

Salutatory Address

**Professor Sir Colin Blakemore, President, World Cultural Council
Riga Technical University 154th Anniversary
Friday 14th October in Ziedonis Hall, National Library of Latvia**

Excellencies, Distinguished Rector and Prize Winners, ladies and gentlemen. May I say on behalf of all my colleagues from the World Cultural Council how grateful we are for your generous reception and for hosting this Award Ceremony this evening. Thank you for letting us share your celebration for your 154th Anniversary of this university.

It's a great pleasure to visit Latvia for me for this time. Of course we all know that these days there are risks in travel, particularly risks of unusual infectious disorders, and I'm afraid that there is such an infectious disorder here in Riga. It hasn't got any name, but the principal symptom is one of intense enthusiasm. And I have certainly caught this disease, and I sense it in everyone attending the ceremony.

This university has made great strides, particularly in the last few years. Yes, it was the first technical university, as we heard from the rector, in the Baltic States. But it's making, very rapidly making a deeper and deeper impression as a very distinguished university, entering the top 500 universities in the world this year for the first time. This is an achievement, I suspect, to a large extent, because of the leadership of the university, especially the rector's leadership in the last 6 years. And we are delighted that he has agreed to join the World Cultural Council for the jury. I want, on behalf of the World Cultural Council, to present him with the diploma to recognise his joining our jury.

Deciding on the location of the Award Ceremony for this World Cultural Council Awards is sometimes complex and nearly always a long process. And selecting and accepting the invitation from this university began more than a year ago. Now you all have noticed that this event coincides not just with 154th Anniversary celebrations but also the opening last night of the Design Factory. You all also have noticed that the founder of the Design Factory concept, Professor Ekman, is one of our award winners. Your mind might begin to speculate about associations and wonder whether the university is having disproportionate influence in the choice of the World Cultural Council's candidates, but that's not the case.

It is true, though, that during the discussions about the timing of this event, the decision was made, the selection was made of Professor Ekman for the education award. And the university very generously and very

appropriately decided to open the Design Factory here on this occasion, so we're having a multiple celebration. We had a wonderful talk by Professor Ekman last night conveying his own enthusiasm, but also very evidently that of his students for the Design Factory concept, and wonderful party last night where everyone has caught the Riga virus because they're all full of enthusiasm.

We heard again this afternoon the extraordinary lecture about difficult, obscure and ponderable features of the early universe from Professor Witten, and we are very proud that he has won the science award from the World Cultural Council this year. These two prize winners, I think, represent ideally the objectives and the aims and the aspirations of the World Cultural Council to recognise and to reward the greatest achievements in the areas of Science, Education and the Arts.

The World Cultural Council is an organisation devoted really to supporting and honouring the greatest of the achievements of human culture, and also to recognising the importance of those who study with the leaders of those fields and those who support those fields. So it is a great opportunity for us to celebrate with you, recognising this university as being such an excellent representative of all of the aspirations of the World Cultural Council. The Awards have previously been being given in a sequence of equally distinguished universities, Aarhus in Denmark, the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, my own university, Oxford, in Princeton, and so on. And the Riga Technical University joins that distinguished group. And now I can say that very recently the decisions have been made about next year's award, and I'm proud to announce that the World Cultural Council Awards for 2017 will be made of the 8th of November in Leiden University. Thank you.