Presentation of the Rt Hon the Baroness Hale of Richmond

My Lord and Chancellor

It could be said that there are broadly three paths for someone who wishes to pursue a legal career:

- The Legal profession
- Academia
- Law reform

In the course of a working life some lawyers practise in two or even all three of these fields. What is rare is to find a lawyer who is a leading figure in them all. Baroness Hale is that rare example.

It will not surprise you to learn that in reviewing Baroness Hale's career the words "first" and "top" make frequent appearances.

Baroness Hale graduated from Cambridge with a starred first coming top of her year - one of just six women that year to graduate with a degree in law, a quite different picture to the one we see here today, on the 30th anniversary of the awarding of a degree in law by Reading University.

Baroness Hale went on to take her bar exams, coming top of her year, and practised on the Northern Circuit becoming in 1989 a Queen’s Counsel - the top of that branch of the profession. At the same time she entered academia at the University of Manchester, reaching the top of that career when she became Professor of Law in 1986. During her time at Manchester, Baroness Hale was seconded to the English Law Commission - the body whose task is to make reasoned proposals for law reform. She was not only the first woman Law Commissioner, but also the youngest person ever to be appointed.

In 1994, after 10 years at the Law Commission, Baroness Hale became a High Court Judge in the Family Division and in 1999 she rose further up the judicial ranks to become a Lord Justice of Appeal (a judge in the Court of Appeal) only the second woman to do so. In 2004 she was appointed to the Judicial Committee of the House
of Lords as a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary, or Law Lord - the first woman to be appointed a member of the highest court in the United Kingdom. She is also the first family lawyer for many years to sit in the House of Lords, and the first mother to do so. It is certainly not significant that she gave her first speech as a Law Lord on the first of April 2004.

It is only possible to give a flavour of Baroness Hale's achievements in these three legal careers. As an academic she published widely and in particular in the field of Family Law and with respect of issues concerning gender and equality, as well as mental health law. One of her early books - the influential *Women and the Law* - was the first comprehensive survey of women’s rights at work, in the family and against the State. Her cases and materials book, *The Family, Law and Society* is a classic text used widely in Law Schools and we are proud to note that Elizabeth Cooke, a Professor at Reading, is one of its editors. At the Law Commission Baroness Hale was responsible for investigating and proposing reforms in the area of Family Law. She is probably best remembered for her work on the radical and far reaching Children's Act 1989. Since joining the House of Lords, Baroness Hale has delivered opinions in a wide range of cases. These are notable for being both clear and interesting, something particularly valued by students. Her suggestion, earlier this year, that there was much to be said for the House of Lords adopting the practice of other supreme courts and having a single majority opinion is one she suggested would be welcomed by future litigants - and I would add future students. However, she also acknowledged that such a move would be less popular to advocates and academics.

Baroness Hale's contribution to legal scholarship can be gauged by the decision to devote a plenary session at the 2007 Society of Legal Scholars Conference to a discussion with her. The theme of the conference is “Diversity and Difference" and her writings, both academic and judicial, will provide a fertile field for what promises to be an excellent conference.

My Lord and Chancellor, I present to you the Rt Hon the Baroness Hale of Richmond for the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws of this University.