

Trevor Phillips' speech at Leeds Social Sciences Institute

Tuesday, 17 June 2008

Thank you for inviting me here to the Leeds Social Sciences Institute to talk about the role of the new Commission, and the way in which my colleagues and I are seeking to develop our strategy. There should always be, I think, a natural relationship between our Commission and what you might call boffin-land, and here more than anywhere else. To paraphrase a well-known political philosopher of the nineteenth century, if your job is to understand the world, our job is to change it and, to me, that sounds like the basis of a pretty productive and symbiotic relationship, a point to which I will return at the end of my remarks this evening.

All of you, I'm sure, will be aware of the complex genealogy of the EHRC. It carries the benefits and disbenefits of having a trio of well-known antecedents – heroic or infamous, depending on your point of view and which newspaper you happen to read. And that means that we come with a certain amount of baggage. So I want to start by saying something which may be obvious to most people in this audience but is still worth saying - the Equality and Human Rights Commission is a great deal more than a simple administrative and legislative tidying up exercise.

We carry all the mandates and most of the powers of our legacy Commissions on gender, disability and race. That is true. But we also have some new responsibilities, including the promotion of human rights. And we are the first statutory body charged with securing greater equality and good relations in the spheres of age, sexual orientation and religion or belief.

We have new and greater powers to discharge those responsibilities than did our predecessors. And we have a privileged status as one of only three publicly funded bodies with a statutory guarantee of independence from government – the other two being the Electoral Commission and the BBC, for obvious reasons. That guarantee is vital because it ensures that we can carry out our mandate to promote equality, human rights and good relations without fear or favour. It is also a recognition that the Equality and Human Rights Commission, like the BBC and the Electoral Commission, if we do our job properly, are likely to find ourselves at times having to be explicitly critical of a government's actions. What I had not anticipated, and probably would not have chosen is that such a situation would arise so early in our existence with the government's determination to press ahead with a 42-day period of detention without charge.

I want to say a word about why we have entered this particular fray because it tells you something about the kind of body we aspire to be.

This new Commission has its origins in bodies that stood up for the rights of the sorts of people that some newspapers alternately patronise and deride; women, minorities, the disabled.

When the Equal Opportunities Commission stood up for women they called them destroyers of the family.

When the Disability Rights Commission spoke out for a voice for the disabled they said that they should focus on welfare.

When the Commission for Racial Equality defended gypsies and travellers, well, it got really rather ugly.

But I think that people are beginning to see what we could be.

In a society, that is more unequal, and which threatens to be more illiberal and authoritarian; whatever the political weather, when governments change and pressure groups wilt; because we have a statutory presence and we have legal powers; one day this Commission, and I hope it doesn't have to happen on my watch, could be the last best hope of those who really believe that we should be a more equal society; of those who think that human rights and civil liberties are sacrosanct; of those who believe that there should always be a voice for the poor and dispossessed. We aren't that yet. But we could be.

That after all is what we are doing in relation to the government's plans to extend pre-charge detention to 42 days. We have made clear that we oppose their adoption; and that we will do everything in our power to prevent the implementation of those proposals. I have no idea what will happen in Parliament eventually. But even if the government wins, they get the Bill through the Lords, and they bring it into law, they will face us in the courts. That is our job, and that is our mission. But I talk about this because I think our opposition showed some other things about us.

It showed our independence from government. But we're not just a pressure group there to be oppositional.

It showed that we would base our views on real evidence, real legal advice, on our mandate and on consultation with communities.

It also showed that we mattered, even nine months into our existence; the fact that the Home Office went to some lengths to leak our letter to them ten days ago showed that they thought our opposition was damaging to them.

Finally it showed that despite the fact that we know that ours is not a popular position in the country we are all prepared to stick to it. And we are sticking to it because our Commission isn't simply here for ourselves.

We are here to protect and advance the fundamental principles laid down in our Act - equality, human rights, good relations.

What we are here for is, through thick and thin, to stand for a kind of idealism that seems to have passed out of public life. Yes, that idealism has to be realistic, and sometimes we will have to settle for compromises. And yes, we have to be flexible and work with people as they are and not just be people who send out bureaucratic compliance letters.

But behind all this I think has to stand a basic idealism that says our society can be better, for more people, more equal, more humane, and we will be here every hour of every day to remind people that this is what decent civilised societies are striving to do.

