

Principal's address at the 1451 Society lunch – Honouring our past and inspiring the future

Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli, Principal and Vice Chancellor, University of Glasgow

Recently, I had the pleasure of welcoming members of the 1451 Society to the University of Glasgow for our annual lunch. It is always a real pleasure to welcome our supporters back to Gilmorehill - especially those who travelled some distance to be with us.

The 1451 Society began nearly ten years ago, at a lunch in the Senate Room in November 2015. Many of those who joined us then continue to support us now. Others I've had the privilege of meeting more recently, and some I met for the first time at our lunch. Each of you are part of a growing community that now gathers not only in Glasgow, but around the world.

These moments of reunion matter - not only for the sense of community and shared purpose they represent, but the chance for us to express our profound thanks for the extraordinary way our 1451 Society members support the University by pledging a gift in their Wills.

Legacy giving is not a modern phenomenon at Glasgow; our University has, from the beginning, been built on the generosity of those who came before us and Glasgow's rich tradition of philanthropy goes back to the 15th century. As Principal, I see and hear about the impact of philanthropy every day. I often meet students of exceptional ability who would not be here without donor support. I want to thank our 1451 Society members - not only on behalf of those students - but on behalf of the entire University community.

This year, the city of Glasgow celebrates its 850th anniversary. Next year, the University will mark 575 years of excellence. We were founded for the benefit of the city and to serve its people. The Papal Bull on which we were established declared that the University would "open doors" and "support those born in the lowest places." The language may be dated - but the principle holds; being a 'civic' institution is in our DNA.

Five years ago, together with the University of Edinburgh, we launched three IntoUniversity Centres in Govan, Maryhill and Craigmillar. These centres support young people from the age of eight, helping with homework, providing additional lessons and crucially, creating a safe, inspiring space where they can develop confidence and attain their chosen aspirations. Many will be the first in their families to go to university. With continued philanthropic support, we can break cycles of disadvantage and open up opportunities for young people.

We are also fortunate to welcome students from all over the world, and we remain ambitious in offering a world-class learning environment. That ambition is reflected in our continued investment - most recently, in the announcement of the Keystone building, which will enhance our teaching and research capabilities particularly in Engineering.

The transformation of our campus in recent years has been remarkable. The James McCune Smith Learning Hub and the Mazumdar-Shaw Advanced Research Centre are not just buildings. They foster community and collaboration, enabling our students and researchers and staff to thrive.

The Keystone development is our next step. It's not just about space. It's about creating an environment that matches the scale of our ambitions for education and research. And just like the gifts that came before it, this too will be a legacy that lasts generations. Keystone is our most significant development since the creation of the Gilbert Scott Building - and your gifts have helped make this possible.

Philanthropy also powers our research. At Glasgow, 93% of our research is rated 'world-leading' or 'internationally excellent.' That is no small achievement. Your support allows us to pursue solutions to the world's most pressing problems, creating new technologies and policies that will change lives far beyond our campus.

After 16 years in the role, I will step down as Principal later this year. When I became Vice Chancellor in 2009, I often described it as becoming the football manager of your favourite club - the place where you grew up and spent your career. Some might say that adds pressure. For me, it was a source of pride, and a deep sense of the trust placed in me. Throughout, it has been a team effort. I've worked with extraordinary colleagues, and I continue to be amazed by the talent across our teaching, research and student communities.

The University has changed in ways I couldn't have imagined. Fifteen years ago, we were a smaller Russell Group institution, known for strong teaching and a commitment to widening access. Today, we are a world top 100 university, with global partnerships and world-leading research. In a short time, we've become not just a university in the world, but for the world.

Later this year, Professor Andy Schofield will take up the post of Principal. He joins us from Lancaster University and has already seen the impact of philanthropy at Glasgow—especially on our new campus spaces. When asked what advice I would offer him, I say this: retain Glasgow's bold ambition, and continue to adapt to a changing world. We must keep striving for excellence in teaching, research and civic engagement.

In the years ahead, it will be Andy's privilege to host events like this one, supported by the outstanding leadership team here at Glasgow. I will remain a strong supporter of the University and look forward to maintaining my connections here.

To our supporters: thank you for the faith you have placed in us. Thank you for trusting Glasgow with your legacy. Whether your gift funds a scholarship, creates an inspiring space, fuels ground breaking research or enables a young person's dream of university—you are part of something lasting. You are helping to shape the next chapter of a university rooted in history, but focused on the future.