# Peter Duthie Honorary Graduates Speech Transcript

Professor David Hillier

Peter, we're proud to confer this honorary degree: a Doctor of the University on you today. Your journey from being a graduate of Strathclyde to becoming one of UK's most respected event industry leaders inspires us all. We look forward to your continued contributions to our culture, business and society.

Professor Sir Jim McDonald

Congratulations. Peter, I create you Doctor of the University honoris causa. We're delighted to have you be part of the Strathclyde family. You're a fantastic force for good and success in Glasgow University, and Strathclyde University and all the other institutions around the city. Well done again. And congratulations, please.

Peter Duthie

Thank you and good morning, everyone. I'd like to start by thanking the University of Strathclyde for this recognition today and for those very kind words. I'm humbled and very proud to receive it. I would also like to congratulate everybody else graduating today. To achieve success in university education is a great accomplishment. To do so when impacted by a pandemic is even more so.

COVID has impacted so many lives in so many ways, but I feel for those whose university experience has been compromised by restrictions on in-person learning and on all the social activities which are so important. As someone who spent 40 years in the event industry, it will come as no surprise. I'm sure that I believe passionately in the value of face to face engagement.

Our whole business is based on live interaction, whether it's an artist feeding off the energy of an audience or conference delegates, simply exchanging ideas informally over coffee. One thing the pandemic did do was reinforce how important live events are to people supporting not only the economy, but the health and wellbeing agenda as well. At the SEC, we had to navigate our way through two years of closure, converting, as was mentioned, to a medical facility, the NHS Louisa Jordan for part of that time and we were proud to play our part in the country's response to COVID before reopening to stage our biggest and most important event ever COP26.

I never thought I would be in the same building as Barack Obama, Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, and Leonardo DiCaprio all at the same time. It was a very big building, and I wasn’t in the same bit as them but it was nonetheless. We were closed for a further couple of months soon after that, before fully opening again in February last year.

And since then we have had our busiest year ever with a huge pent up demand for events. It's clear how much they mean to people. Live events are also at the heart of many celebrations. I can personally vouch for that having come from my daughter's wedding on Saturday to this graduation ceremony today. Fortunately, equipped with the right speech, although the father of the bride speech may have been more entertaining.

What excites me is that what we do at the SEC really matters. Activities in the campus contribute, as was stated earlier, nearly half a billion pounds into Glasgow's economy annually. But equally importantly, the OVO Hydro is one of the five busiest arenas in the world, helps to provide memorable experiences for over a million visitors a year. I got into the events business partly by chance, partly by good luck, but also partly by actively looking for opportunities with an open mind.

How could I use the knowledge and skills I'd acquired and use them in a field that interested me. I've been very fortunate to work in an industry which enabled me to grow with it, and since my first role in 1984, every sector of the business has changed dramatically. There were no big conference centers or live entertainment arenas in the UK back then.

Many of the jobs our teams do now simply didn't exist until recently. The pace of change is only increasing driven significantly by technology, and I'm sure that many of the jobs you will all be doing in five years time don't exist today. I would encourage you, as you start out in your careers and as you progress, to keep an open mind, to search for something that interests or excites you, and to see how you can use your knowledge and skills to find your own way in that space, whether that's in a caring profession or a commercial environment, hopefully that way you'll enjoy what you do, which is hugely important. Due to the changing world, employers increasingly look at candidates attitude, enthusiasm, adaptability, resilience and social skills as well as their qualifications, seeking the personality who can add value to their organisation, bringing much more than simply technical skills. Having trained as a teacher, I wasn't necessarily expecting the skills I had learnt to be so transferable, but so much was around communication skills, understanding and empathy.

Listening as well as broadcasting. And those skills have been hugely valuable to me throughout my career. Communication is so important and so much more effective when it's face to face. So when you go into the workplace, for example, and are given the option to work virtually from home, please consider what you might miss out on working in a dynamic live environment with fellow team members.

Informal learning and knowledge exchanges. Conversations that lead to innovation. Not to mention the social aspects which are equally important for building healthy relationships. All of these aspects can help your own career to progress. I can feel a huge amount of positive energy in this room today. Anticipation not only of your own graduation, I'm sure, but also of what lies ahead for you.

 We are social creatures and rely on and benefit from being together, such as at this ceremony today. I hope you thoroughly enjoy your day and wish you all and the University of Strathclyde every success in the future. Thank you.