

**Dr Simon Ofield-Kerr, Vice-Chancellor, University for the Creative Arts**

**Graduation Ceremonies 2014**

**Royal Festival Hall**

**24 & 25 June 2014**

By virtue of the powers granted by the Privy Council, the University for the Creative Arts is this day holding a Ceremony for the Conferment of Awards.

Chancellor, Governors of the University, Mayor of Medway, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen, and – most importantly – those of you who are soon to be graduates of the University for the Creative Arts: good morning and welcome to the Royal Festival Hall.

Before we move on to the main event – the celebration of your successes and the awarding of degrees – there are just a few words I would like to say about the University.

Today is about the individual and collective achievements of our graduating students, and so it is also about the achievements of the University as a whole. And this year has been one of truly extraordinary achievement. It has seen numerous competition successes and memorable events across our campuses and courses, culminating in graduate showcases that were, I believe, amongst the very best in the UK. Our end-of-year shows have featured work of enormous strength and skill, impressively curated with careful commitment; our collections on the runway at Graduate Fashion Week have translated ambitious, conceptual experiments into amazing and wearable garments, with four UCA students reaching the final; our annual publication Geist and many others you have produced have been incredible productions of great quality that represent the strengths of all we do; and our presence at other showcases and our London shows has also been exceptional.

The University – of which today’s graduating students will always be a part – is formed by its rich history, all of its staff past and present, our campuses that were once independent schools and colleges, what happens on our

courses, our local relationships and partnerships, and what all of this means and makes happen for our students now and in the future. Each of us – students, alumni, colleagues, and friends – pursue journeys that are at once individual and unique, and yet each a vital part of the University and its creative community – threads woven into a complex, constantly changing and developing whole.

For me, this year represents a particular milestone, in that I have now been Vice-Chancellor of UCA for as long as many of you graduating here today have studied at the University. I am delighted that we share this connection, and that together we can celebrate all that has been achieved, individually and collectively, over the past three years.

I was also delighted – but not surprised (well, perhaps a little surprised) – by the recent news that UCA's commitment to the on-going development of its creative communities has been acknowledged with a rise of 24 places in the 2015 Complete University Guide league table, following a 9-place improvement in 2014. Not surprised because this increase of 33 places over two years recognises the very real and longstanding strengths of the

University – the talent and dedication of our staff, and sector-leading quality of our facilities – together with our commitment to enhancing these still further by providing new contemporary spaces designed specifically to enable great creative work. This outstanding success – UCA was the highest climber in the table – is also testament to the extraordinary achievements of all our students, and is something of which you should be very proud. A top 50 place is now within our sights.

Although in one sense this ceremony marks an end point, in another it is just the beginning. During your time with us you will have developed all sorts of skills and talents, but will have realised just some of your potential, and have, I hope, identified new and exciting ambitions for the future. At our graduation ceremonies this year we are recognising through the making of honorary awards three individuals – photographer Jane Bown CBE, an alumna of one of our founder colleges at Guildford; curator Professor Lewis Biggs OBE; and designer Orla Kiely – who through the development and expression of their talents have made outstanding contributions to the creative arts, and demonstrate just what can be achieved when dedication to a discipline is single-minded and wholehearted.

Speaking of single-minded and wholehearted, just last week we received the tremendous news that our Chancellor Zandra Rhodes has been made a Dame in the Queen's Birthday Honours – such well-deserved recognition of a career-long contribution to textile and fashion design, to the public presentation of, and research on, textiles, and of course, to the University. Chancellor – we really couldn't be more proud.

We also celebrated earlier this year the success of 1996 Farnham Film graduate and Hollywood director Gareth Edwards, an honorary graduate two years ago, whose blockbuster movie Godzilla earned great reviews, had an impressive opening weekend, and grossed over 16 million pounds at the UK box office. He graduated just 18 years ago – where will you be in 18 years' time?

Whilst box office takings on this scale provide some of the more obvious examples, in total the creative industries contribute more than 71 billion pounds per year to the UK economy. The crucial role played by creative arts education in this regard is now well established – although still

Government doesn't quite understand what we do, how we do it, and what happens at UCA. In March I wrote to a number of ministers and MPs pointing out that a reduction in Government funding for 18-year-old Further Education students had the potential to negatively impact on the Foundation Diploma in Art & Design – a qualification that has a long and distinguished history, that most of our internationally prominent practitioners experienced at the beginning of their careers, and that constitutes an integral part of the well-established form of art, design and media education in this country that prepares students so effectively for entry into the creative industries.

The skills taught in the UK through an education in creativity are well understood overseas – with China, for example, opening a phenomenal number of art and design colleges over the last ten years – and as the Chief Design Officer at the Design Council pointed out in the Telegraph recently, there is mounting evidence in the UK that the uniqueness of a creative arts degree in terms of its depth of practice is proving increasingly attractive to employers far beyond the creative industries.

At UCA, we have long recognised this, with industry links representing a key feature of our courses, both in terms of the industry-based practice of our staff, and the opportunities that we are able to provide for students to undertake live group projects, work placements and internships. Earlier this year we developed our business engagement still further with the launch of the Design Business Institute, a new initiative drawing upon the University's well-established expertise in creative business education to promote the value of our graduates to the sector.

UCA equips its students with the skills, creativity and entrepreneurship necessary not only to make a considerable contribution to the economy, but actually to shape the future and make it a better place. Class of 2014 – your achievements up to this point, the work you have produced during your time with us, all indicate that you are up to this challenge. Class of 2014 – you are the last year not to be charged the full cost of your degrees and there has been some press recently suggesting that VCs are reluctant, less than a year out of a general election, to say what the fees regime should be in the future – more interested in the accounts of their colleges than their students. I am happy to be clear, as the beneficiary myself of a free higher education, with a grant to support my living expenses, I believe

we need to return to a model where the full £9000 cost is not placed on the shoulders of students, where the benefits to society and not just the individual are recognised through a system that financially supports the students who are following you at least as much as you have been supported. Class of 2014, finally I would like to thank you for choosing UCA, for trusting us with some of your hopes and ambitions and I give you my warmest congratulations and most sincere good wishes for the future. Thank you.