

Speech at The Foundation for Science and Technology, Learned and Professional Societies Luncheon on 28 September, 2018

Thank you for that kind introduction, and to the Foundation for the invitation to speak to you here today.

I would like to take this opportunity to speak to you about the Government's Civil Society Strategy, published in August following a period of significant engagement with charities, businesses and across government. The Strategy sets the vision for how the Government will work with and for civil society over the next decade or so. I'll try to focus on areas that may be of particular interest or relevance to learned and professional societies.

Before I start on the strategy, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the fact that we are living in uncertain times, politically and economically. We don't yet know what the final shape of our exit from the EU will look like, and across the political spectrum there are divergent views. We do know that whatever the outcome, it will have profound long-term implications for the UK and its place in Europe and the world. We also know that there is to be a budget at the end of October, and that the Chancellor has re-emphasised the need for fiscal restraint given the size of the deficit.

We face a number of long-term societal challenges. These include a growing and ageing population, putting new demands on the NHS and social care services.

There are major environmental challenges which we must address for the sake of future generations.

The housing shortage needs new and bold solutions.

The pace of change of technology is disrupting and changing the way we work, consume media, communicate and do business.

Government alone cannot respond to all the challenges or seize all the opportunities. Big societal challenges are being tackled through solutions that bring together public services, private sector businesses, and communities in collaborative effort. That is what the Civil Society Strategy is about.

It is the social companion to the Government's growth and productivity focused Industrial Strategy.

The government believes that social value – enriched lives and social justice – flows from thriving communities. These are communities with a sufficient stock of financial, physical, natural, and social capital, in other words resources including public funding, private investment, buildings, and spaces for community use, as well as trust, connectedness, and goodwill. Thriving communities make life better for everyone and naturally prevent or reduce social problems.

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The government believes we need to strengthen the 'five foundations of social value', namely people, places, the social sector, the private sector, and the public sector. I will take each in turn.

1. People

People taking action is the bedrock of a strong society. Our vision is that people have a sense of control over their future and that of their community. Our Place Based Social Action programme with the Big Lottery Fund is helping communities to collaborate with local private and public sector organisations to create a shared vision for the place they live and work in.

In particular, young people should have a central role in shaping the future of our society. The Government will build on the cross-sector partnership created by the #iwill campaign, to identify how the existing offer for young people can be improved. The National Citizen Service Trust is being established as an independent public body accountable to parliament and ministers. In addition, the government will allocate £90 million from dormant accounts to an ambitious youth initiative, delivered by a new independent organisation which will ensure that major employers and social sector organisations work together to help the most disadvantaged young people transition into work.

2. Places

Like the Industrial Strategy the Civil Society Strategy has a Place Foundation - Global Britain is rooted in local Britain. We want to encourage a more collaborative place-based approach. By working with public service providers and the private sector as well as individuals and communities in a place, we will make more sensitive and appropriate policy, achieve better social and economic outcomes and make brilliant places for people to live and work in.

This is about working differently - rather than public servants working in silos accountable to Whitehall, they need to work together and with local communities to co-design services and pool budgets.

Key to successful place-based work is empowering local people in the decisions that affect them. For example devolving more power to community groups and parish councils, including service delivery and local decision making.

A core part of a strong place-based approach is targeted investment in a place that benefits the community living there.

The future UK Shared Prosperity Fund will help tackle inequalities between communities and raise productivity, adopting an inclusive growth model. New models of finance will play an increasingly important role including crowd-funding for public infrastructure, boosting social impact investment; and developing new models of investment in local communities, funded by money from dormant accounts.

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3. The Social Sector

Charities and social enterprises - the social sector - are at the core of civil society. A strong social sector is a sign of a strong democracy.

We want charities and social enterprises to be fully confident in their right to speak in public debates and to have a strong role in shaping policy and speaking up on behalf of those they support. We want to work alongside the social sector to help it build a future in which the sector can adapt and thrive, strengthening public trust, as well as finding new ways to resource and deliver their work.

So, for example, we will renew our commitment to the principles of the Compact; a series of principles and commitments that govern the relationship between the social sector and the government.

We will work with civil society to establish the principles of effective involvement in the policymaking process, learning from the examples of good practice that already exist.

