

Lord Vaizey of Didcot

Vice-Chancellor, Graduates and Guests,

It is a rare feat for a politician to stay in the same Ministerial role for six years, rarer still for that to follow four years as Shadow Minister for the same portfolio, and perhaps unheard of for 150 leaders in the sector represented to write to a national newspaper to salute an “approachable, sincere and a knowledgeable advocate for our industries, both nationally and internationally.” This was the tribute paid to Lord Vaizey, the UK’s longest serving Minister for Culture, Communications and the Creative Industries, and it is for his contribution to culture and creative industries that we are honouring him today.

Lord Vaizey grew up in a cultural household. His mother, Marina Vaizey, is an art historian and was art critic for the *Sunday Times*, and his father John, later Baron Vaizey of Greenwich in Greater London, was an economist specializing in education but also consulted on matters of cultural policy. Lord Vaizey’s early cultural memories include going to the first night of *Evita*, seeing the famous Royal Shakespeare Company production of *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* and watching *Brideshead Revisited* with his parents. These formative cultural experiences presaged a lifelong passion for the arts, with Sir Nicholas Serota, Chair of Arts Council England, recognizing Lord Vaizey’s ‘unusually large number of appearances at openings and performances’. Likewise, Lord Vaizey’s friend Benjamin Wegg-Prosser, CEO and co-founder of Global Counsel, noted this genuine interest in a range of arts and cultural experiences as a key

facet of his success and crucial in rebuilding the then Conservative Party's relationship with arts organisations.

Lord Vaizey read history at Merton College, Oxford, where his friend and fellow Conservative Michael Gove recalls being in the presence of someone self-possessed, who had a clear view, an entertaining manner and an attractive intellectual confidence. All of which set him up well as a politician. After leaving University, he worked for the Conservative MPs Michael Howard and Kenneth Clarke, who Lord Vaizey recalls as the most impressive politician he ever worked with. He also worked as a barrister specializing in family law before becoming an MP.

Entering the House of Commons in 2005 as MP for Wantage, a constituency he represented until 2019, Lord Vaizey became Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy in 2010, and was appointed a privy councillor in 2016. Echoing Frank Field, a politician he admired, Lord Vaizey quickly established himself as someone with a clear area of expertise and independent spirit. He is unafraid to express views at odds with the majority of his Party, most noticeably when he had the whip removed for backing efforts to block a no-deal Brexit. He is widely recognized as a liberal, progressive and modernizing Conservative. His friendships extend across political boundaries and, as his peers and friends note, a strength in his friendship is his candour – you always know where you stand – and when praise is given, it is valued as sincere.

During his time in office, despite budget cuts and financial constraints, Lord Vaizey upheld the policy of free entry to the UK's national museums and worked with the Treasury to introduce tax credits for theatre, orchestra and museums which Nick Serota heralded 'a lifeline' at a time of standstill funding for the arts. He secured funding from

the Treasury to help reform museum storage, and oversaw the development of English Heritage into two organisations – Historic England and English Heritage. He was also instrumental in the roll out of rural broadband, the introduction of 4G, and created the conditions for considerable growth in creative industries through the introduction of tax credits for film, tv, animation and video games. While the ambition to appear as an extra in a Bond movie might (thus far) remain unfulfilled, his impact on the film industry was acknowledged with a credit in *Star Wars: the Force Awakens*, the subtitle of which could speak to the subsequent growth of film as a mainstay of the UK creative industries.

As a champion of the creative-digital-IT ‘fusion’ concept, his support of the reclassification of creative industries to include IT sectors was vital in maintaining the creative industries as recognised high-growth economic sectors, and laid the foundations for the later Creative Industries Sector Deal in the Industrial Strategy. He chaired the Advisory Board of the Newcastle University-led project Creative Fuse North East which was pioneering in bringing the region’s five Universities together to create a step change in the creative digital IT sector. Hasan Bahkshi, the Director of the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, now led by Newcastle University in partnership with the RSA, commented that Lord Vaizey was ‘the best creative industries minister the UK has ever had. He appreciated early the opportunities for the arts from digital technologies, leading to amongst other things the *Digital R&D Funds for the Arts*, and the urgent need to tackle digital skills shortages in the video games and VFX industries, commissioning the *Next Gen Skills* review, which led to the wholesale reform of the ICT curriculum in England’s schools.’ And with the introduction of coding into classrooms, a generation of parents learnt a whole new meaning to Raspberry Pi.

A key achievement in office of which he is very proud, was publishing the first White Paper on Culture for 50 years – referring to it as ‘a kind of physical manifestation of my time in office.’ In its focus on the importance of equity of access and diversity, the essential role culture can play in a child’s education, the role of culture in place-making particularly at a local level and for communities, and culture’s global soft power, it retains a relevance, perhaps enhanced, in our post-pandemic era. Speaking in a 2015 interview for BBC’s Front Row, Lord Vaizey commented that if he could take one policy to a desert island it would be the National Plan for Music Education, which, working with Arts Council, led to the establishment of music education hubs, still core to delivering high-quality music education in schools, and, as Lord Vaizey noted in the House of Lords earlier this year, developing young people’s transferable skills.

Throughout his term in office Lord Vaizey engaged with stakeholders to inform policy something which meant, as Nick Serota commented, that he was ‘much liked by arts organisations even when they disagreed with his political views because he was, and is, an advocate for the arts.’ When Lord Vaizey left office, his resignation letter explained: “I am passionate about the arts, our creative industries and technology and I want to specialize in these sectors.” Now with a portfolio career to rival many creative freelancers, Lord Vaizey is a business advisor and consultant, podcaster, public speaker, broadcaster (with a weekly show on *Times Radio*), and journalist. Past and present trusteeships have included the National Youth Theatre, London Music Masters, the Tate, and Common Sense Media (which campaigns for kids’ internet safety). He acts as an Adviser and consultant to a wide range of technology-related companies and has had considerable influence in the development of the fast-growing Esports industry in Britain.

Lord Vaizey was awarded his life-peerage 2020. In this year alone he has spoken on the importance of local radio and the UK's radio infrastructure, diversity in the creative industries – in terms of representation and workforce, the regulation of online safety and AI, the importance of international students and Universities, and the significance of culture to UK's soft power. His lifelong engagement with and championing of our creative industries is truly remarkable.

Vice-Chancellor, for his outstanding contribution to arts, culture and creative industries, I present to you the Rt Honorable Lord Vaizey of Didcot as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Civil Law, *honoris causa*.

Professor Vee Pollock,

Public Orator

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