It is was striking that when we did a poll of the British people last autumn what they wanted us to prioritise. We did this the month before we opened, and I expected them to say, as do politicians and many of our stakeholders, that we should be providing services, handling complaints, providing a helpline and issuing guidance about the law.

Actually that isn't what they said.

They want us to do those things, yes, and they want us to do them well, but at the top of their priority list was an idea - the idea that we should be an advocate for fairness; that we should make the case for equality; and that we should be trying to change the way that our society works.

In short though the public want us to connect to reality - they want us to be the conscience of the nation, to be the idealists, to be the ones who hold our society to the hope, the promise of being better than it is today.

I also believe the fact that we are constituted differently from our legacy bodies is important and significant. There is a reason for this.

The reason is we have entirely some new tasks to perform:

- where our predecessors had to be advocates of the rights of one group or another we can't afford to do that - the country expects us to lead on the balancing of the rights of different claims to fairness. For example in my previous work as chair of the Commission for Racial Equality I could worry about the disadvantage of minority women, and what I was really interested in was their minority status without being too precise about how much of their disadvantage came from being women within a certain community . This Commission can't get away with dividing women's race from their gender.
- we could all be a bit blasé about class and poverty because our issues were gender or race or disability; but that's not possible for any longer. We could identify groups by their race or gender, but our research tells us this would be wrong. Poverty and class is as much of an issue for many as race.

We have moved past the point where we characterise inequality by segment alone. Instead we are moving back perhaps to old-fashioned ideas of class and poverty as indicators of disadvantage.

We could talk about flexibility at work purely as a way of evening things up for women; but that can't be good enough for us. We've got to be more radical still - not just looking for measures that accommodate women so that they can work like men, but rethinking the whole workplace so that people and families operate differently altogether. Bear in mind that in the next twenty years the workforce in this country will be made up of a majority of women.

This new Commission isn't an accident of politics.

It is a recognition that one chapter in the long, slow forward march of equality and human rights in Britain is over and another has begun, with different demands and different pressures.

And like so much else that is happening around us, I think we have to see this next chapter as much in a global as in a national context. The extraordinary and unprecedented movement of people, money, goods and services around the world gives the task we are engaged in a far greater significance than it has ever had before.

We are dealing with something that, in terms of urgency and scale, is on a par with climate change if not more significant.

Let me put it this way. How we treat the planet is one of the great overarching challenges of our time. But the other, I would argue possibly more urgent, is how we treat each other.

And there is a good deal more that holds the two together than a neat phrase. Living as we do in a global economy with a global labour market, we have to consider equality and rights at work in a global context. And living, as we do, in a world in which 200 million people are working outside the country of their birth, we have to consider issues of our rights and human rights on a scale that encompasses that reality. By the way that figure was only 100 million twenty-five years ago.

Nor can we assume the flow of migration is always going to be from Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa into the UK. Our children and grandchildren may well have as compelling an ambition to work in India or Brazil or China as young people in those countries today have to come to the United Kingdom.

We are thinking about a global issue.

We are all in this together, wherever we live, just as we are all in it together when it comes to the impact of climate change. We need

solutions that are sustainable and the only truly sustainable solutions are those that are just and are felt to be just – in other words the ones that are based on mutual respect and dignity.

In a democracy that is the only way to make it work. Coming back to the issue of climate change and the idea of 'living graciously' with one another, at its most basic, you can't advance the proposition that car pools are a good way of reducing traffic congestion and pollution if you do not start with the assumption that commuters will have sufficient empathy with their neighbours to make them want to share a car at all.

These two challenges sit together, and we must solve them together.

And just as in the area of environmental sustainability we make the case that mutuality is the key – that social responsibility is the pre-condition of a good environment for each of us as individuals – so we have to make the same argument about the social environment: that the pursuit of equality is in the interests of each of us as individuals, because it fosters economic efficiency and therefore economic growth, and because it helps maintain the cohesion and the security of our communities.

Well, outside civilised gatherings of this kind, that is never an easy sell and it is not necessarily in accord with people's gut instincts. We always want to look after our own and the idea that people always want equality is not always true. Commenting on women's rights in his *Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* of 1928, George Bernard Shaw wrote: 'Idiots are always in favour of inequality of income because it is their only chance of achieving eminence.'

He then went on to proclaim loftily that 'The really great are in favour of equality' leaving his readers in little doubt as to where he placed himself in the story!

But, of course, it's not just idiots who feel threatened by equality. It's people who feel under threat themselves, who see the equality agenda, for example as a bureaucratic interference – something which is nothing to do with them and will be of no particular benefit to them.

