

**Speech by H.E Sylvie Bermann,
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom,
at the ceremony to present Ms Carolyn McCall
with the insignia of *Chevalier*
in the *Ordre national de la Légion d'honneur*
at the French Residence
on Thursday 13 October 2016**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Chère Carolyn McCall,

It's a great pleasure for me to welcome you, your family, and your many friends and colleagues to present you with this distinction, the *Légion d'honneur*, which is the highest French honour.

“Flying high”: this expression sums up your outstanding career. Outstanding in terms of your achievements, as CEO of one of the most successful British companies, but also your commitment to promoting women in business, a cause I feel strongly about as well.

But let's talk about your career first.

After a short spell as a researcher at Costain, you joined the exciting media world at the well-known British newspaper The Guardian. There, over 24 [*twenty-four*] years, you rose through the ranks from research planner to Chief Executive of the Guardian Media Group (GMG).

Your tenure as GMG Chief Executive was marked by bold decision-making. In 1999 you oversaw the launch of The Guardian's fully-fledged website, which became one of the world's leading news sites.

In 2010 you followed your adventurous instincts and jumped from one turbulent industry to another, moving from the media to aviation. After nearly two decades at The Guardian, you were ready for a radical career shift and took over the helm of the low-cost airline easyJet.

And it did not take you long to make your mark. You have overseen an impressive period of growth at easyJet, with profits rising every year since you became Chief Executive. EasyJet is now one of the world's most profitable airlines and one of the biggest in Europe, with almost 70 million passengers per year. That is what we call an undeniable success!

Under your leadership, easyJet has been playing its part in boosting trade with and travel to France. As a board member of the French Chamber of Commerce in Great Britain since 2012, you've reinforced the links between our two countries. EasyJet is today the second largest carrier in France, employs around 1,000 people and passed the 50 million passenger mark in 2015.

Besides France, the whole of Europe benefits from the many spin-offs of easyJet's success. Since its creation 20 years ago, the company has built a strong partnership with Airbus [*the two-hundred-and-fiftieth Airbus was delivered in twenty-fifteen*] and CFM International [*seven hundred and sixty engines delivered over the past two decades*], supporting thousands of jobs in France and Europe. EasyJet is therefore showcasing the success of European industry!

Over the years, your success and professionalism have been praised by your peers and the press, making you an influential and respected figure. The many distinctions awarded to you in recent years testify to this. To name but a few, you were made a dame in the New Year's

Honour List in 2016 for services to the aviation industry, as well as being awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for services to women in business.

As commonly spotted, you are one of just seven female CEOs running a FTSE 100 company. As such there is no doubt that you are, Carolyn, an inspiring role model for women everywhere. But more than inspiring them, you have been helping to empower them.

From 2005 to 2009, you chaired Opportunity Now, the UK's leading membership organization for gender equality and diversity at work. During those four years, you led a campaign to promote women's advancement in the workplace, a cause you also supported as the President of Women in Advertising and Communications London (WACL).

By becoming the first woman in the world to run an airline company, you have helped make the aviation industry aware of women's low level of involvement in the sector. Indeed, I was quite disappointed to learn that women account for less than 5% of airline CEOs and 5% of commercial pilots.

Indeed, there is a misguided idea that because the aviation industry is a technical one, it should be a male one. But aren't we celebrating this year the 75th anniversary of the death of Amy Johnson, the UK's most well-known and inspirational female pilot?

In this context, tonight I would like to pay tribute to your efforts to reverse this trend at easyJet. It is a measure of your support for women in the sector that you aim to double the proportion of female newcomers at all levels of the organization.

The recent promotion of a young female first officer, Kate McWilliams, as airline captain at the age of only 26 has shown the efforts your company is making to empower women. It is indeed important to have women at board level. But a company is, as we know, not only a

board. I therefore hope and believe that many young women will be inspired by you and Kate McWilliams.

Through your outstanding professional achievements, your talent and your support for women in the workplace, you contribute to both our countries' economic success. For all these reasons, you deserve the honour that the French Republic wishes to bestow on you.

Chère Carolyn McCall, au nom du Président de la République et en vertu des pouvoirs qui nous sont conférés, nous vous faisons Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur.