

**John Mathers** Hon LLD

**Oration by Sir George Cox  
Pro-Chancellor and Chair of Council**

Mr Chancellor,

When the University considers the award of Honorary Degrees, it seeks individuals who are not only pre-eminent in their field - whether that be science, medicine, the arts or the many facets of public life - but who also reflect values that are important to us at Warwick: individuals who have pushed the boundaries and moved their field forward, and whose work has benefitted society more widely.

Today, we seek to honour just such an individual: someone who has played an outstanding role in promoting the understanding and effective use of good design - the Chief Executive of the Design Council, John Mathers.

We often think of design very much in terms of visual appeal, but of course, it goes far beyond that.

Design can be defined as the process which links creativity with purpose.

It takes new ideas, new discoveries, new thinking, new developments and puts them to beneficial use. It can open up new opportunities or it can offer solutions to long-standing problems. Design embraces everything from fashion, to aero-engines, to kitchen appliances, to video-games, to web-sites, to the layout of a university campus.

The appliance of good design lies at the heart of economic success - whether for a company or for a nation. It is also central to quality of life.

John Mathers is one of Britain's leading figures in the design industry.

He is currently the Chief Executive of the Design Council, an independent body established in 1944 to champion excellence in design and help re-build and re-invigorate a war-weary nation. It helps foster innovation in business and public services, and gives people the advice, practical tools and knowledge to achieve changes in companies, government and local communities.

Nowadays, it is very much focused on big issues. Bringing together designers with professionals from other disciplines, the Design Council tackles major concerns like health, ageing and community cohesion.

John Mather's appointment at the Design Council followed a long and distinguished career as a design professional. As Chief Executive of the Holmes & Marchant Group, with its offices in London, New York, Singapore & Shanghai, he became a leading international figure in his field.

However, throughout his various roles, John has always demonstrated a broader commitment to the identification and nurturing of new talent.

He served as President of the Design Business Association for three years, and currently acts as the spokesperson for its 20:20 Mentoring Scheme: a programme, set up with the support of Arts Council, which pairs rising industry leaders with established design pioneers. The programme has been vital in maintaining a healthy talent pool in one of Britain's key industries.

As Chief Executive of the Design Council, John Mathers has also been influential in developing government policy relating to the promotion of design.

He is a member of the All-party Parliamentary Group on Design and Innovation, and he has been instrumental in creating productive links with emerging economies such as India as part of a wider Government strategy.

Of particular relevance to the University, John Mathers has played a significant role in the development of the Warwick Commission, which over the past year has looked at the University's impact on the local cultural environment.

He has brought an industry perspective to the Commission's work, allowing the project to move well beyond what might so easily have been an inward-looking discussion of the future of the arts.

Using his extensive connections within the industry, he helped the Commission to bring together high-level professionals to consider how the contribution of the cultural sector might be better understood and how it might be deployed more effectively.

I think this will form an important part of the Commission's legacy.

All-in-all, John Mathers has played - and continues to play - a significant role in developing the UK's design capability, ensuring its potential benefits are recognised and bringing those benefits to society at large.

Mr Chancellor, on behalf of Senate, I present to you John Mathers for admission to the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.