

Sharon White, DBE,

Friday, 22 July 2022, awarded Honorary Doctor of Science (Hon DSc) with
oration given by Professor James Hayton

Chancellor

Our honorary graduand this afternoon is an economist, a former Chief
Executive of Ofcom and now Chairman of The John Lewis Partnership.

I am delighted to introduce DAME SHARON WHITE.

Dame Sharon has a BSc in Economics from Cambridge and an MSc from
University College London. She joined the civil service in 1989, starting
work at the Treasury. Later roles included working at the 10 Downing
Street Policy Unit during the Blair government; at the Washington Embassy
and the World Bank; as a Director General at the Department for
International Development, 2003-9, and at the Ministry of Justice, 2009-11.
From 2012-13 she was the Treasury's Director General of Public Spending,
conducting a review of its response to the 2007-8 financial crisis and an
inquiry into the financial management of government. In 2013, she was

appointed Second Permanent Secretary to the Treasury – the first black person and only the second woman to hold such a position.

In 2015, Sharon became Chief Executive of Ofcom, the UK's communications regulator - another boundary-breaking appointment. This was an enormous job in an organisation with a wide remit – home broadband packages, mobile phone networks, public complaints about television and radio content – which also had to face the growing influence of social media and streaming video services. Under Sharon's leadership, Ofcom helped to deliver ultrafast broadband, widespread 4G and 5G mobile, and became the first independent regulator of the BBC. She insisted that the organisation focus on consumers' interest, being prepared to intervene on their behalf in pricing disputes. And there was an ongoing dispute with the Kremlin-funded RT channel, with Ofcom under fire from the Russian government. Leaving Ofcom in 2019, Sharon became Chairman of The John Lewis Partnership, at a time when the organisation was struggling to deal with the change in customer habits from in-store to online shopping; then, in 2020, came the Covid Pandemic. She had to take some 'very painful' decisions, like closing down stores which were unprofitable - but as chairman, she says, 'your job is to take the really hard decisions.'

During her working life, Dame Sharon has successfully overcome issues of gender and ethnicity to take on some of the UK's most important appointments, in both the public and private sectors. Her career has been punctuated by 'firsts': at the Treasury, where her appointment in 2013 was described as 'punching a hole in the glass ceiling'; at Ofcom, where she was the first woman to lead the media regulator and the first black woman in such a senior position in any UK media organisation; in 2019, the first woman to be Chairman of the John Lewis Partnership. She has been regularly named amongst the most powerful black Britons and, on her John Lewis appointment, was described as the UK's most high profile black businesswoman. Looking at her own success, she goes back to her education: she feels privileged to have had an excellent education at a state comprehensive that supported and encouraged her dream of going to Cambridge. And she has been assiduous in mentoring and coaching younger women colleagues in the early stages of their careers, trying to boost their confidence to 'put their hat in the ring' for more senior jobs.

Sharon White has an Honorary Fellowship at University College London and has been a Visiting Fellow at Nuffield College Oxford. In the 2020

New Year's Honours, she was made a DBE for public service. She is an inspirational role model for women in general and for black women in particular. We are delighted to welcome her to Warwick today.

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

621 words