

Suzanne Duncan

Doctor of Letters

Durham Cathedral, 10 January 2025

If you didn't know Suzanne Duncan, you missed out!

Suzanne was, until she recently retired, the CEO and Principal of East Durham College, a phenomenally talented leader, a highly valued friend, and a much-loved wife and mum.

Born in Hartlepool, Suzanne served in the further education sector for more than 30 years. She became leader of East Durham College in 2012 and over the following 12 years she transformed the College for the betterment of the communities it serves - this enablement was not forceful or demanding – it was quiet, skilful and supportive – almost imperceptible. She would plant seeds and watch them flourish. It was also built on a deep understanding of needs, particularly for those students that experience significant disadvantage – and Suzanne built the opportunities that were otherwise not there. For 14–16-year-olds who refused to attend mainstream schools, for those with learning difficulties and autism, for those who experienced the challenges of poverty and were disadvantaged in being able to access higher education. Suzanne cared deeply about learners, and the transformational difference education can make to their lives – especially to those who are hardest to reach.

At the Houghall campus of East Durham College, Suzanne strengthened the focus on this local area, passionately pushing forward the land based agenda so important to sustainability and food security, which led to a complete transformation of the estate, and Houghall becoming the biggest provider in the north east of England, with £13m of investment and state-of-the-art agriculture facilities.

Suzanne was a great ambassador for the college and its community, and her reach extended beyond the college; she was an Ofsted inspector and actively involved in many external boards including Visit County Durham, Northeast Learning Trust, Landex and the Association of Colleges, influencing from within to ensure that the Northeast and particularly county Durham were recognised on a national level. As she

approached retirement, she was in the running to be the President of the AoC with a laser focus on banging the drum for further education with the mover and shakers in the Department for Education. Sadly, this did not happen but please be in no doubt that Suzanne would have been great.

At her funeral, Suzanne's husband Steve read the extract from her birthday from The Daily Stoic 'Show me that the good life doesn't consist in its length, but in its use...'.. Suzanne embodied this quote in all aspects of her life, including, in her career and as a friend and colleague. She was an enabler at her core; supporting her friends, colleagues and students to reach beyond their existing horizons for the fulfilment of themselves and others – something that she embodied in her own career, her personal life and her love of discovering the world through travel.

Suzanne was informed of this award just a few weeks before she died. Steve has since told us she considered it her greatest career achievement, and best possible recognition of her work and sacrifices. His wish, and ours, is only that she could be here to receive it.

But her legacy is the positive difference that she enabled for so many people. It will continue beyond her initial influence with careers built on the foundations of their education, financial independence, living independently, sharing and encouraging aspiration in others, looking after their and making a better life for their friends, families and their communities.

Chancellor I present Steven Duncan to receive the degree of Doctor of Letters honoris causa on behalf of Suzanne Duncan.