
HONORARY DEGREE

Brian Percival O'Connell
DEd (honoris causa)

Brian O'Connell qualified as a teacher in 1969 and graduated from Columbia with an MA in 1984 and an MEd in 1985. He returned to South Africa to lecture at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), from where he served at the Athlone College in Paarl, the Peninsula Technikon, and headed the Western Cape Provincial Education Department. In 2001 he returned as Vice-Chancellor of UWC, a position he held until his retirement in 2014.

Professor O'Connell's broad and extensive experience in education enabled him to steer UWC into a position of strength during a tumultuous time in its history. In 2001 the University faced serious financial challenges and the possibility of a merger. His vision was encapsulated in his belief in the pivotal role UWC could play as a "beacon of light and source of hope and confidence". He attracted to it young intellectual leaders and engendered a commitment to excellence at every level in the institution. When he retired in 2014 the University of the Western Cape had established itself as a leading research university. A defining feature of UWC under his leadership was that it was a place of '*becoming*' where transformation of the self, and thereby the transformation of society, was possible. His leadership enabled individuals and the institution to face their history and through learning and dignity, transcend the identities cast for them by apartheid.

In 2017 he was awarded the NRF Lifetime Achievement Award. This accolade is "awarded to individuals considered to have made extraordinary contributions, of international standard and impact, to the development of science in and for South Africa over an extended period of time. An additional consideration is the manner in which their work has touched and shaped the lives and views of many South Africans."

Brian O'Connell has lived a life committed to improving the lives of the oppressed and disadvantaged peoples of South Africa. He has made a direct, practical impact on the lives of countless people. He has been a model public servant, a visionary leader in education generally but particularly as a Vice-Chancellor at the University of the Western Cape.