

## Graduation 2013 Honorary Graduate – Oration

Oration for Honorary Graduand Paul Lewis  
Orator: Professor Michael Sherer

### **Chancellor, the Senate has resolved that the degree of Doctor of the University be conferred upon Paul Lewis.**

Paul Lewis is an investigative freelance journalist, public speaker and broadcaster, specialising in personal finance, business, consumer rights, and related matters. It is therefore most appropriate that we should be honouring Paul at one of the graduation ceremonies for Essex Business School which itself has a strong commitment to ethical and socially responsible business.

As the presenter for BBC Radio 4's Money Box since 2000 he is a champion of consumer interest's especially concerning finance, savings and investments, and has campaigned for greater transparency by the banks, airlines and utility companies (I will return to these three targets late in my oration!). He writes extensively on money and is a regular guest on BBC Breakfast, News 24 and many other news programmes.

He has authored six books on money matters and received numerous awards for his investigative journalism. He writes about money news and advice every month in Saga Magazine and a weekly column on its website and has contributed frequently to The Daily Telegraph and Reader's Digest. He is also an expert on the Victorian writer Wilkie Collins and one of the editors of the first complete edition of his letters, published in 2005 (again I will return to this later).

Paul Lewis has been a freelance financial journalist since 1987. He was a reporter on Money Box in the 1990s and, after a three year stint on Radio 5 Live, returned to as presenter in September 2000. As many of you will know Moneybox is broadcast at noon every Saturday and repeated on Sundays at 9pm.

He also presents the phone-in Money Box Live on BBC Radio 4 on Wednesday afternoons, doing alternate monthly stints with his colleague Vincent Duggleby. Roughly speaking Paul does the even months and Vincent does the odd months – although Paul does July and (like the University) no-one does August. Paul says "Money Box is there to make a difference to the finances of its listeners. It is rightly regarded as a trusted source of financial information and news. It is a marvellous show to work on. And a wonderful team of people to work with."

He also makes appearances on You and Yours, Women's Hour, Today, the World at One, PM, and BBC breakfast.

Each month he writes a regular double page Money Works feature on a personal finance issue for Saga magazine. Usually the feature focuses on a financial matter which readers can use to make, save, recover, or keep money. He has written for Saga, which has more than two million readers since it was founded in 1984 and several of his pieces and campaigns have won prizes. Before the General Election in 2010 Paul hosted three webcasts putting questions from Saga readers to Gordon Brown, David Cameron, and Nick Clegg.

He has won more than a dozen journalistic awards including Headline Money Broadcast Journalist of the Year in 2004, 2005, 2010, Consumer Pension and Investment Journalist of the Year in 2006, and Association of Investment Companies Broadcaster of the Year in 2012.

Here are some examples of recent causes he has espoused.

Banks which fail to cancel regular payments against credit cards or pay day lenders even though the customer has written in. This has now been taken up by the new Financial Conduct Authority which has confirmed that banks are breaking the law if they don't cancel these regular payments. Now the FCA has said that if a bank fails to abide by the law they will be required to give compensation.

Utility companies are another example (along with banks) of what Paul has coined as purveyors of "complexification", when it is made very difficult for customers to know whether they should stay with their current provider or move to another one. Paul suggests that the problem really stems from utility companies (perhaps alongside mobile phone companies) having too many different tariffs so that it is not easy to make comparisons between companies. One of Paul's radical suggestions is that the utility companies should only have one tariff which would make comparisons much more straightforward.

A third example concerns the budget airline industry, and specifically the one which last week announced that it was reducing the size of cabin luggage that can be taken on board a plane. Not only does it raise the possibility that this will be another way airlines can increase their income but there is much ambiguity about what will be the permitted size of the bag you can take on board the aircraft, perhaps with different airlines having different requirements.

Finally, Paul has also campaigned to reduce some of the anomalies and unfairness of the so-called "bedroom tax" and it is largely through his efforts that the government has widened the scope of the exclusions to include ex-servicemen and carers.

I cannot do better than end this oration with some quotations about Paul Lewis:

"he has the ...ability to politely nail industry bosses to the studio wall" Headline Money Awards 2004

"I agree that Paul Lewis is an estimable journalist who does indeed know how to do an interview and get a story, as he did on this occasion." Pensions Minister Mike

O'Brien "champion of the underdog...a fearsome campaigner...a long-haired terrier biting the ankles of the financial establishment" Nigel Blundell *Saga Magazine* September

2000"brilliant---a fantastic combination of proper journalistic nous and an ability to back up everything."

Headlinemoney Journalist of the Year 2010

"...a consummate and hard-hitting professional...pressing [interviewees] firmly but politely when they're trying to wriggle out of questions "Headline Money Awards 2005

"a fearless and unnerving interviewer...his journalistic record includes dogged pursuit of justice on behalf of readers and listeners."Maria Scott *The Observer* 17 September 2000

**Chancellor, I present to you Paul Lewis.**