

Mr Chancellor,

As the festive season approaches, images of the glossy, commercial vision of Christmas are everywhere. In this idealised world, whilst there may be (fake) snow outside, everyone is snug and warm, ensconced beside a glowing fireside. Back in the real world, with long-range weather forecasts predicting sharp overnight frosts and below average temperatures, it could be a cold, cold, Christmas and very possibly, a white one. For the four million UK households estimated to be living in fuel poverty, the prospect of a cold, white Christmas is likely to hold more fear than joy. A combination of high energy prices, dwindling household income, and low standards of domestic energy efficiency mean that many families currently struggle to pay their energy bills.

Our honorary graduand, Jenny Saunders, has spent the last thirty years working for National Energy Action, a national charity, based in Newcastle, which pursues practical solutions to end fuel poverty in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. She joined the Charity in 1986 and fulfilled a variety of roles before becoming its Chief Executive in 2007. The consequences of living in fuel poverty are bleak. Only last month, a Channel 4 news report highlighted the fear and misery faced by those living in poorly insulated homes, unable to afford the cost of adequate heating. Those who are fuel-poor experience considerable stress, ill-health, and in extreme cases, it can even be the cause of premature death.

Under Jenny's leadership, National Energy Action has sought to enhance the quality and ease of access to energy advice and services, and improve the energy efficiency of older housing. Their approach is characterised by engagement at grass roots, for example, appointing "heat heroes" to champion

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energy efficiency in the community. NVQs have been developed to ensure consistent and accurate advice is given, and to date, 25,000 people have undertaken this training. The NVQs provide not only a quality assurance kitemark, but a recognised qualification for those who achieve the award. Jenny is as comfortable with the political, strategic aspects of her role as she is with the local and individual. Her husband Ian told me that she “speaks truth to power” - a wonderful phrase, which encapsulates the integrity and humanity of Jenny’s approach as well as the laser-like focus required to achieve success.

Maria Wardrobe, Director of External Affairs at National Energy Action, has worked closely with Jenny for twenty three years. She describes her as a passionate campaigner against social and financial exclusion. Maria wished to highlight that Jenny has made a lifetime commitment to a cause that hasn’t always been fashionable, and suggested that if she hadn’t engaged in this particular line of work, she would have made a wonderfully principled politician who represented her constituents admirably. Maria also observed that whilst Jenny is “serious about her work and very driven to achieve success for the Charity...she is always fair and quick to recognise and develop talent in others”. Her drive and commitment is matched by a warm, fun-loving, thoughtful personality. Jenny is passionate about the importance of mentoring, having benefitted greatly from it herself. She told me how privileged she feels to have been supported by such an excellent Board of Trustees at National Energy Action, observing that they have, “presented me with positive challenges and have been supportive in equal measure. They have pushed me in good directions.”

Jenny came to Newcastle in 1977, to study Scandinavian Studies at Newcastle University. She relished the lively culture of the city, which was in sharp contrast to life in the small Cumbrian town of Silloth, where she grew up.

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Jenny met her future husband, Ian Ground, at a Fresher's event, and despite him being, by his own description, "a dodgy bloke from London", they hit it off immediately. Ian studied philosophy at Newcastle where he was taught by the distinguished English moral philosopher, Mary Midgley, who later became a good friend to them both. Mary also ran a feminist bookclub, which Jenny recalls with particular fondness. From Mary, Jenny learnt a robust sense of what is real and what is not, which has informed everything she has done since. Ian and Jenny have many happy memories of their student days, including their time living in Wallsend, where Jenny's creative talent for recycling thrift shop buys is fondly recalled by her friend Suzanne, who notes that "Jenny could knot, twist, pleat and wrap someone's poor deceased Auntie Enid's tweed coat and make it look like a Bruce Oldfield original." However, I gather she was sometimes less successful in her efforts to do the same for Ian, particularly on the occasion where she bought back from a charity shop several items that he had only just dropped off there!

In 2013, Jenny Saunders was awarded the OBE for her services to the fuel poor.

She was also recognised for her work in establishing the Chesshire-Lehmann Fund which supports young academics and community groups wishing to undertake active research and evaluation into the relationships between fuel poverty and energy efficiency. Her work has a natural affinity with research undertaken by Newcastle University's Institute for Sustainability, which seeks to find practical, engaged and integrated solutions to real world issues. One of the Institute's current areas of research is identifying how the energy industry can use weather and socioeconomic factors to predict gas demand, determine the areas of greatest needs, and aid the alleviation of fuel poverty. Jenny is a

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member of the Institute's Sustainability Partnerships Committee and her guidance and advice on the Institute's mission and strategy are highly valued.

Away from the office, Jenny relaxes by playing bridge and jazz saxophone. According to her husband Ian, she initially took up the saxophone to encourage their daughter Hannah to play, and approached the task in the same way she approaches everything in life – with determination, resolve and lots of enthusiasm. Her saxophone heroes include the inimitable Charlie Parker, Jan Garbarek and Andy Sheppard.

Jenny proudly acknowledges the invaluable support of her husband Ian, both in exploring the ethical dimensions of her work and, just as importantly, helping her to recognise when she is becoming too immersed in work. A gentle reminder that Game of Thrones is on in ten minutes always seems to have the right effect.

Mr Chancellor, in recognition of her principled, practical and dedicated endeavours to address the societal challenge of fuel poverty, I present to you Jenny Saunders, OBE, as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Civil Law, *honoris causa*.

*Citation by Jill Taylor-Roe, Public Orator*

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