



## The inaugural ceremony at the Barbican

*The inauguration of Lord Puttnam as Chancellor of the OU*

MUSIC

### **Vice Chancellor**

David Puttnam, by the authority given in the Royal Statute and Charter, I hereby install you as the Fifth Chancellor of the Open University.

Applause

MUSIC

### **David Puttnam**

I, David Puttnam, declare that I will to the best of my abilities to strive always to promote the objects of the University as defined in Article Three of the Charter and to maintain the Articles and the Statutes of the Charter in spirit and in fact.

### **Vice Chancellor**

Pro Chancellor, Members of Senate, graduates and guests. It is my great pleasure to stand here before you on behalf of the Open University and honour Lord Puttnam of Queensgate, our new Chancellor, an extraordinary man by any measure. A man whose illustrious career has encompassed many roles, not the least of which, film producer, politician and educationalist. A passionate champion of those less fortunate members of our society. Lord Puttnam first came to the nation's attention during his hugely successful thirty year career in film production, a career garlanded in honours including ten Oscars, a staggering twenty five BAFTA's and a BAFTA Fellowship for lifetime achievement. His many award winning classic films include "The Killing Fields", "Midnight Express", "The Mission", "Chariots of Fire", "Local Hero", and "Memphis Belle". And he has been awarded a CBE, a Knighthood and honoured as a Commander of Arts and Letters in France. However, it is his work as a passionate advocate for training and education that made him the pre-eminent choice for Chancellor of the Open University and for which we honour him here today. His own early education experience was by his own description "modest". He went to Minchenden Grammar School in London and left with limited academic qualifications. Later he enrolled in City and Guilds evening classes in London to further his education, an experience that closely measures that of many Open University students. Lord Puttnam became more involved in education and training in the early 1970's and he has devoted much of his time to the service of education since his retirement from film production in 1998 since when he has been the driving force behind a long list of initiatives and organisations. He was a visiting Professor of Film and Television at Bristol University, a Governor of London School of Economics before accepting an invitation to become Chancellor of Sunderland University, a role he has performed with distinction for ten years. When this present government came to power he joined the Secretary of State's Educational Standards Taskforce and was later appointed the inaugural Chair of the General Teaching Council for England. For many years the Chairman of the National Film and Television School, Lord Puttnam also founded Skillset, the organisation responsible for training young people for the film and television industries. His continuing commitment to the field of education has led to his appointment as the UK President of UNICEF and the Founding Chair of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. Currently a Trustee of the think tank the Institute for Public Policy Research, the National Literacy Trust, Futurelab, to name just some, and an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, Lord Puttnam has been an active and vocal member of the Upper House since his appointment in 1997. Just this week he began chairing the joint Parliamentary

Committee scrutinising the draft Climate Change Bill. This is not a man who knows the meaning of the word “retirement”. It is of great significance for the University to have such a champion as Chancellor, a Chancellor who shares the University’s mission of widening educational opportunities for everyone and whose own career is a shining example of achievement from modest beginnings. In 1997 David published his book “The Undeclared War”, about the economic and social development of the film industry on both sides of the Atlantic. He ends that book with a quote, which seems to resonate with his own life and work and not just that connected with the film industry. And I quote: “We can allow the undeclared war to rumble on”, he writes “or we can work together to turn it into something altogether different, a battle to win a better, more fulfilling future for us all”. Indeed, it is for his ongoing efforts generally to win a better more fulfilling future for us all that we honour him here today. Pro-Chancellor, by the authority of the Senate, I present to you for an Honorary Degree of Doctor of the University, the Chancellor of the Open University, Lord Puttnam of Queensgate.

