Chairman of Council it is my pleasure to present Mr Surinder Arora.

The reasons for this honour are: his commitment to the world of business and education and his contribution to the College.

High ambition and aspiration are dangerous things. Failure can be humbling; success can come at a cost. On the other hand, achievement can be a wonderful thing, particularly when shared with family and colleagues and we honour Surinder Arora today to mark his remarkable achievements in the business and education sectors.

Surinder came to this country as a youngster without the language and his first struggle was simply to gain an education. His initial aspiration was to be a pilot and he took a job with British Airways, starting as a Customer Services Officer but then taking on a second, evening sales job in the financial services sector, to pay the cost of pilot's lessons. He had a drive to excel, watching the ‘Salesman of the Year’ receiving the annual award and determining to achieve that accolade himself. And so, he did.

He also worked as a part-time waiter at an airport hotel, being advised by colleagues on his first night that the easiest way to open a champagne bottle was to ‘just shake it’. Surinder learnt quickly about the hospitality industry and, having acquired some bed & breakfast properties he used personal contacts to develop the business, offering clients the unusual bonus of a limousine service from the airport — yes, it was Surinder driving his own white BMW.
He discovered that flight crew in those days were not always treated well by airlines and identified an opportunity in the market to provide higher quality accommodation by entering the larger hotel market. The investment could only be justified by persuading the planners to ‘go high’ and, after several characteristically persuasive pitches they were won over. Surinder was then faced with the temptation to sell on the now lucrative planning permission for a quick win but preferred to pursue his aspiration and build the hotel. A period of rapid expansion followed as Surinder built up the loyalty of staff and customers by simply offering a higher-quality service at a lower cost. He now has the largest family-owned hotel chain in the country with a presence at major airports.

Though working incredibly hard Surinder also played hard, having become a very young football referee, handling games with wily old players and fitting this in between 2 or 3 jobs. On the field he learnt how to handle many personality issues, not dissimilar to those of demanding customers. No yellow cards in the hotel business but the ‘early bath’ is an option. Surinder remains passionate about football and now has some time to indulge that passion. He is similarly passionate about education, having seen his daughter and brother-in-law study at Royal Holloway and he has taken time out to share his business wisdom in practical ways, supporting the College and the School of Management.

Surinder’s most recent outstanding achievement was the coup of beating the international giants, the Marriotts and Radissons, to win the new Terminal 5 hotel franchise and he will be open for business there soon.

Surinder’s motto is to treat his customers like royalty and his staff like family and he leads by this example.

In recognition, therefore of his commitment to the worlds of business and education and for his contribution to our College, may I invite you Chairman of Council, to induct as an Honorary Fellow of Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, Mr Surinder Arora.

David Sweeney
Vice-Principal
18 July 2007