In times of prosperity and stability it is pretty hard to make the argument that social justice contributes to economic dynamism rather than detracting from it. Even more difficult to make that argument at times of radical and fundamental and unsettling change.

But if my analysis is correct and the task we are engaged in is as significant and as urgent as addressing climate change, it is an argument we have to make and, more importantly, an argument in which we have to seek to engage every section of society, not just those that currently are or feel themselves to be at a disadvantage.

I believe we have to go back to first principles to learn how to do that, and in doing so shift the debate on from a traditional view of equality as the minimising of disadvantage to a much more broadly based notion of fairness that involves every single one of us. Let me explore that for a moment.

The history of anti-discrimination legislation in the United Kingdom is, crudely a history of prohibitions – of 'thou shalt nots' backed up by punishment for the transgressors and compensation for the victims. But that is a view of equality and rights, which assumes a sort of stable consensus view of what is normal.

The history of equal pay, for example, is largely predicated on the assumption that there is a consistent benchmark from which to measure equality – and the benchmark, the baseline if you like, was an able-bodied, partnered, white man in full-time employment. Does that make sense anymore? By 2010 able-bodied white men in full-time

employment will account for just fewer than 20% of the workforce. Not a very useful benchmark any more.

And here are a few other facts about what the evolving labour market of our country will look like in 2010:

- 80% of the growth in the workforce will be accounted for by women
- 40% of the workforce will be over 45
- 20% will have a disability
- and half the total growth of the working age population will be accounted for by ethnic minorities.

Looked at in that light, it is no longer enough for us to be thinking about issues of equality and human rights simply in terms of enabling minorities to overcome disadvantage and mimic the so-called white, male, under-45, non-disabled norm. There is no longer a norm in that traditional way. There is going to be a multiplicity of different needs and aspirations. In a pluralistic society the business of safeguarding fairness for others and feeling that we ourselves are being treated fairly has got to be a more inclusive one in which that variety of needs and aspirations is understood and respected.

We are no longer playing catch-up for minorities.

That is why equality has to move from being the concern of a few specialist and disadvantaged groups to being a central part of our national conversation. We don't yet even have the terms of that conversation. But the basic premise of equality and rights legislation has got to move away from measures that outlaw exclusion to measures that positively promote inclusion.

Of course that does not mean we abandon the business of agreeing, setting and achieving benchmarks for a decent life, a decent wage and decent working conditions. It does mean that the comparabilities by

which we assess whether we, and our neighbours, are getting a fair deal or not become much more complicated – with all the attendant dangers of disadvantage, discrimination, exploitation and prejudice finding new ways of getting a foothold. In turn, that is why we have to initiate a much bigger and broader debate that engages every part of society and it impacts on everyone in society.

Almost every measure of how we live today makes the need for that wider debate plain. The statistics will be familiar to many in this audience but it is worth repeating some of them all the same.

There are already 9.4 million people in Britain over the age of 65 and that is expected to increase to 12.4 million by 2021. By 2026 the demand for informal care for the elderly will nearly double but, at present, neither the financial nor the human resources are there to deal with it.

Other changes to family life:

In 1974 the number of lone parents as a proportion of households was 8%. In 2006 that figure was 24%.

Britain's ethnic minority population is likely to go on growing - from 9% today to 11% by the end of the decade and the diversity of that population is likely to go on increasing. We used to think of ethnic minority communities in terms of black/brown/white. Then we got a bit more sophisticated and thought of five or six major communities. Today there are already forty communities in London with population over 10,000.

The numbers of people living with a disability are also increasing and the rate of increase is accelerating – the greatest growth is among children under 16.

This means that every day we confront a population, and a student body, that is objectively more diverse.

The labour market is also changing. There are more service sector jobs and more jobs that need higher education qualifications and higher-level skills. Around a million new jobs will be created by 2012 – three-quarters of them in education, health, personal and social care, and retailing.

That sounds good – a steady growth in high-value and mostly high-skilled work. But the reality is that we are potentially entering a twin-track economy of skilled and unskilled work with less and less possibility of crossover between the two. Nine out of ten adults with a degree are in work. But only five out of ten adults with no qualifications work and the chasm between the two is growing wider, not narrower.

Flexible working and short-term contracts are becoming more and more common, offering greater opportunities with one hand and diminishing ambition and security on the other. Wider background trends in employment point to the fact that there will be more women, older people, ethnic minorities and disabled people working, seeking work and facing disadvantages which are likely to deepen and intensify.

