

MICHAEL VLASTO OBE

My Lord and Chancellor,

Michael Vlasto was Operations Director at the Royal National Lifeboat Institution - the RNLI - from 1997 until his retirement in July this year. He has always, in his own words, 'mucked about in boats', so when he left Hardye's School in Dorchester it was no surprise that he became a cadet in the Merchant Navy. As a Deck Officer and Master Mariner he sailed the world with P and O Lines; from this experience he learned respect for the power of the sea and the weather, and this gave him a strong foundation for his later career. After nine years, married and looking for a shore-based life, he joined the RNLI in 1975 as a Lifeboat Inspector, first in Scotland and later in Wales. Immediately he came face-to-face with the raw challenges of his new task, when a lifeboat was wrecked on his first day in the job.

From 1990 Michael was based in Poole as Staff Officer Operations (Training), with responsibility for training lifeboat crews and station personnel. At that time the RNLI was focussed essentially on marine rescue, but in 1994 Michael introduced the concept of prevention, and a more proactive approach to sea safety education. This included the development of the Sea Safety Initiative, which he led, working with the Royal Yachting Association and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. In 1997 he was promoted Chief of Operations (a title later changed to Operations Director); this gave him operational responsibility for all lifeboat and prevention programmes throughout the UK and Ireland, with over 500 full-time staff and 5000 volunteers at 235 lifeboat stations and 150 lifeguard units. In 2002 he led the introduction of beach lifeguarding and the establishment of lifeboats on the River Thames. As a self-confessed people-person, listening to those working on the front line was always one of his top priorities, and he made no less than five complete circuits of all lifeboat stations. And recognising the ever-increasing importance of training, knowledge and skills, he took a leading part in establishing the RNLI College and introduced a Competence-Based training system for all the Institution's lifesavers

Michael has directed massive operational developments at the RNLI, but he is also a world leader in his profession, as Chairman of the National Water Safety Forum, and the International Maritime Rescue Federation, which unites the world's maritime rescue organisations. His outstanding work and achievements around the world have been widely recognised. For his distinguished services to the RNLI, and to maritime search and rescue in the UK and Ireland, he was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire in 2005. On his retirement the RNLI awarded him its Silver Medal, celebrating his 38 years of

service and paying tribute to his 'generous, effective and intensely human contribution to saving lives at sea'. He has received the Irish Coast Guard Medal for Exemplary Service, and the Chief Coastguard's Commendation for Meritorious Service to UK Search and Rescue. He is a Younger Brother at Trinity House, a Liveryman of the Honourable Company of Master Mariners and the Worshipful Company of Shipwrights, a Freeman of the City of London, and a Fellow of the Royal Institute of Navigation and of the Nautical Institute.

BU is proud of its connections with the RNLI, where our School of Design, Engineering and Computing has collaborated in projects on the quality of lubricants used in lifeboats, and improvements to slipway performance. So today it is our special privilege and pleasure to honour Michael Vlasto and his many outstanding global contributions to life-saving at sea.

My Lord and Chancellor, I have the honour to present Michael Vlasto, and I ask you to confer upon him the degree of Doctor of Technology, *honoris causa*.