Oration for Mr Nigel Roberts

Nigel Roberts has played an important part in all our lives. He is a computer scientist who has made a valuable contribution to the development of the Internet over three decades.

Every day we rely on the Internet and through his involvement over 25 years with the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers – more commonly known as ICANN – Nigel has played a key role in keeping the Internet stable and secure.

Nigel has been involved with ICANN right from its formation back in the late 1990s through to serving as an elected member of its board from 2018 to 2021. Nigel received 67% of the global vote when he was elected – a pretty strong endorsement.

The importance of ICANN cannot be overstated within the Internet ecosystem.

To reach another person on the Internet you have to type an address into your computer - a name or a number. That address has to be unique so computers know where to find each other. ICANN coordinates these unique identifiers across the world. Without that coordination we wouldn't have one global Internet and enjoy all the connectivity this provides. Imagine that – the world without the Internet!

I really can't stress enough how big a deal it is to have an Essex graduate so closely involved in such a prestigious organisation; this is the body that has overall worldwide responsibility for the allocation of domain names to Internet sites. So, every time you type a web address – remember that Nigel may have had something to do with it.

Nigel graduated from Essex in 1980 with a degree in computer science. As a student he was Chair of the Computer Society and got involved in the development of the Multi-User Dungeon, known as MUD, which was being developed by students at Essex. This was one of the first multi-user virtual worlds and connected users from around the world – which was incredibly exciting and novel back in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Nigel provided advice about how MUD could be extended and

improved to its creators, Roy Trubshaw and Richard Bartle (now a professor in the School of Computer Science and Electronic Engineering). MUD would pave the way for today's huge $30bn-a-year role-playing computer gaming industry and is still referenced as a major moment in the history of computer gaming.

As you can tell the University of Essex was an early pioneer of what was to become the Internet – that is what made MUD possible - so it was the perfect place for Nigel to develop the expertise and skills which proved so valuable in his career and his work with ICANN.

His time at Essex wasn't just about computing thought, it also developed Nigel's other interests.

While at Essex, Nigel joined University Radio Essex where he presented a weekly music programme on the station. He later joined the Radio Society of Great Britain, serving on its board from 1991 to 1997. He still loves radio and presents radio programmes on Quay FM (a local channel for Alderney).

He also developed his political interests while at Essex – getting involved in student political societies - and although he stood unsuccessfully as a Liberal Democrat candidate in 1997, he went on to be successfully elected to the States of Alderney in 2003, the legislature for the island.

We encourage our students to go out and make a difference in the world and we pride ourselves on being a truly global university. Nigel's lifetime of service to unlocking the potential of the Internet and protecting its integrity for the benefit of the whole world is I hope an inspiration to all our graduating students here today.

Pro-Chancellor, I present to you Nigel Roberts.