

Chris Kelly

Doctor of Civil Law

Durham Cathedral 10 January 2020

Chris Kelly came up to Durham, to Hatfield College, in October 1973 to study Economics and Economic History, followed by a PGCE, having fallen in love with the city at first sight of the cathedral. He had played some rugby at his grammar school in Raynes Park in London, alongside cricket, basketball and athletics, but it was at Durham that he really discovered his passion for the game. He has been involved ever since, from playing to teaching, to organising and leading, culminating in his recent year of office as President of the Rugby Football Union. Chris considers that his time at Durham set him up for life, allowed him to follow his passions, and through this to discover and explore his own strengths. And in turn, Chris has given back much to the university and our current students, playing a central role in the campaign to develop facilities for rugby here, and acting as a mentor on the Team Durham Leadership programme.

At Durham our pride in our students rests not only on their academic achievements, which we are celebrating today, but also on their participation in so much more besides, be it competing on the sports field or on the river, performing in orchestras and bands, staging plays and operas, or giving their time as volunteers in the local community. It is our ethos that development of the person whilst a student at Durham happens as much outside the lecture hall as within; that through the enrichment the wider student experience brings, pursuing interests they love, our students learn to work together, they create, organise, make mistakes and learn to bounce back, support each other and acquire the skills to lead. Chris Kelly epitomises the Durham way, both during his time as a student at the university, and in so much that he has done and led beyond. As he puts it, 'How could a humble bloke like me end up being President of the Rugby Football Union?'

The 1970s into the 1980s were key decades in the development of sport at Durham, most notably of rugby. In those days, Hatfield completely dominated the scene, producing future internationals well into double figures. Chris Kelly played for the university First XV throughout his four years, becoming captain for the club's centenary

year during which Durham finally broke into the exclusive Oxbridge league, playing the first ever game against Oxford in 1975, which ended in 9-9 draw only after a very last minute try by Oxford. At this time, Chris also played for the combined English Universities team. He went on to play for Harlequins whilst pursuing a career as an economics teacher as well as a rugby coach, firstly in secondary schools and then moving to work with younger boys in prep schools where he found his real niche with enthusiastic, energetic and responsive, younger children.

Despite being immensely proud to have been President of the Rugby Football Union, Chris's greatest love and contribution has been to the development of grass roots rugby, particularly among young people. Early on in his career, he gained the RFU's top coaching award and coached the London and South East Division 18 Group, also becoming National Selector for the English Rugby Football Schools' Union. He has served on multiple committees both in the southeast and nationally in support of youth rugby, such as recent roles at the RFU on the Schools and Youth Governance Committee, the Education Development Committee, and the U16 Transition and Strategic Review Groups, as well as being the RFU Representative on the Student Rugby Football Union. Chris also chaired the RFU Player Development Committee for 10 years, including a major role in the development of rugby academies, notably ensuring that all academies have Education Officers, and that young players continue to access broader education and qualifications whatever their professional potential. He has also served on the Club England Committee, the Community Rugby Standing Committee, and the Community Game Board. Chris is especially proud of the RFU's All Schools programme, which provided £1 million to support teachers and coaches to develop rugby in 750 schools where the game was not played before. Reflecting Chris's own philosophy, feedback highlights the positive impact of the programme on children's broader behaviour, and how team playing has helped to develop their confidence.

This is but one example among many of how Chris has used rugby to support the development of young people, about which he is passionate. As he says, it could have been another sport, or music or theatre. Somehow rugby grabbed him and through it he has had enormous opportunities, not just for himself directly, but to engage young people, to provide something they love to do and to enable them to gain a wide range of skills for life. Through rugby, players develop strong team skills, students work hard

and play hard in support of the team outcome, along the way developing self-esteem, self-direction, respect for the referee and fair play, appreciation of mutual dependence. In Chris's own words, 'Rugby has provided me with a vehicle for life, which really started on the playing fields in Durham'. Talking with others from the rugby world, it is clear that he is held in the highest esteem for his service and commitment to developing the world surrounding a game that many love both to play and to watch, and especially for the impact he has had on the lives of young people.

Despite the demands of his teaching career and national rugby roles, Chris has maintained his links with Durham University over many years. For the past 8 years, he has been one of our lead mentors on the Team Durham Leadership programme, now a flagship for development across the university. Chris has been involved since the start, bringing his skills both as a rugby coach and as a teacher to bear. He has gone way beyond the requirements of the role with particular students, not only during their time at Durham, but after this during their journey into the workplace. Within the programme he is highly respected by staff and other alumni mentors, but the most important accolades come from individuals who Chris has mentored. And so, I will end with some words from one of his mentees, Erin Kelly, current captain of the Durham University Women's Rugby Team. In Erin's words: Chris is always available to talk; he put me on the right track, he helped me to make my own decisions about what I want to do and how to do it. Chris has a huge range of experience; he's really open about himself and generous with what he has learnt. He is amazing.'

Chancellor, for his service to rugby and to young people, culminating in his appointment to the most prestigious role within English rugby, together with his long time support for Durham University and its students, I present Chris Kelly to you as eminently worthy of the honorary degree of Doctor of Civil Laws.

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