The wearing of academic robes can be traced back to medieval Europe, when all students were in clerical orders. Today, the robes worn by graduating students, academics and dignitaries form a distinctive element of the graduation regalia.

Academic dress comprises a gown, a coloured hood and a hat, the shape and colour of all of which differ from institution to institution. Gowns for graduating students at Leicester are traditionally black. The colour and pattern of hood varies depending on the award received.

Members of the academic procession wear the academic dress associated with the university from which they graduated, creating the rich variety of colours you see at the ceremony.