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Installation Address

Martin Hall, Vice-Chancellor, University of Salford

Monday 12 October 2009

Chancellor Irene Khan, Mayor and Mayoress of Salford Roger Lightup and Valarie Fleet, Chair of Council of our university, Alan Mawson. We have a useful expression in South Africa, “all protocols observed”, which avoids the embarrassment of forgetting anyone. So please all feel warmly welcomed to this celebration, in which we reaffirm the continuity of our university.

Eight years from now we will be marking the 50th anniversary of the Royal Charter that established the University of Salford although, of course, our history stretches back long before 1967. A useful motif for thinking about the past and the future in the same frame is the Adinkra symbol of Sankofa which is understood as an evocation to remember the past in order to live consciously in the present, and to have ambition for what lies ahead. Sankofa is often represented in Ghana as a bird flying forward while looking backwards. The Sankofa bird, flying freely across the clear blue skies of Salford, shows us that two apparent pairs of opposites are not in contradiction. We can draw from the past in order to make the best decisions for the future, and we can be intensely engaged with our local circumstances while being free to fly to be cosmopolitan.

Salford became a free borough almost eight hundred years ago when Manchester was little more than a village – a point of some significance that I’ve found it important to remember. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Salford was, with Manchester, at the hub of the industrial revolution and at the heart of innovation – the first street in the world to be lit by gas, the first free public library, the first public park. This was the town to which Friedrich Engels was sent in 1842, to learn the textile trade at the family mill, and Salford has long been an epitome of working class Britain, and of the complexities of re-alignment to the post-industrial city.

Our university’s points of origin are the Pendleton Mechanics’ Institute of 1850 and the Salford Working Men’s College of 1858, which merged in 1896 to become the Salford Royal Technical Institute. Here, about 1200 students studied Mathematics, Engineering, Chemistry, Physics, Dyeing, Spinning and Weaving and Art. Between 1958 and 1996 there was a complex sequence of breakaways, re-naming and mergers before the University of Salford finally took the form that it has today. This was the institution that my predecessor, Michael Harloe, came to lead in 1997. I thank Michael for all that he has done to build the university from the legacy of a complex – and unfunded – merger through to our system of four Faculties and twelve Schools, and for his support and generosity during the three months we worked together in the leadership transition.

Looking backwards, we see a mission to offer education irrespective of social class. We also see the search for knowledge, both to widen the imagination and the sense of the possible and to advance industry through innovation and application. In 1896, as today, Art and Design was valued as a core part of the curriculum. In 1896, Chemical Engineering was at the lead edge of innovation, giving Greater Manchester the competitive edge in the world textile trade. Today and in the years to come Digital Media is the lead edge of innovation, with turnkey applications in all aspects of infrastructure development and communication. This is why we have grasped the opportunity of becoming a founding partner in Media City at Salford Quays, where our new campus will open in September 2011.

Salford Quays, on the Manchester Ship Canal, was one of the busiest ports of the nineteenth century, and at the heart of Lancashire's network of canals that brought the products of local mills to warehouses for shipping anywhere in the world. In 1887, Buffalo Bill set up his tent on the site of today's Media City and enthralled thousands with his Wild West extravaganza of exotic exaggerations. There has always been a fascination with the wider world, whether the possibilities for trade and industry or with other ways of living and being – with the Sioux warriors who missed the train out of Manchester in 1887 and merged into the tenements of Salford. It is the particular mission of a university to be both for the local and regional community and also to be part of the world as a whole. This is the compass for setting our objectives.

These objectives – the focus of our work for the next few years – fall into three broad areas: teaching and learning, engagement, and research and innovation. I will talk briefly about each of these and then end with our institutional culture – the customs and behaviours that either bind us together as a community of scholarship, or pull us apart.

The University of Salford had a great tradition of teaching and learning, of business and industry placements and of special opportunities for our graduates. We no longer hold this position. Over the past few years we have slid steadily down every major league table and we are now in the middle of the lowest quartile of the 120 or so British universities. In the latest National Student Survey, our university was 3% below the national average, and this will cost us dearly in the next batch of league tables to be published. This is not where we belong, and it is not where we will remain.