There is some evidence that the social sector is not taking full advantage of the digital revolution, so we will work with civil society and private sector partners to explore how best to use digital to build a stronger and even more effective social sector.

Our work with the Charity Commission, Fundraising Regulator, and others is seeking to strengthen public trust and confidence in the social sector. For example our approach to strengthening safeguarding practices has been developed working closely with the social sector and its regulators, and will be focused on making it easy for charities get it right.

We also expect to see the Charity Commission's own strategy very shortly. I haven't seen it yet but the Commission's chair, Baroness Tina Stowell has already said that she sees the Commission's role as representing the public interest in charities, so I would expect to see a strong focus on supporting public trust and confidence.

4. The Private Sector

Business can be a strong force for good, and we want to develop this further. We are starting to see a shift from businesses delivering good as an add-on – for example a corporate social responsibility programme – to delivering social value through their mainstream core business. Many leading businesses are increasingly putting social and environmental responsibility at the heart of what they do.

A key part of the strategy will be to develop further our approach to responsible business. We are setting up a responsible business Leadership Group to lead the debate about the role of business in society and to put in place actions to support businesses to fulfil this role. The Inclusive Economy Partnership is already

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supporting increased collaboration between business, the social sector, and government departments to solve some of the toughest challenges in society.

We will explore with the tech sector how we can harness the power of technology in addressing complex social issues, such as tackling loneliness, healthy ageing, online safety, and digital inclusion. And, working with the Big Lottery Fund we will apply £55 million from dormant accounts to fund a new, independent organisation which will work with partners across the private and social sectors to tackle financial exclusion.

5. The Public Sector

The government's vision for public services is one of collaborative commissioning – working with communities, businesses and the social sector to respond to needs most effectively. We want local players to be involved in an equal and meaningful way in how services are created and delivered. All the resources of a community, including public funding, should be deployed to tackle the community's challenges.

So we will support the spread of Citizen Commissioners - local people with a key role in making commissioning decisions on behalf of their communities.

Public spending needs to generate social value in addition to the goods and services it purchases. We want to increase social value commissioning across all levels of Government, improving the use of the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012. The Act requires public sector commissioners to 'consider' economic, social, and environmental factors in their procurement. It was a milestone in the development of civil society. The Act has tremendous potential and there are already some excellent examples of social value commissioning – the challenge is to expand these and make social value commissioning the mainstream. So central government will apply the terms of the Social Value Act to goods and works as well as services. We will also be expected to 'account for' the social value of new procurements, rather than just 'consider' it as currently.

Over time, we should increasingly see procurements include consideration of social value alongside quality and value for money.

Relevance to Learned and Professional Societies

So that is a run-through of the Civil Society Strategy – our vision for working with and for civil society over the next decade or so. But I hear you ask how is the Civil Society Strategy relevant to my organisation?

Learned and professional societies occupy a unique space within civil society. You perform an important role in promoting education and debate for the benefit of the public, and in ensuring that various professions meet high standards and the public's expectations.

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I think there are some clear areas where the Government's Civil Society Strategy is relevant to your organisations.

The first is trust and confidence. This is a precious commodity which can be easily and quickly lost, but is hard to rebuild. We have recently seen the impact that the safeguarding scandals have had on major aid charities, and the wider negative impact this has on public trust in charities. So, for example, I would encourage you to review your safeguarding and whistleblowing policies if you haven't done so recently, as this is in the news and is an area where several charities, albeit on the international stage, have dropped the ball. Keep an eye out for an announcement, new guidance, training and support for charities in this space over the coming months.

Your organisations and your members represent hugely important sources of expertise and knowledge, and you may want to review how you can collaborate with Government on policy development. There could be some real opportunities here to inform and aid in policy development, but it does require the investment of time to build the relationships that can make all the difference.

What is your youth offer – how are you helping to bring through the next generation of your membership?

When you procure something, do you take into account social value as well as quality and value for money?

I could go on, but I will stop here. To conclude, I will simply say that the Strategy sets out the future we want, which is one of collaboration and 'co-creation'. Everyone is invited and has a part to play – and I look forward to working together to realise the vision.

Thank you