

The Anslow Years Continued (2000-2010)

So, we were now in a new decade and the Further Education Funding Council became the Learning and Skills Council. Did we notice the difference at the sharp end? Yes and no. The new quango meant new, high profile staff with their own new agenda and new structures, all of which we needed to understand to work with effectively. There were national conferences, lots of literature, edicts and consultations. The biggest danger was distraction and taking our eyes off the ball.

Not at KGV, our focus remained well and truly the highest quality education and experience for the students. We had a long tradition of excellence from King George V School and the first years of the Sixth Form College to uphold, maintain and develop. I never forgot our legacy and that I would need to report at least once annually to Old Georgians at their traditional dinner every Maundy Thursday.

The Old Georgians remained so supportive of the modern college. They were always really interested in the college. They raised money and offered outstanding advice and support. The Education Foundation was a large sum of money raised from the sale of Longrigg. The money had been shrewdly invested. The trustees were chaired by Sir Christopher Hewetson. He wisely oversaw the income from the investment and I was able each year to request money to support students who would not otherwise have been able financially to engage in certain educational visits. We were so grateful for his time, commitment, guidance and wisdom.

In addition, a significant number of Old Georgians continued to give time and valuable expertise as members of the governing body. Very ably led by John Rostrom (MBE), as chairman, they played a vital role in the running of the college, asking relevant questions, challenging assumptions, determining strategy, assessing quality of outcomes and appraising me as principal.

Our reputation remained gold standard nationally and more students from an increasingly wide geographic area applied to join us. We were enrolling more than 1,700 students. Some were restarting their level 2 GCSE courses, some engaging at once with level 3 Advanced level or BTEC National.

I distinctly remember Alan Johnson Secretary of State for Education sitting in my office and asking me what made KGV such a good college. I told him that there was no secret, that we treated every student as an individual. We started by agreeing with them what they needed from us in order to achieve success. We had the highest academic standards combined with a strong pastoral system and a special needs department noted by inspectors as outstanding.

When we learned that one of our students was not being paid income support and was sleeping under a bridge, Ronnie Fearn immediately took up her case with the local authority to resolve the matter and she received several weeks back pay.

When one of our autistic students ended up in a prison cell overnight and in court in the morning, Polly Collier was there in court explaining the context of autism and how the misunderstanding had transpired. Court staff and the police were appreciative and the student was released without a record.

One day, Martin Hovden from the Champion newspaper requested an interview. He asked me, "Hilary, what do the students think of the college?" I said, "Why are you asking me? Come with me now. I led him from my office to the link building where lots of students congregated at break time. "Now ask them" I said. "Aren't you staying?" he asked. "No, you don't need me, just ask one of them to bring you back to my office when you have finished."

He was amazed and, needless to say, he got very honest and positive comments from the students.

What am I most proud of? The outcomes we achieved with the students.

However, I am under no illusions. We had an outstanding board of governors and outstanding members of staff.

It wasn't me who delivered fantastic results in Classical Civilization, in History, in Geography, in BTEC Business Studies, in Geology, in Chemistry, in Physics, in Archaeology, in Music, in Mathematics, in Health and Social Care.....etc.,etc.

It wasn't me who led the outstanding Learning Support department, or who led Schools Liaison, or who led and managed the Finance department, the General Office, Reprographics...etc.,etc.

I had the absolute privilege of being the conductor of a truly outstanding orchestra. One in which every section played its part in the symphony. Wasn't I fortunate? I did this for eighteen years! I loved every minute....well almost every minute.

What still haunts me? The debacle of the planned new building!

I cannot bear to dwell on it for long. Having successfully built the Millennium Centre we were encouraged to plan a complete new build which would be funded through the Learning and Skills Council. We worked so hard on this project and I planned my retirement with a view to the new college principal having a brand new office.

In a nutshell, despite delays caused both by disputes with the Local Authority related to car parking and the slow moving LSC tanker, the speedboat KGV was “shovel ready” to begin building work in February 2010. All plans, timing and finances had been approved at national level. Then they pulled the plug in January 2010. They had run out of the money they had promised us and encouraged us to plan for. It does still haunt me. How could they get it so wrong? They just walked away, no one lost their job for incompetence. Clearly they didn’t have any Old Georgians on their governing body!

However, looking back over the Anslow years, I remain very proud of our achievements. Without question, thanks to a remarkably talented and committed group of people, we upheld and truly enhanced the legacy I had inherited. You cannot be a successful conductor without a great orchestra and I had a truly great orchestra.

I spoke to all the candidates whom the governors had shortlisted for the new principal post. I didn’t talk about an orchestra; I thought that they might think me a little odd!

I did tell them how lucky they were to be going for this position and that if they got the job, they would have every support from very talented staff, an outstanding board of governors and a very special group of people known as the Old Georgians.