APPLAUSE

### **Lord Puttnam**

Pro-Vice Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Graduans, distinguished guests and friends. It’s my sincerest hope that in the very few minutes available to me I find myself able to convey the really tremendous sense of pride I feel in formally taking up office as the fifth Chancellor of this unique institution. This is not only the university that most closely equates to my own rather bumpy academic journey it’s also the repository of the dreams of hundreds of thousands like me who thought that their chance of higher education had for whatever reason passed them by. As the Vice Chancellor in her generous introductions reminded me, I have occupied myself over time in five quite distinct careers. As my wife Patsy never fails to point out, when you take a top down look at the pattern of my life it begins to look more like the London Underground map. At first sight – all over the place – but with a connective thread that has helped me to make each transition. These connections are almost like a word game, which goes something like this. Publishing: reading, knowledge, understanding. Advertising: choice, knowledge, understanding. Cinema: creative ambition, knowledge, understanding. UNICEF: poverty, knowledge, understanding. And government: policy, knowledge and understanding. That sounds quite interesting but what does it really mean? It means that the underlying reality of publishing is the need for literate, informed and inquisitive readers of all ages. The reality of advertising is exactly the same except for the need to address a rather broader universe of consumers. The reality of any sustainable ambition in our cinema or indeed television industries is seeking out and satisfying audiences who actively wish to be challenged. Everything, and I do mean everything I have learnt through my work for UNICEF and in the various spheres of government, has only reinforced my view that in the words of H G Wells, the future really is a race between education and catastrophe. Personally not finding the idea of catastrophe all that attractive, I have thrown in my lot with education. So for the third time in my life I find myself draped as it were in quite elaborate symbolism. The first occasion was ten years ago when cloaked in baronial ermine, I took my oath as a Member of the House of Lords. Now if that sounds a bit grand it helps to remember that ermine is in reality the winter – the winter coat of the stoat, not one of God’s most illustrious creatures. But my special good fortune on that occasion was to be wearing the robes that had belonged to Lord Olivier. Any student of history or tradition will easily imagine how this particular hand me down greatly added to my personal sense of occasion. The second was my installation a few months later as the First Chancellor of the University of Sunderland, with a gown specifically designed to emphasise that university’s modernity. And today I find myself wearing, with minor alteration, the robes of an earlier Chancellor, that very remarkable historian, Lord Briggs. And maybe that’s why I find myself intensely aware of the added responsibility of ensuring that no matter how many Chancellors far more illustrious than I, inherit this cap and gown, a sense of continuity, pride and respect are built in to as it were the very foundations of the office that they represent. It would take a pretty foolish and sensitive individual not to dig that bit deeper into his soul to justify shouldering Laurence Olivier’s or Asa Briggs’s Robes of Office and with them the reputations of the Institutions that they represent. For my own part I am more than honoured to be at your head, always aware that in terms of day to day reality I am far more of a hat than a head. As it were a ceremonial cap for very special occasions. But you know hats and caps do have their value, especially when an icy wind is swirling about and storms are threatening. In the end we Chancellors, we come

and go, but the dignity and the integrity of the office remains, carrying with it the very best each of us has been able to offer to this increasingly important teaching and learning institution. Over the next I hope many years I will have the pleasure of greeting literally thousands of people of all ages who have succeeding in completing what must be one of the most lonely and courageous journeys that anyone can undertake in many cases it's nothing less than a journey from enveloping darkness into light. Every one of them will have challenged themselves against Henry David Thoreau's precept that what lies before us and what lies beyond us is tiny compared to what lies within us. That's a thought that could easily serve as the OU's mission statement. But today I would like to close, not with those words, but with something rather more appropriate to the rather difficult times we are living through. It's in the form of a short extract from a fairly recent speech by the ex President of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel. Reflecting on his own experience of power he explained that over time he became, if anything, less assured of himself, something that he explained in the following way:

"Please understand me. I am not saying at all that I have lost my fight. Or that everything has been in vain. On the contrary our world, humanity and our civilisation, now find themselves at perhaps the most important crossroads of their history. We have a greater chance than ever before to understand our situation and the ambivalence of the direction we are headed in and to decide in favour of the way of reason, peace and justice and not for the way that leads towards our own destruction. To set out on a path of reason, peace and justice means a lot of hard work, self denial, patience, knowledge, a calm overview, a willingness to risk misunderstanding. At the same time it means that everyone ought to be able to judge his or her own capacity and act accordingly, expecting that either ones strength will grow with the new task one sets oneself or that they will just run out. In other words there is no more relying on fairy tales and fairy tale heroes. There is no more relying on the accidents of history that lift poets into places where empires and military alliances are brought down. No, the warning voices of poets must be carefully listened to and taken very seriously, perhaps even more seriously than the voices of bankers or stockbrokers. But at the same time we cannot expect that the world in the hand of poets, will suddenly be transformed into a poem". Now as a former filmmaker, working in the political arena, those words have a really tremendous resonance. That strikes me as a message to artists, politicians, in fact all of us, that nothing comes easy. But if we can only stick together, addressing not avoiding the complexity of our lives, then in my judgement we can achieve almost anything. And that's exactly the way I feel about the Open University. Knowledge and understanding are the twin pillars upon which any sustainable future for this planet will be built. This great institution has an important role to play in tilting the balance away from catastrophe, a catastrophe we sometimes seem intent on inflicting on ourselves. What is at times missing, across some parts of the educational sector as well as from political life, is the type of self belief that's capable of changing the course of history. In future of all the voices cheering the EU on – the OU on – from today onwards I promise you mine will be the loudest. It only remains for me to congratulate all of today's graduates and to wish each of you every single, possible success in the future. Thank you very much for listening to me.

APPLAUSE

Chancellor – you have been installed as the Fifth Chancellor of the Open University. It is my honour and indeed my pleasure to invite you to take the Chair to preside over this afternoon's degree ceremony.

**Lord Puttnam**

I declare this ceremony to be open by the authority recently invested in me. Thank you.

APPLAUSE