

Succession Ceremony, 18 December 2020

Anders Hagfeldt: Tribute to outgoing Vice-Chancellor Eva Åkesson

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Merely by taking office, Eva Åkesson made history. Not only was she the first to interrupt the male succession, she was also the first from another higher education institution, Lund University. She came fearless, strong and determined, armed with a programme that would set the agenda for her entire tenure as Vice-Chancellor.

In her inaugural speech, she spoke of top-quality research and education, development and innovation, of the University's principal mission being to contribute to a better world. Eva Åkesson spoke about academic freedom and collegial leadership, and she drew attention to some areas for development and certain themes. One theme was making better use of Uppsala University's excellent potential for cross-cutting initiatives on complex societal challenges. She also declared the three guiding principles that would be followed:

- continuous quality enhancement,
- constant endeavours to develop our internationalisation,
- and a humble awareness that our students are our future.

The first guiding principle, then, was to make education, research, collaboration and innovation of the highest quality the goal towards

which to strive. Quality and renewal remained important keywords and strategic development would continue to be based on evaluations.

Secondly, internationalisation was to be a strategy for achieving higher quality in research and education. One important point in her inaugural speech was that internationalisation must always be an integral part of all operations at a world-leading university. Uppsala University was to play an active role in the global community and promote development by building long-term relations.

The third guiding principle concerned the students. They were to be regarded as future leaders who would act in an increasingly globalised and changeable world. To equip them for their future roles, the University had to constantly review and develop its teaching methods and subject contents. Eva Åkesson wanted to see the students as partners in quality assurance and enhancement, and encouraged them to be active and involved in students' unions, nations and associations. Strong student influence would contribute to a strong university.

Another point mentioned alongside these three principles was the importance of Uppsala University being an attractive place to work, with clear and transparent career paths. Finally, the concept of widening participation underlined that Uppsala should be an open and welcoming university for students and staff, women and men alike, regardless of origin, background or orientation.

The guidelines laid down in this first speech have largely endured over the years. Based on the programme declared in this speech, the university management hammered out its common strategic agenda, summarised in the *Mission, Goals and Strategies* document.

Eva, the University you are leaving is not the one you came to. There are many reasons why so much has been achieved. One major reason is your energy, the way you get involved in issues and take them forward. The way in which you have improved procedures, demanded good decision-making data and clear working methods. In all you have done, you have put the University first. Deputy Vice-Chancellor Anders Malmberg and you have shared responsibilities throughout your term of office in a successful joint leadership. You have enjoyed working with students, and welcoming all the new students each semester has been one of the highlights for you.

You have been an outgoing and visible Vice-Chancellor who has tackled issues energetically. Social media have been part of your everyday life, but you are not interested in the limelight as such and you dislike symbolic actions. Everything should be for real, for the best of the University and the students.

Your global focus has led to an increased involvement in international networks. You have chaired several of these networks and given the University a more prominent role in Europe and beyond. The latest success story is ENLIGHT, in which Uppsala University is collaborating with eight other European universities on the theme of sustainable cities and communities.

Your portrait shows you holding a sprig of ivy. The Gotlandic word for ivy is *Rindi*, which is also the name of the students' union at Campus Gotland. One important event during your Vice-Chancellorship was the merger with the former Gotland University College, an exemplary merger. Many are now eyeing this success with interest.

Gotland was where you created a new tradition by riding through the city to the freshers' reception. This is a tradition I do not feel entirely at ease with. We shall have to see if I keep it up.

You have run the falls on 30 April and reportedly stage-dived during the mingle at Almedalen. Behind all the seriousness and hard work there is a playfulness which many have witnessed.

It will not be easy to follow your example, but on some points the University can feel easy. There will not be any great change academically – after all, chemical physics and physical chemistry are not so far apart. The name should also be reassuring. I will be the third Anders in the series, after your predecessor Hallberg and Deputy Vice-Chancellor Malmberg.

I would like to thank you for the handover and all the good discussions we have had. You have shared your wealth of experience, seriously, but often with a twinkle in your eye. I feel as well prepared as I can be for this great and demanding task. You really have done everything you could to give me an understanding of what it involves.

Now I would like to wish you all the very best and to thank you on behalf of the entire University. In the course of my conversations with you, I have gained a deeper realisation that leading a university is an exercise in responsiveness, impact assessment, humility and courage.

I already foresee that I will sometimes recognise myself in the words of the philosopher Winnie the Pooh:

“The more he thought, the more he felt that there *is* no real answer.”

May I ask you now to step forward and, as a token of Uppsala University's gratitude, receive from me the 1924 Gustaf Adolf Medal, in accordance with the University Board decision of 30 September. You will also receive a Festschrift dedicated to you and reflecting your time as Vice-Chancellor.