Reflecting on the past in order to guide our ambitions for the future requires that we become known as one of the top thirty universities in Britain for teaching in learning. This means that we focus fiercely on retention and progression, and on the student experience. Once our students join us they must stay with us, complete their studies in the time mapped out in their curricula and be pleased with what they have learned and with how we have taught and supported them.

This is not just a matter for our academic staff – it is rather a shared objective for all of us. In meeting and talking with people since I arrived in April, I've been particularly impressed by Commercial Services at Castle Irwell and their preparations for incoming students, by the concern of our security staff and Campuswatch volunteers for student safety, by the Student Information Directorate's attention to the improved online registration service, and by Information and Library Service's attention to front-line student support in our libraries and in online information services. We have also seen the huge benefits of our investment in University House and the new one-stop service offered by Student Life.

This combination of teaching and learning infrastructure and services for student support and development is an enabling framework for inspired and inspiring teaching, and we have today recognized the contributions made by great teachers from each of our twelve schools. In order to regain our distinction in teaching and learning, it is essential that teaching has parity of esteem with research. I've asked all Deans and Heads of School to give particular attention to this, and I've opened up a discussion with them – which we will take to the academic community as a whole – about the potential of a Teaching and Learning Charter in which we commit to minimum standards of provision for all academic programmes. And we will increase recognition of inspired and inspiring teaching through annual Distinguished Teachers Awards, the first round of which will be made during this academic year.

Improving teaching and learning requires a partnership with students. Students are not customers, and the analogy between education and service delivery – and sometimes retailing – is one of the more corrosive aspects of the contemporary debate about the future of universities. Good education requires that attention to the quality of teaching is matched by a commitment by students to take learning seriously. We are fortunate in the quality of student leadership at our university. Last year's Student Union President Usman Ali – now elected to a leadership position in the National Union of Students – led a restructuring of sabbatical officer responsibilities that now has a Vice-President focusing on each of our four Faculties. This is enabling this year's Student Union President Matt Webber to concentrate on the key aspects of student experience, working with Vice-Presidents Emily Godrey, Joe Kirwin, Ricky Chotai and Jim Dale. In order to connect student experience more directly with the leadership of the university, Matt and I will co-host a twice-yearly Conference of Class Representatives, in which Deans and Heads of School will be able to take part in a discussion of student concerns across all academic programmes.

It has been argued that the key to raising our standing in teaching and learning is simply to raise our A-level entry requirements. Students with better A-level grades, it is suggested, will perform well and be happier. I don't believe that it can be – or should be – as simple as this. We have always attracted students

with excellent A-level results, and we will still continue to do so. We also welcome and value students with a range of other qualifications, and students who have yet to have the opportunity to show their potential. We have a proud record of widening participation and, in some of our schools, the proportion of students from families that have little prior participation in higher education is more than double the national average.

Britain is now one of the most unequal countries in the developed world, and there is compelling evidence that household income is correlated with educational attainment. It matters profoundly which school you go to; if it did not, why would parents give so much attention to the issue? While we will continue to recruit undergraduate students internationally, nationally and from the north-west, there is great potential in working with the City of Salford, and with Salford City College, in understanding education as an integrated path that is one of the primary engines for individual attainment and social mobility.

As we focus more on our educational mission, we should pay particular attention to students living at home, older students and part-time students. A special feature of the University of Salford is that more than 15 000 of our students live with their families and commute to classes. As the cost of education to students and their families rises and as the long-term effects of the crisis in public funding roll out, the opportunity to study from home will become far more important. The public transport network will become a key strategic asset and our leading expertise in advanced visualization and digital media will enable innovative curriculum development that meets the needs of learners who must combine study with part-time work and family responsibilities.

