

Pics attached: 2012pr107pic1 Charlie Spedding; 2012pr107pic2 Alastair Stewart; 2012pr107pic3 Eddie Izzard; 2012pr107pic4 Norman Cornish; 2012pr107pic5 Ray Spencer

Comedy legend Eddie Izzard, newscaster Alastair Stewart and local Olympian Charlie Spedding will be among those honoured by the University of Sunderland next month.

Also being recognised at the university's annual awards ceremonies are two leading figures from the world of art – Norman Cornish, the last surviving artist of the Pitman Academy; and Ray Spencer MBE, executive director of the Customs House in South Shields.

The week-long graduation ceremonies, beginning July 9, are an opportunity for graduates to celebrate their success with friends, family and loved ones.

Eddie Izzard is one of the foremost stand-up comedians of his generation and has won two Emmy Awards during his career. Since his first stage appearance in London's West End in 1993, Eddie has repeatedly sold out across the world as well as broken box office records in the UK and America.

In August 2009 Eddie ran 43 marathons in 51 days for Sport Relief, raising £1.85 million.

Eddie Izzard is to receive an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from the university.

Alastair Stewart OBE is perhaps best known as presenter of the ITV News at Ten. He started his career working for Southern Television in 1976, joining News at Ten in 1989. He was the network's Washington Correspondent, covered the Gulf War in the 1990s, and has presented many of ITN's landmark programmes, including the Royal Weddings of the Prince and Princess of Wales and the Duke and Duchess of York. He moderated the first ever British live TV debate between the main Party Leaders ahead of the General Election in 2010.

Alastair Stewart OBE is to receive an Honorary Doctorate of Arts.

Charlie Spedding is the English record holder for the marathon, a winner of the London Marathon, and the last British athlete, male or female, to win a medal in the Olympic Marathon.

Charlie was born in Ferryhill, County Durham, and followed his father Joe into the pharmacy industry, graduating from the forerunner of the University of Sunderland, Sunderland Polytechnic, in 1974. In the early 80s Charlie briefly quit his career as a pharmacist to focus on his lifelong dream of becoming a professional athlete. In 1984 he won the London Marathon, and later that year he won a Bronze medal in the Los Angeles Olympics. To this day he is the English record holder for the marathon, at 2 hours, 8 minutes and 33 seconds.

Charlie Spedding is to receive an Honorary Fellowship from the university.

Norman Cornish will receive an Honorary Doctorate of Arts in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the arts, and in particular, in support of the mining community.

Norman began working in the mines in 1933 aged only 14. At aged 15 he joined the famous Pitman's Academy and began painting and drawing the world around him, eventually becoming a celebrated artist. His vivid paintings of ordinary life feature both realism and a nostalgic look at a world that no longer exists outside of his canvases. To this day, aged 92, he continues to chronicle the everyday lives of the people of Spennymoor.

Ray Spencer joined The Custom House in 2000 when the institution was on the verge of bankruptcy. Ray was tasked with saving South Shields' community theatre, cinema and art gallery.

Ray has turned around the fortunes of The Customs House with audiences flooding into the venue, making it a shining example of artistic and financial success.

Ray Spencer is to receive an Honorary Fellowship from the University of Sunderland.

University Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Fidler says: "Our honoraries have all made highly significant contributions within their fields and will inspire our graduates as they celebrate their academic success and embark on their careers. We look forward to welcoming them and are proud to pay tribute to them."

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