

CONVOCATION MARCH 2019

Presentation speech for Sir Eric Anderson for the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters of the University *honoris causa*

Chancellor:

Winston Churchill once said, 'Headmasters have powers at their disposal with which Prime Ministers have never yet been invested.' Sir Eric Anderson is clearly a very powerful man indeed having served as headmaster of Abingdon School, Shrewsbury School and Eton College. But his influence has been even greater than that because he has helped to form the minds of at least three of the most important figures in modern Britain.

At Gordonstoun he taught Prince Charles, at Fettes he was Tony Blair's housemaster and was Head Master of Eton when David Cameron was there. He has thus been involved in the education of the heir to the throne and the leaders of the two biggest political parties. Blair was particularly impressed by Anderson and subsequently named him in an advertising campaign run by the Teacher Training Agency entitled 'No one forgets a good teacher.'

Our Honorand has held a host of major positions including Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford, Provost of Eton, Chairman of the Heritage Lottery Fund, a trustee of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, the Wordsworth Trust and the Abbotsford Trust. He is Visitor at Harris Manchester College, Oxford and a trustee of the Royal Collection Trust. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and in November 2002 he was appointed a Knight of the Order of the Thistle. Somehow or other, he also manages to be a distinguished scholar, especially on the life and works of Sir Walter Scott.

But Chancellor, it is perhaps Sir Eric's views on education that are especially relevant to us at the University of Buckingham. He clearly enjoyed his time at George Watson's College in Edinburgh and quotes with approval the words of an English teacher who said that his job was to 'show people how to read books they wouldn't read for themselves.' He feels – as we do – that schools must never abandon their duty to lift people's eyes to higher things by pretending that Mozart and Michael Jackson are of equal quality, or that Keats is no better a poet than Paul McCartney.

Sir Eric has spent much of his career in the independent sector of education and that means that he has much in common with this university. He sees, however, that the sector faces serious challenges and has warned that it faces becoming the preserve of 'the sons of hedge-fund managers, sheikhs and Russian footballers'. He notes that Independent schools have become very expensive and that 'there are far fewer trades and professions that could think quite happily of educating their children in boarding schools compared with 20 years ago.' To this end he is a staunch advocate of the generous provision of scholarships and bursaries. We at Buckingham try to do the same but our Honorand is a man from whom we have much to learn. Chancellor, I call upon you to confer upon Sir Eric Anderson the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*.