

Prince Philip to retire from public duties at age of 96



The Duke of Edinburgh will retire from public engagements in the summer at the age of 96, a decision that Buckingham Palace said had the full support of the Queen. Shortly after the news was announced, Prince Philip was on duty, and on customary form , joining the Queen at St James's Palace for a service and lunch for the Order of Merit.

When the mathematician Sir Michael Atiyah told him: "I'm sorry to hear you're standing down," Philip shot back: "Well I can't stand up much longer."

Tributes to the longest-serving royal consort in British history, who will turn 96 on 10 June, followed the announcement, first made to royal staff in the ballroom of Buckingham Palace on Thursday. The prime minister, Theresa May, said Philip had been a "steadfast support" to the Queen, while the Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, an avowed republican,

praised his "clear sense of public duty".

The Duke of Edinburgh awards, which he set up in 1956 and are now the world's leading youth achievement awards across 141 countries, were highlighted as one of his most striking achievements. An aide stressed it was not a medical decision. "The duke decided this is the right time. He's nearly 96 and most people will have retired 30 years earlier."

In a statement, Buckingham Palace said: "In taking this decision, the duke has the full support of the Queen. Prince Philip will attend previously scheduled engagements between now and August, both individually and accompanying the Queen.

"Thereafter, the duke will not be accepting new invitations for visits and engagements, although he may still choose to attend certain public events from time to time."

It added: "Her Majesty will continue to carry out a full programme of official engagement with the support of members of the royal family." The announcement was made as the autumn diaries of the royals are being drawn up to give a clear signal of Prince Philip's intention to the hundreds of organisations he is associated with. Philip, who famously describes himself as "the world's most experienced plaque unveiler" has undertaken 22,191 solo engagements and given 5,493 speeches in almost seven decades as the Queen's "strength and stay". He has never taken the official title of Prince Consort, despite it being offered. He has one of the royal family's busiest diaries, last year carrying out official meetings and visits on 110 days.

It means the Queen, whom the Philip has affectionately nicknamed "cabbage", will attend more solo engagements, or be accompanied by younger members of the royal family. The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge announced in January they were moving from Norfolk to London, with William giving up his job as an air ambulance helicopter pilot in the summer with the

intention of taking up more royal duties.

Prince Philip will spend more time at Windsor, enjoying leisure time. He is still an active carriage driver, though he no longer competes, and was seen driving his cart and horses through Windsor as recently as March. He also loves oil painting, and the outdoors. His barbecues are legendary, as the [former prime minister David Cameron attested on Twitter](#).

He will continue his association with the more than 780 organisations he is patron, president or a member of, though no longer play an active role by attending engagements. His particular fields of interest include scientific and technological research, industry, the environment and sport. He has authored 14 books.

Tributes poured in from the charities he supports. The conservation charity WWF said he was “a true champion of the environment”, while Muscular Dystrophy UK wished him “a well deserved and happy retirement”.

Book Aid International said the duke’s support had been “a privilege and an honour”. The dean of the chapel royal in Scotland, the Very Rev Prof Iain Torrance, thanked “our witty and eagled-eyed Duke of Edinburgh” for his “unstinting” promotion of organisations across the country.

The Eccentric Club in London said it looked forward to continuing its relationship and wished him “a most eccentric and delightful ‘retirement’”.

In recent years he has been admitted to hospital on a number of occasions for abdominal surgery, bladder infections and a blocked coronary artery.

Acknowledgement that he was thinking of retirement came on his 90th birthday, when he stepped down as president or patron of more than a dozen organisations and told the BBC in an interview: “I reckon I’ve done my bit,” adding: “It’s better

to get out before you reach your sell-by date.”

Seen as a moderniser, who chaired the royals’ Way Ahead Group, Philip was instrumental in abolishing the practice of debutantes being presented at court, and in instituting informal palace lunches drawing people from different walks of life together.

On his marriage, he effectively gave up a promising naval career, which could have seen him become first sea lord. It was curtailed in 1951 with the failing health of his father-in-law George VI. When on his 90th birthday, the Queen bestowed on him the title Lord High Admiral, titular head of the navy, it was seen as an affectionate tribute.

The mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, was among those who praised the duke not just for his seven decades of royal duties but also [“his time fighting for Britain during the second world war in the Royal Navy”](#). Philip was mentioned in dispatches for courage during the Battle of Cape Matapan.



Over his 70 years at the Queen's side – they celebrate their platinum wedding anniversary in November – he has seen the popularity of the royal family fluctuate, and his sense of humour sometimes translated into “gaffe-prone prince” headlines. It seems not to have bothered him.

He once told biographer Gyles Brandreth that the adulation of the royal couple in the early years of the Queen's reign was so unbelievable “it could have been corroding”. “It would have been very easy to play to the gallery, but I took the conscious decision not to do that. Safer not to be too popular. You can't fall too far,” he said.

While many paid tribute to Philip, the shadow business minister Chi Onwurah [tweeted](#): “Congratulations to Prince Philip on retiring in financial security at a time of his choosing from a job he enjoys #forthemanynotthefew #waspi,” referring to the Women Against State Pension Inequality campaign.

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