

Lord Karan Bilimoria Awarded Honorary Doctorate by the University of York

Entrepreneur and Crossbench Peer recognised for his contributions to enterprise, higher education and public life

York, 16th July 2026: Lord Karan Bilimoria CBE DL, Founder of Cobra Beer, a Peer of the House of Lords and Chairman of the International Chamber of Commerce UK, has been awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of York.

The doctorate was conferred during a graduation ceremony for the University's School for Business and Society at Central Hall on Thursday 16 July. Lord Bilimoria was presented by Vice-Chancellor and President of York University Charlie Jeffery and the citation was read by Professor Kiran Trehan, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Enterprise, Partnerships and Engagement, before Lord Bilimoria addressed the graduating students as they prepared to begin the next chapter of their lives.



The honour recognises a career spanning entrepreneurship, education and public service. Born and educated in India before pursuing his studies and career in Britain, Lord Bilimoria founded Cobra Beer with a bold ambition: to create the finest Indian beer and build it into a global brand.

Cobra's beginnings weren't easy. In the midst of a recession, Lord Bilimoria was delivering cases of beer to restaurants from a battered Citroen 2CV, facing constant rejection, and even when commercially successful, he came close to losing the business altogether. Through persistence, creativity and resilience, he transformed that original idea into one of Britain's most recognisable beer brands, exported around the world.

Reflecting on his achievements, Professor Kiran Trehan said: "Lord Bilimoria's journey is a remarkable example of entrepreneurial courage and public service. From founding Cobra Beer with £20,000 of student debt, he built one of Britain's best-known brands before going on to lead the Confederation of British Industry, serve in the House of Lords and champion higher education. His career demonstrates the power of resilience, ambition and the belief that universities and business are stronger when they work together.

His journey embodies the principles he has consistently shared with aspiring entrepreneurs and young people: follow your passion, not your pension; have the

courage to adapt; and his family motto: aspire and achieve against all odds, with integrity.”

Following the graduation ceremony, Lord Bilimoria gave a special masterclass at the University of York–NatWest Accelerator entitled “From Start-Up Idea to Global Brand”, sharing in detail his entrepreneurial journey and what he learned along the way with local start-up founders and students. He explored how entrepreneurs can identify opportunities, build a distinctive brand, sell their ideas with conviction and navigate setbacks. He shared the values that made him successful: the importance of resilience, trusted partnerships, lifelong learning and principled leadership.

Beyond business, Lord Bilimoria has made a substantial contribution to British public and academic life. He is an independent Crossbench Peer in the House of Lords, Chairman of the International Chamber of Commerce UK and a former President of the Confederation of British Industry. He served for ten years as Chancellor of the University of Birmingham, becoming the first Indian-born Chancellor of a Russell Group university, and has been a longstanding champion of international students, and of stronger relations between the United Kingdom and India, including having founded the UK-India Business Council. In his role as co-chair of the India All Party Parliamentary Group, he also organized a photograph of parliamentarians at the steps of Westminster Hall on the 15th of July, the day the UK India Free Trade Agreement came into force.

The University of York joins several other leading British universities that have awarded Lord Bilimoria honorary doctorates in recognition of his achievements. This latest honour celebrates not only the success of an Indian-born entrepreneur on the global stage, but also his enduring commitment to helping future generations pursue their ambitions with courage, imagination and integrity.