This all adds up to a society in which there are more opportunities for some, but fewer opportunities for others. Inequality becomes built into how our society works as it become more fragmented.

Any one of these changes throws up new challenges. And, in addition to these quantifiable indicators of change there is plenty of evidence that attitudes are changing too. Whereas a generation ago most people would say you had to be white to qualify as British, today 85% say in effect that they are puzzled by the idea that race should be a factor in whether you are considered British.

Even amongst the older generation, there are changes, triggered by the simple fact of meeting people from different backgrounds.

Let's bear something in mind: our research tells us that a majority of us - 51% - are unlikely to work in a setting where there are people of different ethnicities to ourselves; two thirds of us haven't shared a social occasion with someone from a different group in the past twelve months in their home or our own.

And the place we are most likely to meet someone of a different ethnicity is in a shop. So the moments we do meet are precious. And life changing.

So it does matter who we meet and how. In a society which risks the kind of fragmentation I talked about, the search for something which brings people together is central to public policy.

I draw encouragement from this evidence of greater sophistication of expectation and greater awareness that institutional as well as individual attitudes condition the climate in which we live. To me it signals the extent to which our society is ready to move to that new level of debate.

An obvious analogy is the ban on smoking in public places. Hard to believe that we used to puff away in buses, trains and cinemas as well as pubs and offices. Hard to believe there was a time when most smokers stoutly refused to acknowledge that their habit was killing them, let alone their partners and children. But we know that now. And although the ban has been a long time coming and was not uncontroversial when it came, it is now inconceivable that we will ever go back to where we were before. It hasn't stopped people smoking but it has radically altered the balance of what is and what is not acceptable public behaviour.

My point is that there is a place for public policy in managing the social trends of which I've been speaking.

I don't believe for a moment that greater awareness of discrimination, by itself, will change behaviour. A recent piece of research we conducted at the Commission revealed that nearly half our respondents – 46% - believe they have faced discrimination on all sorts of grounds. The most significant one was race. Interestingly, discrimination on the ground of gender is thought to be a big issue by only a minority of people – fewer than think there is discrimination on the basis of weight. Almost three quarters believed that discrimination was most prevalent in the workplace. But we are now in a position to move the debate on and get beyond the numbers – and we need to move it on.

In doing so we must also have the wisdom to acknowledge that some of our problems may lie with the way we have allowed the debate to be framed in the past.

Here is an example:- 80% of employers say they believe they can violate equality legislation with impunity. It is a safe bet that an even higher percentage is unclear as to whether they are violating it or not. In 2006 The Federation of Small Businesses reported that its legal helpline was receiving an average of 240 calls a day from members struggling with the intricacies of employment law. Can we be surprised that this has happened?

Consider this. Our anti-discrimination arsenal now includes:

- 13 Codes of Practice
- 16 European Commission Directives
- 35 Acts of Parliament and
- 52 statutory Instruments

A grand total of 116 individual items of legislation and regulation that spread across 4,000 pages of close print.

It's not just confusing. It's almost certainly counter-productive. Like tax laws, the more complicated we make our anti-discrimination legislation the easier it is to wriggle around it – or at least get a good lawyer to wriggle round it for you. And it is almost certain that a small business has no idea whether they are transgressing or not.

We need to seek a new consensus. The clearer the principles upon which the law is based, the more acceptable it will be to everyone. The simpler the law itself can be, the more accessible it will be to everyone.

The emphasis of the way we frame our anti-discrimination legislation in future must be on practicality and clarity. Most of all we need to support a trend, pioneered in legislation by the present government, to put more power into the hands of individual citizens, consumers, shareholders and employees to hold employers and public authorities to account.

That may be to state the obvious but sometimes stating the obvious is no bad thing.

The United States Declaration of Independence opens with that wonderful phrase: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident...' Our ambition should be to make the purpose, the value and the applicability of our laws on equality and human rights self-evident.

Let's not forget that the real heritage we are dealing with is not some tick-box bureaucracy and professional political correctness. It's a heritage of passionate commitment to core human values fought for by citizens and still needing to be fought for, by the way. Our job is to re-interpret that heritage for today so that it provides the basis for an individual's being able to unlock their talent and for a community's being able to play its full part in the life of the wider society.

Let me come back, as part of that re-interpretation, to our job in the new Commission to look out for where we are going for the wrong target, or evading the difficult conversation, or missing the elephant in the room. We know that anti-discrimination law fails to impact on many of the cultural and economic causes of inequality. I want to focus for a minute on something I discussed earlier – a word that has become very unfashionable in our language, but whose potency remains. The word is – ‘class’.

