

Pro-Chancellor

Andrew Thomson is an entrepreneur in the fields of retail and hospitality. His career includes business start-ups, restoring historic houses and advising high-street retail chains, all whilst supporting the local community through Trusteeships and representation on local Parish Councils.

Andrew is open about his failures, and he believes that what differentiates successful entrepreneurs is their ability to bounce back and to try again. He credits his success as a sprinter at school for making him believe in himself. He was part of the relay team which won the English Schools' Athletics Championship in 1964 – and their record still stands to this day.

Andrew did not have a career plan when he left school, and he tried various jobs including training as a manager at the Savoy (where he served cold baked beans to Aristotle Onassis). He was unemployed in 1971 when he agreed to help a friend open the UK's first-ever shop to sell jeans designed for women. In 9 years the shop – Jean Machine - grew to a chain of over 50 with a turnover of £13 million. Sir Philip Green noted recently that Jean Machine was the only chain he could not successfully emulate.

In the 1970s, a friend asked his company for a loan of £10,000 for a business venture. Andrew and his business partners felt the loan would be too risky, so they told Sir Richard Branson that they couldn't help with Virgin Records. Not long after a young Scotsman approached Andrew with a business idea for theatre. Again Andrew felt the investment would be too risky, and told Sir Cameron Mackintosh he couldn't help.

After Jean Machine was sold in 1980, Andrew went on to open a restaurant in Scotland; to become a Director of Jaeger and non-executive Director of Balfour Developments. He restored one of the most important Elizabethan manor houses in Dorset, running it as a luxury B&B welcoming over 10,000 guests. His consultancy included high street names such as Phase Eight, and he set up an American car spares business with the McLaren F1 Racing Team as one of his clients. Today he is equally busy with a range of projects and is passionate about continuing to learn. He notes that his achievements are “not bad” for someone who was not particularly academic, was sacked from his first job, and who is colour blind.

Pro-Chancellor, I have the honour to present Andrew Thomson, and I ask you to confer upon him the degree of Doctor of Business Administration, honoris causa.