

## **HELENA LUCAS MBE**

Pro-Chancellor,

Helena Lucas is a professional yachtswoman who, uniquely, has campaigned both in the Olympics and Paralympics. Born with no thumbs and limited extension in her arms, Helena started sailing at the age of eight. She confesses that she 'hated it at first' through fear of capsizing, but when she gained confidence there was no stopping her. Early success came when she took part in the Royal Yachting Association's Youth Programme and was selected for the England Youth Squad, but she postponed her international ambitions until she had completed her degree course, in Yacht and Power Craft Design at Southampton Solent University.

Initially she was committed to racing in the 470 class in non-disabled competitions. The 470 is a modern high-performance planing dinghy, very demanding to sail. In this boat Helena pursued selection for Team GB in both the Sydney 2000 and Athens 2004 Olympic Games, narrowly missing out in both. She then switched her focus to the International 2.4mR Racing Sailboat, a single-handed small keelboat which is designed so that 'a sailor's personal dedication and determination to compete can overcome obstacles inherent in other sailboat designs'. In this fast and challenging dinghy Helena made her Paralympic Games debut in Beijing in 2008, where she finished seventh in some very close and tactically complex racing.

But the 2012 Games was Helena's greatest triumph. In the Paralympic sailing events at Weymouth she was the only woman competing in her class, and in the 2.4mR single-handed keelboat she won Britain's first ever Paralympic sailing medal. Her many other international achievements include Bronze medals at the World Championships in 2009 and 2011, and the Hyeres Regatta in 2011; and Silver at the Princess Sofia Trophy, the Hyeres Regatta and the Skandia Sail for Gold, all in 2012. She was also Winner of the World Cup Series in 2012.

Helena is not only a distinguished yachtswoman who has deeply studied the science of sailing, but also a successful yacht designer. She worked for a few years in the design office of Bowman Yachts, and later she and her husband founded Stephen Thomas Yacht Design, where she is a Director. She now lives in Southampton but trains at the Weymouth and Portland National Sailing Academy, where she is an observer on the Board of Directors. Helena's ambitions are as strong as ever; she is planning to compete at Rio in 2016 and is experimenting with new classes of boats. Her charismatic presence makes her a successful coach for children as well as elite sailors,

and she is also a highly effective motivational speaker.

Helena has received major awards and distinctions, most notably when she was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire in 2013 for services to sailing. She also became a Gold member of the Royal Yachting Association in 1989, and a Member of the Royal Institute of Naval Architects in 1996. Twice she has been nominated as Sailor of the Year by the International Sailing Federation, the sport's world governing body.

Helena Lucas is an inspirational sportswoman who exemplifies the BU values of excellence and achievement, and who has faced and overcome immense challenges to attain the highest levels of performance.

Pro-Chancellor, I have the honour to present Helena Lucas, and I ask you to confer upon her the degree of Doctor of Arts, *honoris causa*.