

**Anita Bhalla OBE Hon DLitt**

**Oration by Professor Lawrence Young  
Pro-Vice-Chancellor**

We've heard a lot recently about social justice and the empowerment of the less privileged in our society. We have someone with us this afternoon who has committed her whole life to promoting a just society by challenging injustice, valuing diversity and serving her community. We are delighted to welcome Anita Bhalla to this afternoon's degree congregation.

Summarising Anita's incredible career and achievements in a few sentences is not easy. Her wide-ranging work in the British media and in public service has impacted the lives of those who often feel that they don't have a voice. Anita has used the power of the media to progress the work of equality and provide that voice for the community. She pioneered British ethnic broadcasting in the early 1980's, opening doors for women and ethnic minorities to engage with public broadcasting and to breakdown the barriers. Her work in television and radio has had real impact in connecting with diverse minority communities.

Anita is a trained teacher who turned her hand to becoming a Community Relations Officer in Leicester, and then a Community Worker in Handsworth, Birmingham, where she set up and ran one of the first hostels for Asian Women, as well as dealing with wider issues around welfare and social care.

Anita went on to a 26-year media career with the BBC that included being one of the first regionally-based TV and radio media correspondents and setting up the Asian Network in the West Midlands which is now a national digital service. She was also BBC England's Head of Political and Community Affairs and Head of the Corporation's Public Space Broadcasting, overseeing a network of Big Screens which deliver a variety of community experiences from interactive games to live relays from the Royal Opera House, Last Night of the Proms to London 2012 Olympics.

Anita presented Channel 4's *Eastern Eye* and was the first woman President of Circom, a European-wide group of public service broadcasters.

Anita's strong commitment to public service is reflected in her prodigious portfolio of community-based activities ranging from being a key contributor to Birmingham's 2013 Social Inclusion White Paper to being a past chair of Grestone Junior and Infant School, past member of the governing body of Birmingham City University and past Chair of the Midlands Art Centre.

She is currently Chancellor of the Birmingham Children's University and Chair of the Creative City Partnership which is a sub group of the Birmingham and Solihull LEP and a non-Executive Director at Birmingham Women's Hospital. Anita is also Chair of Birmingham Town Hall Symphony Hall. Anita was a commissioner on the University of Warwick's recent Chancellor's Commission which considered the future role of the University in Coventry, Warwickshire and the wider region.

She has won several awards including the CRE's Race in the Media National Television News Award and was awarded an OBE in 2009 for her services to Broadcasting and Communities.

Anita's passion for equality and for our communities is unequalled. She has been inspirational in combining the power and glamour of broadcasting with an unswerving commitment to ethnic minority rights and social justice. This has greatly benefited our whole nation and profoundly impacted the lives and welfare of local communities in the West Midlands.

Mr Chancellor, in the name of the Senate, I present for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*, Anita Bhalla.