

Oration for Pamela Jones MBE,

To be Delivered on 17 July 2018 3pm, by Lisa Dodd-Mayne

Chancellor

Our honorary graduand this afternoon is a Paralympic double gold medallist.

Adaptive rower Pamela Jones (Pamela Relph before her marriage last year) was a member of the GB Paralympic Rowing Team that won gold in the London Games in 2012 and again at Rio in 2016 – an achievement that puts her firmly in the record books. It is a great pleasure to introduce Pamela to you and to this degree congregation.

Pamela is the most decorated Paralympic rower ever; she has also won four World Championship titles and has received an MBE for services to rowing.

Yet I think it is true to say that rowing – let alone Olympic-level rowing – was never part of Pamela's original career plan. Her initial ambition was a career in the British army and at the age of 16 she won a scholarship to the Welbeck Defence College. She then moved to the University of Birmingham to study

Physics with a scholarship from the Defence Technical Undergraduate Scheme, aiming to become an officer in the Royal Engineers. However, this period saw a worsening of the medical condition from which she has suffered from the age of seven – psoriatic arthritis, resulting in severe and permanent damage to some of her joints – and in 2010 she was medically discharged from her army career.

This was a massive blow, yet, paradoxically, it led to her involvement with rowing and her subsequent world- beating success. She came to the attention of the Paralympic Rowing Team through her sister Monica, who had herself represented Great Britain as a rower (*if her sister is in the audience, the orator may wish to say ‘and whom we are delighted to welcome to Warwick today’*).

Within a week Pamela had been classified to compete as a Paralympic athlete and she proved to be a natural at the sport. Nine months later, she became World Champion in the Legs, Trunk and Arms Mixed Coxed Four at the 2011 World Championships in Slovenia, with Olympic gold following in 2012. By 2015, she had won another three World Championships, while her gold medal at Rio the following year made her the only international para-rower to be a double Paralympic Champion.

For Pamela, training with the GB Paralympic Rowing Team was a life-changing experience. She learned that to row successfully in a crew boat required

dedication and discipline, the ability to perform and communicate under pressure, and awareness of the goals and unique

personalities of the other team members. For the first time, she came to terms with the fact that her medical condition had caused so much damage to her joints that it had caused her to have a disability. She now speaks openly of her medical condition and how she manages it, stressing the effectiveness of exercise (although now retired from competitive rowing, she continues to enjoy a variety of sports). She embodies the Universities Active Campus strategy and our drive to motivate all our students and staff to be active to improve their health and wellbeing. She works to help improve the public understanding of arthritis, which she calls an ‘invisible condition’ and in 2013 became an Arthritis Research UK Ambassador. Her mantra, used throughout her Paralympic training, is ‘improvise, adapt and overcome’ – excellent advice for all our students graduating today and moving on to the next stage in their careers. Pamela has said that she hopes to be a role model and inspiration to young people affected by arthritis: in fact, she is an inspiration to us all.

Chancellor: in the name of the Senate, I present to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*, Pamela Jones.