

Speech by Sir Robin Gill, Chairman of The Royal Anniversary Trust, at the 2010 Queen's Anniversary Prizes Banquet at Guildhall, City of London

Your Royal Highness, your Excellencies, my lords, ladies and gentlemen – pretty difficult to follow that. Thank you very much indeed for those kind words. It destroys some parts of my speech and the words I was going to make – I'll do my best for you. You'll be relieved that it will truncate the length of the speech. I'll just try and do my best.

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you all this evening on behalf of the trustees. Tonight we salute the marvellous achievements of excellence of our 21 prize winners. Thank you, prize winners, for the great efforts you make to maintain the power and extend the success of your institutions, and your pupils. It is very important work for our country and for the world and I congratulate you all.

When you greeted our prize winners this evening you heard their surprising and extraordinary breadth of subject areas. Each of them, small or large, had however reached a refined class of sustained excellence of world interest. The Prizes Office have prepared a booklet for the Round for each of you to take home tonight. This describes the work of the prize winners in more detail. Do please make good use of it. That is part of the Prize.

Prize winners – tomorrow you go to the Palace where The Queen and Prince Philip will invest you with your national honour. And afterwards in a special reception that The Queen gives us you will see the genuine enthusiasm for, and pride in, your work. Both Her Majesty and His Royal Highness gave us this reception as a unique opportunity for your academic staff and your wonderful students to show your good spirits and tell her of your work and your hopes. I know you will.

Our trustees emphasise the importance of and are always grateful for the wonderful, practical, pro bono support that we receive from so many quarters – all of it given in the noble cause of education. Our thanks also go to Stuart Fraser and his colleagues at the City Corporation for their wonderful support in letting us use this great hall. We are also deeply grateful, as indeed most of you are, for the financial and other support of our benefactors and those are listed in our booklet. Thank you all very much indeed.

But the Trust is also appreciative of all our guests for joining us here tonight to press our work forward and magnify the use of The Prize. Thank you all very much indeed.

Our two speakers are Richard Levin – the very distinguished President of Yale University and an economist of bright peerlessness whose greatly admired pathway includes all parts of the world and close associations with the United Kingdom. Sir Graeme Davies, the vice-chancellor of London University – peerless administrator himself – a distinguished materials scientist and engineer whose pathway came from far abroad to UK academe and its central administration in both HE and FE and with great impact. Each of these great men is crucial to the protection and development of educational thought and its teachings, teachers and students. They continue to make stellar contributions at the altitude of higher and further education and I am very happy to introduce them to you.

At the very start of The Royal Anniversary Trust my ambition was to provide the nation with an opportunity for a direct expression of gratitude from the people to The Queen for her extraordinary devotion to duty and care for the nation over such a long period. Forty years then; fifty eight now. With Prince Philip, theirs was an inspiring example of excellence at work so we said thank you in a very powerful way. For The Queen's Anniversary Prizes my ambition was – through our head of state – to say thank you to you all. All of you successfully toil so hard to maintain world class standards and produce new achievements in university and college education. By drawing a spotlight on your work we were saying thank you to you in a dramatic way, to encourage you to continue to strive always for the best. But knowing that you have the appreciation of friends and allies, that is our purpose.

I was then going to say that I would be standing down quite soon. Not soon enough, you say. It has been a truly amazing ride. But the horse has never bucked and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for that. The good work will go on in the years ahead, widening the benefit that we seek to bring about. The Trustees will see to that. Please make good use of the occasion tonight, all of you, to open doors. I know you will take home a feast of ideas from the thoughts of Richard Levin and Graeme Davies and use them.