There will also be a sharply growing demand by older students to return to higher education, or to come to university for the first time after having been in work for substantial periods. Current student funding policies that discriminate against those older than 19, and against those who already hold degrees, are both unfair and make little sense in terms of economic development and recovery and we must join with other universities and organizations lobbying for their reform. For example, the public sector, along with businesses dependent on public sector contracts, is one of the largest sources of employment in Greater Manchester. As jobs are cut to reduce public sector expenditure, universities must open up opportunities for older and part-time learners. Given our long tradition of alignment with the needs of business and industry, and our focus on employability, this is surely an area of provision in which we can excel.

As in other areas of our work, simultaneous attention to the local and global dimensions of the student experience adds a special dimension to our university. A significant proportion of our students are international and, over the last few weeks, we have welcomed students from more than 100 nations to our campus. While I've come to learn that Yorkshire is a foreign country and the River Irwell as an international border, I've also seen from my own experience how Salford

welcomes those of us from distant places. We benefit from a diverse leadership team; South Africa, Australia, Guyana, Lebanon, Egypt and now – with our new Chancellor – Bangladesh. We even have colleagues from south of the Thames. Internationalization benefits the university in many ways, and particularly through a diverse staff and student culture that contributes directly to the educational experience.

We can think, then, of our campus as a hub where the intersecting lives of staff and students coincide in forms of scholarship. And the idea of engagement extends this image to include other forms of network: our partnerships with other universities in China, Australia, the Middle East and North America; our 100 000 or so alumni distributed around the world; our strong connections with other universities in Greater Manchester and the north-west; local businesses and public sector organizations with which we work on a daily basis.

Looking backwards, it is evident that engagement has always been high on the University of Salford's agenda. In 1981, when this university was subjected to savage funding cuts, Vice-Chancellor John Ashworth took the university into partnerships with business and industry that strengthened its reputation for engagement. Today, we are still building strong partnerships such as the Framework for Innovation and Research in Media City that will be based in the Media Enterprise Centre at Salford Quays, and which brings together our university and Goldsmiths, MIT, the Universities of Lancaster, London and Cambridge, the BBC and North West Vision and Media. In the future, it is probable that such networks of engagement will come to define Higher Education. Just as the complex requirements of information technology are driving the evolution of distributed computing and shared services – the digital cloud of the near future – so universities will come to depend on flexible consortia of organizations in order to tackle complex problems more effectively.

In this ever more-engaged world, we have a special set of opportunities for working with public and third sector organizations in our city. Salford has a particularly rich array of community organizations dedicated to improving the quality of life and a raw energy for initiative. Many of these projects are now connecting with the university through the Beacons for Higher Education project. We are strengthening our relationship with the Salford City Council and we have a special relationship with the Salford Primary Care Trust. Many of these connections have been in place for some years, and are the means by which staff and students combine study and work at the university with civic engagement.

We have, though, not been very good at mapping and describing the ways in which we work in community and, as a result, we have missed opportunities for making this a distinct and defining signature of who we are. We need stronger organizing concepts to guide our mutual partnerships with local public and third sector organizations. One of these – and a valuable exemplar for other fields – is

health and wellbeing. Our partnership with the Salford PCT provides us with placements for our students, and provides the PCT with key research opportunities. Based on mutual respect and commitment, our joint work in health and well-being will go from strength to strength.

A second organizing concept must be sustainability. As with other organizations, we are working hard to reduce our carbon emissions and improve the quality of our campus environment. But our Sustainability Plan must be far more comprehensive than this, and must conceptualize the university in the context of its community and the interests of our local neighbourhoods. We must work with organizations and projects such as the Friends of Kersal Dale, the Seedley and Langworthy Trust and East Salford in Bloom to meet common objectives. The challenge of sustainability demonstrates graphically the interconnectedness of the local and global; at more than three degrees of global warming Lower Kersal will be flooded by the Irwell and Botswana will be blanketed by the Kalahari sands. Universities, as hubs in networks of knowledge, expertise and education, have a central role in tackling complex problems such as these.

