

Professor Day,

As a world class, civic university, we apply our leading-edge research and education for the benefit of wider society, principally through our contributions to major societal challenges such as delivering economic growth, improving health and wellbeing, developing sustainable energy solutions, and advancing social justice. We partner with colleagues from industry, government, and wider civic society to maximise the impact of our work. These relationships take time to build, and are greatly assisted by those whose knowledge, skills and experience embrace both academia and the wider world. Paul Walker, our former Chair of Council, bridges the gap between these worlds with exceptional skill and mastery.

Paul is currently chair of the RELX Group, a highly successful, global provider of information-based analytics and decision-making tools for business customers, and currently the 7th largest company listed on the London Stock Exchange. He has fulfilled this important role at numerous other major companies, including The Perform Group, Wandisco and Halma. However, he is arguably best known for his twenty-six-year association with The Sage Group plc, which he joined in 1984 as a Company Accountant. It was a brave move to swap a secure job with Arthur Young, (now Ernst & Young, one of the Big Four accounting firms), for a start-up company with four staff, and at the time, Paul's dad wondered whether he was doing the right thing. However, Paul tells me that having struck up an immediate rapport with the founding partner, David Goldman at his interview, he felt it was worth the risk. Whilst there were a few scary moments along the way, Paul's intuition proved sound. Sage prospered and Paul progressed to become its Chief Finance Director, then its Chief Executive Officer; a role he held from 1994-2010. When he left the company in December 2010, he was one of the longest serving CEOs of a FTSE 100 company. And the company which started out with four staff, had by then grown to employ over 13,000, worldwide, and was valued at around £3.3 billion pounds.

He has been described in the press as “tech royalty” yet Paul Walker remains very grounded. His long-time friend and former colleague, Paul Harrison describes him as down to earth, humble, and very approachable. A man who finds it easy to get on with everyone from cabinet ministers to cabbies. He also told me that Paul is a person of great integrity, generous and loyal to his staff, who works on the positive principle that trust is for people to lose, rather than something they have to earn. Born in Sheffield in 1957, Paul is a proud Yorkshireman, who still supports his local team, Sheffield United, as well as his adopted one of Newcastle United. After completing an Economics degree at the University of York, Paul initially planned to join the Leeds office of Arthur Young to undertake accountancy training. However, following an interview with an incredibly charismatic partner based in the Newcastle office, he was persuaded to join this team instead. Thus began his long association with the North-East of England.

Pat Ritchie, CBE, our current Chair of Council, first met Paul over twenty years ago when she was Deputy Chief Executive of the One North East Regional Development Agency. She was working to bring University and business partners together to progress what was then Science Central and is now known as The Helix. Pat believes that Paul's involvement and commitment were critical in brokering the partnerships that were needed to bring the development plans to life, adding that, “he brings confidence and credibility to anything he is involved in and is a great ambassador for both the city and the University. “

Paul was Chair of University Council from 2017-2024. His term of office coincided with some of the most turbulent and challenging events in our history: first Brexit, then Covid, and now the sector-wide financial challenges affecting UK Higher Education. Throughout the pandemic, despite the demands of his own job, he was in touch on an almost daily basis and was never too busy to take a call from the Vice-Chancellor. His extensive experience of chairing corporate boards meant that he took care to create an environment at Council where differing views could be heard. However, when decisions needed to be made, he was skilful at steering them towards consensus.

When I invited Paul to reflect on the skills a successful Chair needed, he told me that, "first and foremost, you need to understand the culture of the organisation and find out what makes the board tick", adding that you must also get on with the CEO and have a strong relationship with the rest of the Exec Board. Senior colleagues have told me how much they valued Paul's calm, thoughtful intelligence, whilst also admiring his ability to take people on a journey and help them find innovative and effective solutions to problems.

As an international businessman, Paul travels extensively. Fortunately, this is something he loves to do. His friend, Jamie Martin told me that Paul has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the British Airways timetable, adding that this proved invaluable when a friends and family ski trip was put at risk by the last-minute cancellation of flights. Thanks to Paul's timely intervention, the holiday plans were rescued, and everyone was rebooked on alternative flights. His talent for travel management is further confirmed by his elder daughter Sophie, who also told me that, "in addition to being the chair of x, y and z, Dad is a travel agent, interior designer, wedding planner, career adviser, dog sitter, but most importantly, the best dad, friend, brother..."

Paul divides his time between Newcastle, London, and LA, where his daughters, Sophie and Livie are based. The girls and their brother, Tom, told me that no matter how busy he was, Paul always found time for the family, whether that was helping them with their homework or booking them tickets for Disney. They are incredibly proud of his achievements, and hugely appreciative of his generous care, advice, and support. I'm told that he loves Livie's dogs, especially Bella, with whom he has a special bond. He is looking forward to Sophie's forthcoming wedding in September, followed by Livie's next year. We are delighted that Tom can join us in person today, and we would like to extend a warm virtual welcome to Sophie and Livie, who are following the ceremony in LA, via the live feed.

Professor Day, in recognition of his dedicated and inspired leadership of Council, for generously deploying his extensive business skills and experience in the service of our University, and for being our advocate and champion in the wider world, it gives me great pleasure to present to you, Paul Walker for the award of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*.

Jill Taylor-Roe

Senior Public Orator

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