visits to the University to discuss and explore future education policy.

We have a lot of committees here at our University. And Nick has been on many of them. There are at least 16 committees and sub-committees that benefited from Nick's involvement in some way. Considering his previous responsibilities for the finances of the nation's education budget, it's unsurprising that we asked him to play a key role in our financial governance. However, his influence was felt beyond the likes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee and the Audit Committee. His insight and approach also had a profound effect on our human resources systems.

Whether it was for our Health and Safety committees, or for many varying employee panels, Nick brought into play his considerable experience of national industrial relations.

He also relied upon a set of core values that we, as a University, must forever uphold. He believed in fairness. He approached his role as a lay member of our Council with a sense of rigour, and with an unrivalled commitment to considering the fine details. Perhaps most importantly – he valued the importance on ongoing dialogue. Not just within the meetings themselves either. Nick understood that progress depended on talking to teams away from the formal committee structure, and offering views directly to colleagues outside of committee agendas. When I first played a leading role in institutional governance in 2008, I very quickly received an email full of thoughts, ideas, suggestions

and constructive criticisms of our approaches. This was to be one of many. All of these emails ended with a phrase like "No need for a response". Nick knew only too well that it would be unwise of anyone to discount the observations of a diligent, well-informed and expert eye.

One of Nick's finest qualities has been the time he has spent with colleagues, not only discussing institutional matters, but also sharing past experiences or helping them with career and related decisions. I have been a benefitted personally from both. I remember when he described the transition of Jim Callaghan to Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister in 1979. A unique perspective from someone who was not only in Downing Street at the time, but also knew such interesting facts as what the menus were for their first and last meals respectively as Prime Minister. For someone obsessed with political history, hearing these first hand was a rare treat. Nick was also pivotal in helping me make an important career decision and encouraged me to be brave. I will always be grateful for both.

I began by saying "a week is a long time in politics". And it is. But it's not as long as nigh-on 12 years in a voluntary role within the governance structures of this University. That shows enormous dedication towards ensuring that Warwick maintains its reputation for excellence. And that is why we are hugely grateful for the exceptional service of our esteemed friend and colleague.

Mr Chancellor, in the name of the Senate, I present to you for admission to the award of Chancellor's Medal, Dr Nicholas Sanders.