One particular difficulty in this ever more complex digital world is conceptualization; we have so much information, across so many dimensions, that it is difficult to see how it all fits together, and what the priorities should be. This is a particular challenge to democratic governance. In a society that should value deeply elected representation and accountability at the ballot box, how do we evaluate the complex and often mutually incompatible advice of experts and interest groups? From the university's point of view, how do we honour and advance the long tradition of contributing to public intellectual life?

To facilitate open accessibility to the key issues that will shape the future of Salford and its communities, we are building a virtual model of our city. This will be located in the Think Lab, a marvelous facility high above us in the Maxwell Building. Through three-dimensional projections on wall-sized screens, participants will be able to look at the city from a distance and swoop in to neighbourhoods, streets and individual buildings. Through our partnership with Salford City Council, Salford NHS and the Central Salford Urban Regeneration Company, we will be able map complex data sets onto the topography of the city. We will be able to look at patterns of health by neighbourhood, at the distribution of children and older people, at quality indicators for schooling, traffic flow, car accidents, crime statistics and public transport networks. Our Digital Salford will help us realize the deep value of engagement and the role of the university in the public life of our city.

Our ability to contribute meaningfully to the quality of life – to build on our longstanding tradition of being a university for Salford – rests on research expertise.

Salford has always been a research university and will continue to be research-led in both teaching and engagement. We must now expand and strengthen research and innovation within the framework of our chosen themes, which will guide us in investing in both people and resources over the coming years. The approach to funding research in British universities is under continual review, creating swamps of confusion and speculation. Coming from outside the system, research funding here seems like the Quidditch World Cup at Hogwarts, where the stakes are high, the gamesmanship vicious and the rules unknown to everyone. This said, I believe that the decision that this university made to include a wide range of researchers in the Research Assessment Exercise was correct, even though it may have cost us in QR funding. We now have a broader spectrum of active researchers to work with in preparing for the Research Excellence Framework.

The future of innovation in research lies in interdisciplinarity. Strong methodological and theoretical foundations in disciplines such as Mathematics and Physics, Art and History, Law, Engineering and Music were key to the curriculum of the Salford Royal Technical Institute of 1896, and are key today. But “discipline” has other meanings and implications: to restrict, to regulate and to punish transgressions. If we make the mistake of regulating enquiry – of insisting that Philosophy is owned by Philosophers and that only Economists can explore Economics – then we will take a path of inevitable mediocrity.

The power of interdisciplinarity is beautifully demonstrated in Amartya Sen’s *The Idea of Justice*, published earlier this year. Sen brings together the force of Philosophy and Economics in an approach to social justice and human rights that has particular significance to our work in research-led engagement. Apart, the two disciplines are important but incomplete. By considering them together, Sen gives us a step-wise increase in our understanding of the world.

Thinking beyond the confinement of the disciplines is essential to the future of research because the frontier problems of the coming years are too complex to be solved by single theoretical and methodological sets. As another great contemporary thinker, Bruno Latour, has shown, the “Enlightenment settlement” that has served Science so well for more than three hundred years is under strain. Big problems, such as putting in place effective international arrangements to arrest climate change, to stabilize the global financial system or to eradicate absolute poverty, require cooperative alliances – networks, again – across many fields of study.

Moving forward in these three broad areas of teaching and learning, engagement and research and innovation will depend on a common sense of purpose and commitment that unites professional, administrative, service and academic staff. Such unity of purpose is famously difficult to achieve in any university. Academics owe their primary allegiance to their field of study, and may be happiest at international conferences, sharing anecdotes on the stupidity of all

university administrations. And we particularly value academic freedom and freedom of expression within a framework of respect and tolerance for the views of others. This may often mean that the purposes of a university are contested and common direction is difficult, or impossible, to achieve.

