

CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME ADDRESS AT THE GUILDHALL PRIZE-WINNERS DINNER WEDNESDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2014

Your Excellencies, my lords ladies and gentlemen, a very warm welcome to the trust's guildhall celebration for the tenth round of the Queen's Anniversary Prizes for higher and further education.

We welcome in particular the heads of the twenty prize-winning institutions – seventeen universities and three colleges - in this round. During the entry procession you heard something of the work for which they are being honoured. We wanted this aspect of the evening – the educational and applied research content of the scheme – to be deliberately highlighted. The work is recorded in more detail in the printed report published today so there is no need for me to summarise the subject matter of the entries, but I do want to emphasise firstly that this evening is about content as well as enjoyment. All the universities and colleges represented here, and the many who have been similarly honoured in previous rounds, are here because of the work that they do and what it signifies in terms of quality, exceptionality and not least results. I know that Oliver Letwin, to whom we extend a special welcome, will speak about these themes in a few minutes so I will not pre-empt what he might say.

This all adds up to my remarks being very brief and you will I am sure welcome that. But I do want to make two or three points by way of a report to you about the prizes and where we think they currently stand in the national context. I will be making the same points rather more formally to Her Majesty tomorrow morning at the honours ceremony at Buckingham Palace where, with Prince Philip, she will present the prizes.

Firstly, while we are celebrating principally the achievement of these twenty institutions we also mark the tenth anniversary of this biennial honour and thus the twentieth anniversary of the inception of the scheme. The first Queen's Anniversary Prizes were awarded in 1994. Among the twenty-one prize-winners then were the universities of Glasgow, Leicester, Loughborough, Oxford, Manchester and UCL. They are here again this evening I see. Six colleges of further education were also honoured and it is a continuing driving principle of the scheme that it is open to the further and the higher education sectors to compete for recognition on equal terms and be assessed against standards. And each sector has so competed in each round to date and has done so with success in each round. We need to keep in mind of course that in 1994 there were fewer universities than there are now (and rather more colleges). To underline the openness of the prizes scheme I want to record that up to and including the present round Queen's Anniversary Prizes have been awarded to a total of 72 individual universities and 39 colleges. You can refer to all of these, and the subject areas, at the back of our printed report.

So this fact of the tenth anniversary leads to my second point which is that over the years the scheme – to use an expression that has acquired military overtones - has become embedded in our higher and further education

systems. It has also become well known and well understood in the minds of key national organisations and associations - I refer for example to UUK and the AoC; the Russell Group and the 157 group - which support these institutions and develop their position and their voice. The term embedded can sometimes imply a comfortable intimacy but this is not a characteristic of the scheme. People know that the criteria for the honour are, though simple, very exacting, and that the entry which each institution decides to put forward is rigorously and independently assessed. For that process we are indebted to the 350 or so well-informed and experienced members of our National Readers panel, to an unlimited range of specialist advisers whom we consult without reserve as an entry requires, and to high level advisory committees that help us by second-guessing other views and testing a wider or different spectrum of quality and relevance. My sincere thanks on the trust's behalf to all in this room and beyond it who have helped us so enthusiastically and professionally in this way.

Finally, I want to say that for all its continuity and its obvious and necessary elements of history and tradition, the royal anniversary trust maintains a dynamic approach to the working of the prizes scheme. We take note as we go along of changes in the structure and membership of the sectors, and of new developments in the delivery of education. recently we have discussed at some length for example the phenomenon of massive open online courses – MOOCS as they are known; we have noted the appearance on the scene of new institutions in the private as well as public-funded educational spheres; we have followed the stories of work that has been recognised in the scheme and helped the winners to publicise their achievements and successes. Tomorrow the times newspaper will publish a focus report on the prizes with additional editorial material about the winners.

I now want to introduce our guest speaker this evening the Rt Hon Oliver Letwin MP, minister for government policy. Oliver you have done us a great service by finding time in an increasingly busy political phase to come along and speak to us. We know that as a Cambridge philosopher you are well up to the task. We are delighted that we have representation through you, and support, from the central parts of central government. This also reflects the important and necessary help which the trust receives for its work from the cabinet office, the department for business, innovation and skills and the department for education. Ladies and gentlemen, the Rt Hon Oliver Letwin MP, Minister for Government Policy at the Cabinet Office.

- Kieran Poynter, Chairman, The Royal Anniversary Trust