

The Honorary Graduand: Christopher Curling

The Orator: Gillian Camm

Christopher Curling is to be awarded the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws

Chris Curling is a lawyer, businessman and environmentalist.

Following a state-sponsored education he ended up at Cambridge University in the exciting and turbulent days of the late 1960's. This experience has had a lifelong influence on him.

After travelling round the world he and his wife hitch-hiked in 1974 down to Bristol, where he joined the law firm Osborne Clarke as a corporate finance lawyer. Within ten years he was the firm's Chief Executive and after a further seven years its Executive Chairman. So for 15 years he led its development from a Bristol-based provincial law firm to one with an international presence and reputation. For the past 12 years he has been involved in a number of businesses, including Bristol Water, where as a Non-Executive Director he established and chaired the Board's Environment Committee, and a waste recycling business.

Chris was an early member of Friends of the Earth in the 1970's, and on coming to Bristol he was involved in the establishment of the cycling charity Sustrans. Initially a protest organisation Sustrans has developed into the UK's leading active travel charity, responsible for the construction of the 14,000 mile National Cycle Network, for encouraging many people (especially those who are disadvantaged or isolated) to take up walking and cycling, and for promoting to Governments the environmental and health benefits of cycling and walking. Chris recently stood down as Chairman of the Sustrans Board.

Chris was also for five years Chairman of Wildscreen, the international charity based on Bristol's position as the world's leading centre for wildlife film production. Wildscreen harnesses the power of wildlife imagery to promote globally the vital importance of biodiversity conservation. UWE has had a significant involvement in this organisation over the years.

Additionally Chris was for three years Chairman of a group of industrial and financial experts advising the Cabot Institute, the environmental research institute of the University of Bristol, on its research priorities.

In education, Chris was Chairman of the Governors of an academy school in the disadvantaged community of Withywood in South Bristol, during a period of rapid transformation of this school. As a member of the Society of Merchant Venturers he is now Chairman of the Board which oversees the education of some 4,500 students through its management of the Merchant Venturers' stable of nine schools, including the independent Colston's School and eight state-maintained schools in Central East Bristol and South Bristol.

The Honorary Degree is awarded in recognition of Chris Curling's work in environmental conservation and education in the region.