Class, as the term suggests, is just that – a categorisation based on a range of external factors which, taken together, tend to either constrain or enhance an individual’s circumstances, their achievement, their ambitions and their material and physical well-being irrespective of that person’s individual qualities and abilities.

In a society such as ours, which upholds personal attributes and qualities as the only meaningful arbiter of our destiny, that’s what we believe, class is one of the most disabling and insidious forms of discrimination – and yet we have banned the term to the margins of public and political debate in the last ten to twenty years, and have almost abandoned any vocabulary that might equip us to discuss it intelligently.

We have reduced it, as I was saying earlier on, to the point where it is only applied, incorrectly as I believe, to one small group in our society – poor white families, many of them living in households where there is no regular wage-earner. For the rest, it seems, we are quite embarrassed to talk about it. Maybe we should.

I may disappoint some of you here tonight by saying that my purpose in saying this is not to re-energise and promote class war but to draw attention to the fact that I think one of our roles at the Equality and Human Rights Commission must be to initiate and broker those tricky conversations that we tend to avoid in the past, and, as our Commission

knows better than any other institution in Britain, sometimes language really counts – words really matter

We want:

- A more inclusive approach.
- A more positive stance in favour of promoting equality rather than rooting out inequality.
- A simpler and more transparent framework for legislation in the future.

These are grand ambitions.

Let me finally say a few words about how we begin to advance them in a practical sense. Much of our early focus at the Commission has been on bringing together some of these ideas to provide the fabric for a Single Equality Bill which not only provides some practical solutions to the issues of today, but gives a clear indication of how we intend to move on to the issues of tomorrow.

Our advocacy for a new Bill, is based on three perceived needs:

1. the need to transform the morass of existing legislation into a coherent set of clear, transparent and practical proposals
2. the need to nurture an approach to employment law which allows individuals to express their talent to the full, to be appropriately rewarded and help make UK business globally competitive
3. the need to build a real consensus around the notion of fairness

The new Act should be less prescriptive as to means and bolder as to outcomes.

It should move the basis of equality law from the negative to the positive – from the ‘you must not’ I mentioned earlier, to ‘you may, you can, you

should' and – occasionally – 'you must'. To that extent, it should be aiming to empower individuals, organisations and communities, not constrain them.

In a nutshell, the metaphor we often use is we want to move from handing out umbrellas to those caught in the storms of discrimination and disadvantage towards a much bigger ambition – we need to change the weather.

How could a single Bill begin to achieve this? Let me set out some propositions.

First, to use the power of the public sector. We propose to pull together the present range of public sector duties into one single duty to promote equality, focusing on practical outcomes, not tokenistic paper exercises and to extend that duty across all the grounds of inequality. Public bodies provide a systematic means of tackling major entrenched inequalities and equality gaps in health, education, criminal justice and local citizenship and participation – and they can do so on a scale that should have real impact on the overall life of our society.

With effective management, they can ensure that the concerns of particular groups are integrated into the planning processes and policy development right from the start, so that those who currently suffer disadvantage can begin to shape their own routes out of it, rather than continue to claim compensation because of it.

Essentially, the single duty should require any body carrying out public functions such as a university for example, or funded by the public purse to promote equality for all - regardless of factors such as race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation and religious or other belief, to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment and to positively promote good relations.

And the effect of this single duty could be further enhanced by some simple additional measures such as

- using public sector inspectorates to monitor the way in which the duty has been implemented
- allowing local residents to trigger action by an inspectorate if those residents believe that policies are promoting inequality.
- requiring contractors to meet the same equality requirements as their public sector clients.

Secondly, we think we should use the enormously powerful lever of public procurement.

Currently running at £125 billion a year, public procurement could be and should be a significant engine of change. In its evidence to the 2005 Equalities Review, even the CBI pointed out that: '...public procurement is a highly effective lever for increasing diversity and ... should be used more effectively by the public sector to further spread good practice in the private sector.'

The existing legal and policy framework is so complex that it leaves many public sector bodies unclear about how to apply social considerations to procurement decisions.

We think that the Equality Bill could address this with two simple measures – requiring public authorities to include and consider equality criteria when they are procuring goods and services; and allowing public authorities to refuse to do business with firms which have been subject to a court or tribunal finding under equality legislation, unless it is clear that steps are being taken to resolve the issue. Why should a hospital, for example, do business with a company that has been convicted of discrimination?

