

Benj Sykes

Doctor of Science

Durham Cathedral, 30 March 2022

Benjamin (Benj) Sykes grew up in Yorkshire before attending Marlborough College. Following school he went on to study Natural Sciences at Cambridge, graduating with a BA in 1987. This was a challenging time for the oil industry in the UK. Benj joined Shell as a geologist and worked for them for the next 7 years. During this time at Shell he worked as a reservoir geologist for their northern North Sea oil fields and spent 2 years in the Netherlands working onshore and offshore as a wellsite petroleum engineer. Benj left Shell in 1994 to join the Hess Corporation. A company that developed its interests in the North Sea to become the most active explorer and largest acreage holder on the UK Continental Shelf at the time. Benj worked his way up the organisation eventually becoming Vice President of NW Europe and working with the company's new Global Technology Group in 2008. This Group had responsibility for delivering the organisation's technology strategy worldwide. However, the world of energy supply – and the world - was changing and Benj was changing, not least prompted by his children's concerns about the future of the planet.

In 2009 he left Hess and joined the Carbon Trust where he was Director of Innovation from 2010 to 2012. The move to low carbon energy systems was gathering momentum and Benj was at the heart of the UK's efforts to develop and commercialise new low-carbon energy technologies, including offshore wind energy. He also joined the Advisory Board of Durham University's newly created Durham Energy Institute.

He was persuaded to join DONG Energy in 2012, a Danish company with a portfolio of coal fired power stations and oil and gas assets, but with a desire to become the world's premier offshore wind farm developer with a major holding in UK waters. When he joined DONG Energy, they were in the process of establishing a strategic partnership with the University and Benj gave his full support to this. He was instrumental in establishing a Chair in Renewable Energy in the Department of Engineering and has been responsible for the Company funding numerous MSc and

PhD student scholarships over the last decade. All these activities are ongoing to this day. We are delighted that he has just recently agreed to be the next Chair of the Durham Energy Institute's Advisory Board. He is passionate about the Institute's Science and Society ethos with equal interest in the social and the technical sides of energy development. During its partnership with the University, DONG Energy announced plans to divest their entire oil and gas business in order to focus on renewable energy. It is impossible to say to what extent the work of university researchers contributed to this move, but the link to the Durham Energy Institute's expertise through Benj represents one of a number of sources of innovation that has allowed the Company to rebrand as a low carbon energy developer, changing its name to Ørsted in 2018. Throughout this period, Benj has held various senior management positions within the Company's Offshore Wind Power business. He is currently a Vice President in their UK Offshore Wind business, and now focusses on tackling the joint global challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss. He has just completed over six years as Industry Chair of the Offshore Wind Industry Council where he led the Industry in agreeing a Sector Deal with the UK Government. He is a non-executive Director of the Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult and is a Fellow of the Geological Society and an Honorary Fellow of the Energy Institute.

Chancellor, I present Benjamin Sykes to receive the degree of Doctor of Science *honoris causa*.