

FIONA McMILLAN

My Lord and Chancellor,

Fiona McMillan was Principal of Bridgwater College for 17 years, retiring in March 2012 after leading the College to many successes and an outstanding reputation for excellence. Fiona has been a strong supporter of BU as a member of the University Board from 2006 to 2011.

Bridgwater College is a large tertiary college in Somerset, where it provides sixth-form education for local 11-16 schools and a full range of vocational programmes to all levels of ability. It has also been a highly valued partner of this University. Fiona was appointed Principal in 1994 and almost immediately had to steer the College through incorporation as an independent public body. Other highlights of achievement included the expansion of the main Campus at Bridgwater, and the merger with Cannington College, and the transformation of the Cannington Land-Based Centre which followed. The College has an enviable record of successful working with business, and especially with EDF on the Hinkley Point power-station development, the largest-ever industrial project in the South West region. But students were always Fiona's top priority, and most of Bridgwater's national reputation is based on a stream of educational accolades. In 2002 it was one of the first colleges to be designated Outstanding by Ofsted, and it has maintained that high distinction ever since. Bridgwater has been declared a Beacon College 11 times, and even a Beacon of Beacons. It has also won a Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education.

Fiona's personal role in leading Bridgwater to these heights of achievement, which have been equalled by few other further education colleges, was acknowledged in 2003 by her appointment to the Order of the British Empire for services to further education. Her distinctive management style is based, in her own words, on 'creating a place where people can make a difference and enjoy doing it'. In this she succeeded spectacularly, creating a strong sense of community and a distinctive culture - 'the Bridgwater way', which attracted 'Bridgwater people' who shared her commitment to students and their very diverse needs.

All these high achievements in leadership were founded on Fiona's strong and varied experience in teaching and educational management. She started as an English teacher in London and Dorset schools, but increasingly felt that post-16 education was for her, so she taught at Dorchester Prison, and in FE colleges at Weymouth and Bournemouth and Poole. Then came a series of increasingly senior posts in South Wales and Bristol, so that Fiona moved to Bridgwater in 1992 with experience of the further education sector in all its diversity.

Unsurprisingly, given her immense experience and impact, Fiona has become a leading national figure in the education world. During her last year as Principal she was a strong and influential President of the Association of Colleges, engaging with government and the media to promote the further education sector's often-overlooked achievements and argue for the

resources which it needs. She is a passionate believer in further education and its ability to make a real and lasting difference to the lives of all kinds of students at many levels up to and including degrees.

Never one to rest on her laurels, since retirement Fiona has taken on new challenges, as a non-executive director of EDF Energy's New Build Generating Company, and a leader of the Bridgwater College Academy project. She is also a member of the government's Commission on Adult Vocational Teaching and Learning. This Commission was set up to raise the profile of education and training, and no-one is better equipped to take on this national role than Fiona.

My Lord and Chancellor, I have the honour to present Fiona McMillan, and I ask you to confer upon her the degree of Doctor of Education, *honoris causa*.