

An oration for Nick Davies' Honorary Degree ceremony at the London School of Economics and Political Science

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This was the text of my speech for Nick Davies at the Honorary Degree ceremony at LSE, proposed by the Department of Media and Communications.



Nick Davies at Leveson

Director, ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted to propose Nick Davies for the award of an Honorary Doctorate at LSE.

As a fellow journalist now working in this university it gives me enormous satisfaction to be able to pay tribute to someone whose lifetime of work has taken the craft of news reporting to a level that compares more than favourably with any research or investigation carried out by us academics. And by helping to bring about the Leveson Inquiry it also has to be said that Nick has given journalism scholars, in particular, more material for study than perhaps anyone before.

Nick Davies is now best known as the leading figure in the Guardian newspaper's exposé of the scandal of phone-hacking. Phone-hacking was a series of criminal offences that, when brought into the open, led to much wider revelations about the sometimes pernicious culture within one news organisation in particular, but also malpractice across the newspaper industry as a whole and by some police officers and politicians.



Nick Davies in his 'wizard' outfit at LSE

Nick Davies is one of the most dedicated and skillful journalists of his generation. That has been recognised by accolades from his peers such as Reporter of the year and Journalist of the year in the British Press Awards, and as winner of both the Martha Gellhorn and Paul Foot prizes for investigative journalism. His work has had an historic impact on the trade itself but also on wider society. He has sought to understand the causes of things, but always with a burning desire to change them, too. Like many great journalists Nick Davies is a controversial figure personally and editorially. He is rarely politically simplistic, but he is always ethical.

Nick has been producing outstanding investigative journalism for decades and in so doing, he has redefined that genre itself. As well as investigating specific stories he has also tackled whole areas of British life, such as criminal justice or the "war on drugs". His work is characterised by the relentless deployment of a very basic journalistic idea: find out the facts by going to look for yourself and by talking to real people involved in an issue – as well as a wide range of experts. Out of this act of witnessing and questioning he produces detailed, thorough and critical accounts of major issues seen from the grassroots. It is very much journalism as social science – only much better written. Journalists sometimes divide into those

who find things out and those who can write. Nick Davies can do both, a skill perhaps grounded in his traineeship at the old Mirror Group.

His investigations of poverty, education and crime, in particular, led to outstanding material for the Guardian newspaper but they also became important books. His writing combines an extraordinary evidence base with great

compassion and human feeling for those who suffer. In 'Dark Heart' for example, he revealed not just a world of drug abuse, sexual exploitation and criminal violence, but the impact on those living in the poverty that sustains it.

And when he turned his attention to his own craft in his book 'Flat Earth News' he produced another landmark piece of work chronicling the crisis in news production in the UK. 'Flat Earth News' exposed the depletion of newsroom resources and the assault on journalism standards driven by commercial and other pressures. Backed with a rigorous academic survey 'Flat Earth News' helped spark a serious debate about British journalism. Passionate, persuasive and topical it brought the word 'churnalism' into the lexicon of journalism studies. It was a wake-up call to journalists but also to a society that does not always value what a healthy news media can do for us all.

That debate has now reached an unprecedented level. The role of Nick Davis' work on phone-hacking cannot be underestimated in this. Even as he first broke the story there was an attempted cover-up, widespread denial and general avoidance of the full implications. It was the Guardian newspaper's commitment and Davies' own determination that forced it to its full conclusion. His current editor Alan Rusbridger told me that this was a personal triumph for Nick. Alan said "He has been genuinely fearless in pursuit of the phone-hacking story. He loathes bullying and the abuse of power. No-one else wanted to go near this – not parliament, not the police, not the regulator, not the rest of the press. Nick did."

In response to the phone-hacking revelations we have had the Leveson Inquiry, the most extensive examination of the British press in modern times. From one story Davies has created a debate that has had international resonance and that should change British journalism forever. Whatever system of regulation, and whatever kind of journalism that emerges in the post-Leveson world – a digital world, of course – it must surely include much more of the kind of journalism that Nick Davies produces. Yes, it's traditional, it is documentary. But it is also mould-breaking and timeless. Most of all it is necessary.

Director, I request that by the authority of the Court of Governors, you admit Nick Davies to the degree of Doctor of Literature.

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