

Chair's speech to the Charity Commission Annual Public Meeting 2020

Good morning and thank you for taking part in our Annual Public Meeting.

The decision to hold this meeting online was born of necessity. As with much of how we have all gone about our work over the past six months.

I would have preferred for us to come face-to-face, somewhere out in the real world in England or Wales, as we have been doing since I became Chair – with our last two public meetings held in Manchester and Bristol.

It matters to me that the Commission is visible and accountable to the public we serve – like the people we saw on that short video as we opened this meeting. And it matters to me that we are accessible to the charities we regulate because we rely on each other to serve the public interest.

But while the circumstances are not as we would have hoped, I'm pleased that they have one happy side effect: more people are taking part than has ever been the case, with over 5,000 people registering an interest in joining our broadcast today.

I therefore would like to extend an especially warm welcome to all those who are new to a Commission public meeting. I hope you find it valuable.

Where else to start, then, but with the upheaval brought on by Covid.

Few of us alive today will have experienced a collective crisis of this scale.

Many charities have played a crucial part in the national response to the crisis – from the Red Cross delivering food and medicine to the most vulnerable, to specialist care homes, whether for the disabled or the elderly – working flat out to support their beneficiaries' needs despite the challenges of lockdown whilst keeping them safe from the threat of the virus.

And it's not just established charities that have risen to the challenge. The whole nation has.

Since March, we have seen just how deep charitable instinct runs in Britain. We have seen evidence of huge generosity, volunteering spirit, of courage and determination to do good for others, for our communities.

We've seen Captain Tom, a war veteran who epitomised dignity and decency when walking laps of his garden with tireless, cheerful determination, become a powerful beacon of charitable endeavour, inspiring millions more of us to support his appeal for NHS Charities Together.

But while the pandemic has given rise to much hope about the role of charity in society, it has also left many charities in financial difficulty.

The restrictions imposed on our daily lives exposed just how reliant charities are on a daily drum beat of support and generosity.

Support that comes from a wide spectrum of the public, and takes myriad forms – coffee mornings, school fairs, fun runs and other sporting challenges, donations to and purchases from charity shops, collections at religious congregations, and so on.

Charitable giving in this country is not a grand gesture we make once a year, or a preserve of the very wealthy. It's how we live. It's expressed in daily acts of kindness and generosity.

During normal times the pervasiveness of people's charitable impulse is so effective, it's easy not to realise just how widespread it is.

So during lockdown, when the drumbeat of our daily lives fell suddenly silent, and many people expressed their charitable instincts in more direct ways within their communities, even seemingly unassailable charitable institutions began to suffer, and quickly.

Indeed, many of the largest and best-known charities have seen their incomes seriously hit by the closure of their high street shops – temporary or otherwise – and the cancellation of mass fund-raising events.

The continuing announcements of charity job losses and reductions in or delays to important research programmes and other charitable services is demonstrating the worrying real-life effect of all this.

I know that charities – particularly those hardest hit – have been and are facing some tough decisions. These are challenging times and I want to take this opportunity to pay a particular tribute to the hundreds of thousands of volunteer trustees who work so hard to make sure their charities remain viable. You are the Commission's first line of defence. Thank you for all that you do.

But even though Covid has caused huge strains within the charitable sector, and each charity will be facing their own dilemmas and difficulties, Covid has not changed the main challenge that the sector faces. Covid has exposed that challenge much more clearly.

And it's this: Everybody makes Charity happen. But the public support that charities rely on to survive and thrive cannot be taken for granted.

To rebuild and maintain the resilience of charitable institutions as the vehicles of social and public good in a post-pandemic world – we must learn from this experience and convert those lessons into opportunities to build back better.

Success depends now as it did in the past, on charities meeting public expectations of what charity means in the way that they go about their work – whatever a charity's cause, type, or size.

So, let me outline three ways in which we – charities and the Commission –

can make the sector stronger.

First, and this is fairly simple and I believe all the more powerful for it – charities need to tell people that they understand and respect that they have expectations in return for their support. And they need to signal now that they haven't always done this as well as they might in the past and that this is going to change.

Whether they are launching new fundraising appeals, calling for government support, or more favourable tax regimes post Covid: charities should commit to greater transparency and accountability in return for the financial support they receive; recognising the importance that they explain, as indeed the best charities do, the practical difference people's donations will make and the care that will be taken in spending every penny.

People will be more supportive of charities which recognise that they don't have a right to public or taxpayer support, but rather a responsibility to uphold the special status charity holds in the public mind.

I should add that the new online Register of Charities – which we launched last month – now has more information on each charity than ever before, including salaries and monies received from government and we will keep developing that so people are able to find the information they want to know which will inform their choices. Helen will say more about this in a moment.

So, more humility and accountability. Take people's expectations seriously. That's the first lesson.

The second lesson Covid has reinforced is that Charity is more about standards and less about structures. And when standards are taken seriously, we can be less hung-up about structures.

The Charity Commission must ensure our register of charities better reflects the reality of charity in our society and public expectations of registered charities.

Charity belongs to everyone. We are all capable of it, and we all admire charity when we see others show it.

We saw under lockdown how much charitable instinct is expressed outside of formal charity: motivated by goodwill, enabled by technology, people across Britain connected and found ways of supporting vulnerable people, strengthening their community, doing good.

Informal mutual aid networks sprung up – sometimes supported by existing groupings or organisations, but often presenting simply as coordinated individual acts of kindness.

