

Oration for Mr Philip Long OBE

Essex alumnus Philip Long is Chief Executive of the National Trust for Scotland and was founding Director of the ground-breaking V&A Dundee.

Born in Edinburgh, he has proudly supported and promoted museums, arts and culture across Scotland since graduating from Essex in 1989 with a Masters degree in Gallery Studies and we are enormously proud of everything he's achieved.

Philip was originally going to study architecture, but became interested in museums and galleries. Indeed, throughout his career, Philip has held a strong belief that museums and galleries have a positive impact on people's lives, and he believes passionately that creativity should play an important part in anyone's life.

So, after his MA he returned to Scotland where he worked for the Glasgow Fine Art Society, which he credits with giving him a 'hands on' education in Scottish art history. He then got a job as a junior curator at the National Galleries of Scotland where he worked his way up to Senior Curator, developing his academic specialism for historic and contemporary Scottish and wider British art and design. His work at the National Galleries included the curation of Scotland's presentation at the Venice Biennale in 2007 and responsibility for the UK presentation at the Milan Design Triennale in 2016.

His decision to head-up the project to build Dundee's V&A was based partly on chance, but also partly on his belief that cultural organisations should play a fundamental role in people's lives – to educate, provide fun and entertainment, and to inspire – especially through design.

So, in 2011, Philip became the Founding Director of the V&A Dundee. Completed and opened in September 2018, the V&A Dundee is housed in a striking landmark building which has been the flagship for the city's £1billion redevelopment of its waterfront.

It was the first V&A outside London, delivering an economic impact for Scotland of £75 million in its first 12 months after opening and was described by V&A Director Tristram Hunt as "a cultural milestone for Dundee, and a new opportunity for the UK to show the world how art and design can educate and inspire".

In 2020 the V&A Dundee announced its Founding Director was moving on with Chair of the Board Tim Allan praising Philip's "personal leadership, energy and commitment." But, although a poignant and sad farewell to the man who had made a dream become reality, it was also a moment to be proud because Philip was leaving to become Chief Executive of the National Trust for Scotland.

The conservation charity, and its 300,000 members, champion Scotland's natural, built and cultural heritage, encouraging people to connect with the things and places that make Scotland unique.

At the time of his appointment Trust Chairman Sir Mark Jones described Philip's background in Scottish art and design as "impeccable" and praised his "formidable knowledge of collections and exhibitions."

As a Scot, Philip says he draws much of his energy and inspiration from the surrounding, stunning, landscape, which he says helps to define Scotland's place in the world; and has created, he says, "the undiminished desire of Scots to go out across the world and make a difference."

Here at Essex, we want all of our students to go out into the world and make a difference too. In whatever you decide to do, on the next stage of our lifelong journey.

For Philip, that was using his Essex degree to build a successful and rewarding career, and reaching a very senior level, in the arts world. And on that note, he has kindly offered to revisit and pass on some of his experience and guidance about job roles and opportunities in the arts to current Essex students, which we deeply appreciate.

As an Essex alumnus, whose dedication and commitment to sharing knowledge and broadening access to the arts, we think Philip serves as a true inspiration to all of our School of Philosophy and Art History graduands here today; we are therefore delighted to welcome him back to Essex, and award him this honorary degree.

Pro-Chancellor, I present to you Philip Long.