A sense of purpose depends on, and nurtures, institutional culture, that set of policies, practices and behaviours that shapes the life of the campus and animates its daily life. As a newcomer, I've greatly valued the combination of self-deprecating warmth, humour and enthusiasm that is a characteristic of the north-west. But we must also take note of the work carried out by Professor Gus John in 2005, and also of the results of the more recent Staff Experience Survey. Bullying and harassment, and unfair discrimination in terms of gender, race and sexual preferences undermine the privileges of academic freedom and freedom of expression. I rather like the slogan adopted by the University of Michigan a few years ago: "Respect. Give It. Get It". This approach serves well for our university as we continue to work for a fairer place to work and study.

I take it as a personal challenge that a large minority of respondents to the Staff Experience Survey believe that the university's leadership will not take any effective action. In particular, Deans, Heads of School and Directors of professional, administrative and service departments must work closely with Trade Union representatives to understand the forms that legitimate complaints of bullying, harassment and unfair discrimination take, and the interventions that are appropriate and effective. I like the way that Chris Sheehy, President of the university's UCU branch, put it when she talked of "clear blue water" between management and the unions, allowing issues to be dealt with constructively and in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

We need also to address both the requirements and objectives of current equality and diversity legislation, and the measures anticipated in the Equalities Bill currently before Parliament. It is notable that the Equalities Bill introduces the effect of social class on equality of opportunity. Given that pronounced inequality is inscribed across the landscape of Greater Manchester, and that our university is bordered by communities who have the highest indices of multiple deprivation in the country, the recognition of the ways in which forms of discrimination intersect is particularly important for us, and for our programme of engagement

In order to guide these interventions, I will be putting an Equality Initiative to our Equality and Diversity Forum for discussion and debate, with a mind to this being adopted as university-wide policy. This proposal will include a restructured and enhanced independent mediation service, the re-launch of the Harassment and Bullying Advisors' Network, a leadership programme on equality and diversity issues for all top and senior managers, training opportunities for managers at all levels, and the timely completion of Equality Impact Assessments of our policies and related practices. Together with the Trade Unions, we will monitor the effects of these interventions carefully.

Our decision to focus on Human Rights and Social Justice – one of our chosen themes - serves both as a direction for teaching and research, but also as a means of framing all that we do. It is obvious that a successful Equality Initiative will address this theme. But so too will work across all our Schools. And the School of Law is coordinating many of these strands as a conference, to be held next year to mark the tenth anniversary of the introduction of Human Rights legislation in the United Kingdom.

Our focus on Human Rights and Social Justice has guided us in our invitation to Irene Khan to become the fifth Chancellor of our University since our Royal Charter was granted in 1967. Irene's record in advancing human rights and social justice is well known. In accepting the invitation to become Chancellor, she issued a public challenge to students and staff at the university to reject the pernicious racism of the British National Party. Irene recalls that, as a student in Manchester in the 1970s, it was not safe for her to cross the Irwell. That has largely changed, and anyone walking across the Peel Park Campus on a typical term-time day will be struck by the cosmopolitanism of our staff and student community. But the values of diversity and internationalization are still challenged and increasing income inequality – now a distinguishing feature of the British way of life – threatens the ideal of an equitable society.

Finally, reflect a little more on the wisdom of the Sankofa bird, as it looks backwards for guidance appropriate for the present and the future. For Ghana, looking back is to recall the Atlantic slave trade that tied together West Africa, the New World and the merchants of Liverpool and Manchester with bonds of blood, pain and profit. For us, looking back is to recall that, as well as leading the world in innovation and industry, Salford also set a standard of notoriety for child labour, inhumane working conditions, low wages, deleterious public health and environmental degradation. This was the city that Engels knew, that Robert Roberts wrote about in *The Classic Slum*, that Lowry painted and Harold Riley photographed, and which Mike Leigh captured in his iconic early work with the BBC. Looking back is not for the sake of nostalgia, but is rather to help guide us in our work today, and to make more informed choices for the future.

Thank you all, then, for being with us today and enjoy the rest of the evening, assured that every scrap of food waste from your table will spend two weeks in the composter beneath us, before being scattered, sweet smelling, on the university's lawns and flower beds.