

# Civil Society and government - the next decade

## Foundation annual luncheon for learned and professional societies

Date and Location:	28th September 2018 at The Honourable Society of Gray's Inn
Chair:	The Earl of Selborne GBE FRS House of Lords
Speaker:	Ben Harrison MBE Policy Manager, Office for Civil Society, Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport
Vote of Thanks:	Jon Poole Chief Executive, Institute of Food Science and Technology
Sponsor:	Kingston Smith LLP

The 2018 luncheon was chaired by the Earl of Selborne GBE FRS, Chair of the Foundation for Science and Technology. Ben Harrison MBE from the Office of Civil Society, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport spoke on the Government's Civil Society Strategy, a vision for the next decade.

Mr Harrison summarised the Government's approach. The societal challenges we faced around population growth, environment and housing needed to be managed through collaboration between government and civil society. The Civil Society Strategy<sup>1</sup> published in August 2018 should be viewed as a companion to the Industrial Strategy. It was based around support for thriving communities which required trust, connectedness and goodwill to flourish.

Greater local control, through services which were co-designed with local communities, was important. Younger people also needed to be better involved in local decisions.

The social sector should have more

<sup>1</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-society-strategy-building-a-future-that-works-for-everyone](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-society-strategy-building-a-future-that-works-for-everyone)

effective involvement in the policy process, using the digital revolution to connect more effectively. The strengthening of safeguarding practices in charities helped to increase public trust in the sector.

The business community had a role in mainstreaming social value delivery across the private sector, tackling financial exclusion and supporting initiatives such as the responsible business leadership group.

The public sector should develop more collaborative commissioning involving local groups to engage all the community. Social value commissioning was already recognised under the 2012 Act as legitimate, alongside traditional value for money and quality issues.

The Learned and Professional Societies' had a key role in promoting education and debate about how to increase trust and confidence in decision making; and as a major source of expertise and knowledge. They should continue to take the time to engage with government, including on how to better engage youth in these issues. The Strategy provided a framework for working together in the future.

Questions included how to manage the risk that devolved decision making would lead to

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different outcomes – the ‘postcode lottery’ issue – and in practice help the better off. Mr Harrison noted that there was already a large devolution of services. The focus might be on getting more genuine community views fed into decisions so that these led to outcomes that met local needs.

It was suggested that the government did not pay much attention when things were already going right; arguably that reflected implicit recognition of the high standards of many organisations. In relation to statutory recognition of new qualifications, Mr Harrison said that if the current system was working well there was a case for leaving it in place.

Open access to publications was highlighted as a major problem for academic and other institutions.

Any benefits from this policy did not accrue to learned societies. Similarly the government’s words of support for the third sector needed to be backed up by action, including to strengthen the position of charities. Mr Harrison noted that we were still at the very beginning of a ten year strategy, and the government was working closely with stakeholders and businesses to ensure it would be implemented effectively.

Thanking the speaker, Mr Poole underlined the importance of effective two way communication with the government. The Foundation provided a good way for all the Learned and Professional Societies to stay in touch with each other on these issues.

Sir Martin Donnelly KCB CMG

Ben Harrison’s script from his presentation is on the website - [www.foundation.org.uk](http://www.foundation.org.uk).