Thirdly, to provide speedier redress for those who seek it.

The Bill should provide speedier justice than is available at present to those who have suffered systematic pay discrimination, by allowing both employees and employers to find collective means of settlement outside the courts if they are willing to do so. We've had thirty years of tribunal cases on equal pay. They have failed to eliminate the disparities between men's and women's pay. There are currently something like 50,000 equal pay cases being brought by local council employees; a figure that is likely to rise to 150,000 during the course of the year.

The Equality Bill could cut through this log-jam of injustice by introducing representative actions, in effect allowing tribunals to resolve many similar cases simultaneously by dealing with the issues of principle involved in one.

Fourthly, to influence change in the private sector.

The Bill could do more to promote transparency and accountability in the private sector, thereby helping to highlight both good practice and poor practice. We do not believe it makes sense to attempt to impose the same duties on private sector employers as on the public sector but the Bill should aim to make good employment practice a more prominent element of competitive advantage for good employers.

It could, for example, require businesses to publish equality and diversity data if asked for by shareholders; it could insist they appoint a senior member of staff to be accountable for performance on equality and to include equality deficits as a component of risk assessment procedures.

Fifthly, we need to facilitate positive action.

The Bill should provide greater clarity for organisations wishing to take positive action to overcome entrenched disadvantage, and allow them greater flexibility in responding to the different and particular needs of their consumers and employees.

Under present legislation employers and service providers are unclear what is permitted and, rather than run the risk of falling foul of the law, they prefer to do nothing. The sad result is that common sense initiatives to extend access to groups of people who are excluded from jobs or services are not taken, including initiatives of potential social benefit such as the efforts of police forces to provide better and more representative public services.

The Bill should make that clear by explaining what positive action is permitted, and should set out a process allowing exemption from particular equality enactments where the clear intention is to further the wider benefit of a more equal society.

Finally, to keep it simple.

The Bill should aim for the maximum simplicity and transparency, including making clear to public and private sector organisations, and individuals, what is expected of them and what the consequences are for breaches of the law.

All of this is vital. I have talked about equality legislation at length because I want to move it from an arcane pursuit for lawyers, trade unionists and Guardian editorial writers to a wider public discourse. I want to end by focusing on the role that academic institutions such as this one can play in the process. I know that your Institute is already closely involved in many of the big areas I have been talking about – in thinking about population change, migration, cosmopolitanism, ageing and the implications of all these phenomena for equality, diversity and security in a globalised world.

That work is vital if we are to move ahead in the way I have been talking about. Governments and public agencies love to talk about evidence-based policy-making. It makes us feel that we are on solid ground. But, of course, the world is rarely that simple. Governments act under the

constraints of time, of financial limits, of lobbying and party management. That is inevitable.

And in a country such as ours with its complex layers of legislation, the impact of European legislation and of world affairs, the law of unintended consequences plays out in a myriad of ways every day.

On top of all that, we are moving into genuinely uncharted territory. There are so many things we don't know.

As academics I'm sure many of you will be familiar with the story of Albert Einstein who was asked by a rather nervous and overawed neighbour at a formal university dinner if he would care to tell the table about whatever he was currently doing in the way of research. The great man replied: 'If I knew what I was doing enough to explain it, I wouldn't call it research.'

We all tend to base our strategies and our analysis on our experience of the past rather than our ability to foresee the future. Of course that is inevitable. And in politics we do often find it hard to resist the temptation to stray across the line from evidence based policy making to policy based evidence making.

But sometimes we need push ahead into the territory of real research. To find out about those know unknowns, and sometimes the unknown unknowns. That is where the role of a university becomes of immense importance - thinking the unthinkable, interrogating the assumptions, testing the hypotheses, querying the strategy of the public agency or the data of the government department.

And after a decade in which a culture of target-setting has dominated so much of our public life, some times with less than happy results, there is a special importance in universities, as independent institutions, helping us arrive at a place where if policy is genuinely to be evidence-based,

the evidence is worth having – that it is derived from measuring things of real value rather than just ascribing value to that which we already know how to measure.

That is the way we will evolve the policies we need to advance equality and human rights in our globalised society in a sustainable way and arrive at a point at which the value of what we do, and seek to do, is held by the majority of our fellow citizens to be fair, just and 'self-evident'.

And I look to you to work with us in making that task, in this society, a reality.

Thank you very much.