

Vice-Chancellor, distinguished guests, colleagues and graduands,

It is my privilege to introduce **Marni Myers**—a woman whose life reflects resilience, service, and an unwavering commitment to others.

Marni was born in Gateshead in 1958, growing up in a working-class community where opportunities were limited and expectations were low. She has spoken candidly about being told, as a young girl, that she would never amount to anything. University was not seen as a path open to her.

But within her home, she was raised by strong women—her mother and grandmother—who instilled something far more powerful: belief. Belief that she was capable, that she mattered, and that her future need not be defined by circumstance.

Marni did not follow a traditional academic route. Instead, her life has been shaped by determination, instinct, and an extraordinary ability to get things done.

In 1989, alongside her husband Tony and her sister Barbara, she took on a small and struggling gowning business, *Gray and Son Robemakers*. At the time, it was modest, underperforming, and far from the operation we know today. Marni had no prior experience of universities or ceremonies—but she had clarity of purpose: to do things properly, and to do them well.

Over the next four decades, she and Barbara transformed the business into an integral part of university life in Durham and Newcastle. They did so not through scale or ambition alone, but through care, responsiveness, and an unwavering commitment to quality.

As the University grew, Marni ensured the business grew with it—adapting, investing, and always focusing on what mattered most: the student experience.

Every gown worn on this stage, every hood placed over a graduate's shoulders, every photograph taken in celebration—has been shaped, in part, by her work.

But what truly sets Marni apart is how she has done it.

She has built relationships of trust across the University—not simply as a supplier, but as a partner. Someone who understands that graduation is not just an event, but a milestone that must be delivered with care, dignity, and precision.

That trust has been returned in equal measure, reflected in decades of loyalty and collaboration.

Her journey has also been marked by profound personal challenges. And yet, time and again, she has shown remarkable strength—continuing to serve others, ensuring that ceremonies went ahead, that students could celebrate, and that no moment was diminished.

This is quiet dedication of the highest order.

At the heart of her success is her partnership with her sister Barbara, whom she credits as the driving force behind much of what they have achieved. Together, they have built not just a business, but something far more enduring - grounded in trust, hard work, and shared purpose.

Marni often describes herself modestly, even self-deprecatingly. She speaks of not being “academic.” And yet, for nearly 40 years, she has played a vital role in one of the most important moments in academic life—supporting generations of students as they mark their achievements.

She reminds us that universities are sustained not only by those who study and teach, but also by those whose work enables these moments to happen—seamlessly, reliably, and with care.

And while she may never have sought the spotlight, those who know her have affectionately described her as the “Joanna Lumley of the North East”—bringing warmth, presence, and quiet confidence to every occasion she touches.

Graduands, today you celebrate your achievements and look ahead to your futures.

Marni’s story stands as a powerful reminder that success is not defined by where you begin, but by the determination, integrity, and generosity you bring to what you do—and to others along the way.

Marni, through decades of service, you have helped create the moments that matter most in the lives of our students and their families.

You have not just supported our ceremonies—you have shaped them.

And in doing so, you have become part of the story of this University.

It is with deep respect and great pleasure that we honour you today.

*Chancellor, I present Marni Myers to receive the degree of Master of Arts, honoris causa.*