

Alex Horne, Hon DLitt - Monday 15 January 2024, 3pm

Oration given by Dr Ali Struthers, School of Law

Chancellor,

I am delighted to introduce our honorary graduand this afternoon, Alex Horne.

Alex Horne, as many of you will know, is the creator and star of the hit TV show, Taskmaster, where 5 comedians are pitted against each other in nonsensical tasks to try and win points from the all-powerful Taskmaster, Greg Davies.

I first contacted Alex in November 2021 to ask a question. I'm a law academic, so see if you can guess what was at the top of my mind.

'Dear Alex, I've created a university outreach project for Year 5s based on the format of Taskmaster...but do you think the production company will sue me?'

His response was 'I don't think they'll sue you, but let me just check'.

Here we are 2 years later and not only has the production company Avalon not sued me (hooray), but with support from Alex, the School Tasking project has become supersized.

It started as a tiny seed of an idea to make our primary outreach work more engaging and interactive... and has grown into a national competition running at 32 universities across the UK and Ireland.

Alex's unwavering support for School Tasking speaks to his genuine desire for Taskmaster to be used for good.

The show itself brings immeasurable joy to its legions of fans and, through initiatives like School Tasking, is introducing a new generation to the concept of, to use Alex's own words, 'competing against each other in a supportive way doing ridiculous things for no good reason'.

But School Tasking is actually doing these things for very good reasons.

Teams of law students across the country are introducing Year 5 classes to engaging aspects of law that are fundamental to Taskmaster itself: interpreting language, trying to find semantic loopholes, or convincing a particularly curmudgeonly Judge or Taskmaster (don't tell Greg Davies...) that their reasoning is superior.

But the project is doing something else too. It's introducing young children from less advantaged backgrounds to the notion of university study as something that they can strive towards, and achieve...if they want to.

Taskmaster is Alex Horne's brainchild and it is, in my opinion, the most beautiful vehicle for education.

In the show itself, it is not the Oxbridge graduates that excel. Nor is it exclusively the sporty contestants, the extravagant artists, or the talented orators.

Instead, the show's format is genuinely inclusive, encouraging every contestant to showcase their own particular talents and skills.

And School Tasking does the same in the classroom, enabling all participants to shine.

The children get to know Alex through videos he records for them, through livestream Q&As and, this year, they will get to meet him in person at the grand final here at Warwick.

Alex has said of receiving this doctorate that it's 'made his parents proud and his children embarrassed', but I'm probably about to embarrass Alex more by saying nice things about him in front of a packed auditorium...

...sorry, Alex...

Anyone who's met Alex will know that he has a unique way of making everyone feel important and valued. His achievements are plentiful and they're achievements that should be shouted about...

Yet he is too humble to do that shouting himself.

Taskmaster has won numerous top television accolades, including two National Comedy Awards, but perhaps what speaks to Alex's character more than anything is that you'll find his BAFTA not in pride of place on the mantelpiece, but tucked away in a corner of his downstairs loo.

Speaking for myself, I reckon that if this doctorate finds a place in Alex's downstairs loo, the University of Warwick should be proud.

Alex's support for School Tasking has been integral to its growth and its ability to reach thousands of children each year.

All of us involved truly appreciate him taking time out of his mind-bogglingly busy schedule to make the project that little bit more special for all of the children involved.

And I, in particular, will always be additionally indebted to him...

I have no doubt that he played a fairly significant role in me NOT getting sued by the production company...so, thank you Alex.

Alex Horne truly is one of the good ones: generous with his time when he has little of it to spare; modest when his achievements are remarkable; passionate about enabling everyone to share in the joy of the Taskmaster universe; and, to top it all off, unquestionably hilarious, which is why I am so proud to say:

Chancellor: in the name of the Senate, I present to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*, ALEX HORNE.