I want to make sure that the Register is open to this wider charitable instinct – to encourage more people who are perhaps not the 'usual' suspects to consider channelling their charitable endeavours into existing and new registered charities.

The safest way to maintain charitable standards is to ensure charitable structures remain modern and fit for purpose. The worst thing we can do at registration is miss the point and make it so that nobody bothers to apply.

Last week Danny Kruger MP published a range of proposals to strengthen what he describes as the social covenant as part of the government's levelling-up agenda. He suggested a form of probationary registration period for new entrants on to the register. That is an idea worth serious consideration if the Register is to be truly plural and more easily accessible to new people who are great standard-bearers for what Charity means.

Up and down the country, in all our communities, as we look to bounce back from current challenges and respond to more longstanding ones, we need people with different ideas and outlooks to challenge each other in finding the best and most effective way of delivering a charity's purpose while meeting public expectations of what it means to be a charity.

We need people who may not naturally agree, people who think differently, perhaps look differently to come together, to get on board together, perhaps literally.

Ensuring that people with a diversity of outlooks, and a diversity of backgrounds are involved in charities is the right way of meeting the challenge of ensuring that charities are truly welcoming for all people. And always ensuring the purpose they were set up to serve sits at the heart of their work.

Any other approach puts in peril the unique potential of charity to bring people together.

And that's why I want more people, with more diverse backgrounds and world views, to get involved in formal charity.

Which brings me to the final lesson we've seen reinforced lately – and it's this: standards matter because motives matter.

For people to get behind and support a charity – whether it's a pop-up charity or an established well-known name – they need to believe the motives of those involved are truly what they say they are.

And the only way they can judge is by what they see. Just think about Captain Tom and all that he represented in the way that he championed his cause. No-one doubted him. And the support kept on growing.

That is why being clear about the standards people expect of charity – humility, decency, dignity, commitment, accountability – and ensuring they are met is so important to the future of the sector.

Making the Register more open is not the same thing as lowering our guard or creating a wild west out there.

What it does mean, is that the Charity Commission needs to be better able than we are now to remove from the register organisations where this is

warranted.

We know that the public associates registered status with something more than meeting legal requirements. They expect that supporting a registered charity offers a level of reassurance about an organisation's behaviour, its efficiency and its effectiveness.

So, if we don't want to make registration so difficult that nobody bothers – at the same time we need to be able to act decisively when a charity seriously lets the side down and risks the reputation of what it means to be Registered.

Back in 2018, when we set out the Commission's new purpose and strategic direction, we made a promise.

We said that the benefit of charity to people and society is a precious asset that we can't afford to risk – and that has the potential to do and be even more.

And we said that we would see to it that charities show they take seriously public expectations of high standards.

We are making progress.

But the impact the pandemic has had on our society only makes it even more important that, together, we all work harder.

Now, more than ever, we have a collective responsibility to ensure the impact charity has amounts to even more than the sum of its parts.

These are tough times for charities.

We as regulator have a crucial part to play in weathering the storm and we need to be equipped to ensure charitable status remains relevant for today's world, and into the future.

But more important still is the change that is required within charities themselves to ensure they retain, and in some cases regain, broad, diverse public support.

That means keeping front of mind the lessons of the lockdown – at the same time inspiring and harsh – that charity is founded on public support which should never be taken for granted.

Thank you.

Prime Minister's video message for Black History Month: 1 October 2020

All this month, we're celebrating the lives of black public servants who helped make the UK what it is.

There are servicemen from the UK and Commonwealth who fought for and with Britain to defend democracy.

Heroes like George Arthur Roberts. In the First World War he would literally pick up German bombs with his bare hands and throw them back over enemy lines; 20 years later he became a fire fighter, pulling Londoners from the rubble of the Blitz.

There are women like Yvonne Conolly – who, in 1969, became the UK's first black female head teacher.

Throughout her 40-year career she inspired and mentored not only her young charges but also generations of educators.

And of course there are the thousands of black nurses who came to the UK to staff the fledgling NHS – we see their legacy today in people like 2019 Nurse of the Year Tara Matare.

Sadly, many of these individuals have not been recognised for their incredible contribution to this country.

Far from receiving the respect and gratitude they deserved many black soldiers like George were actively shunned.

Yvonne received so many threats that she needed to take a bodyguard with her to school.

So this Black History Month let's say thank you to figures from our past who we haven't always thanked before.

And let's also reflect on where we are today.

Whilst we have come a long way, and Britain is one of the most diverse and inclusive societies in the world, the events over the last few months have shown that there is still more work to be done. All too often we often forget that black history and British history are one and the same.

And if we forget that, then we are left with a partial understanding not only of our past but also of our present.

It makes it harder for young black people to root themselves and their experiences in our national life.

And it makes it harder for all of us to understand where our country came

from, the challenges it faces today, and what we can do to overcome them.

And that's among the reasons why I have established the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities to examine where inequality exists across our society and to set out a positive agenda for change.

Black history is our history – so let's learn from it, and build a better future for us all.

Extended measures to protect more areas of England from coronavirus

Mr Speaker, with permission, I would like to make a statement about the work to tackle coronavirus.

This virus continues to spread.

Yesterday, there were 7,108 new cases.

However, there are also early signs that the actions that we've collectively taken over the past month are starting to have a positive impact.

Today's REACT study, from Imperial College, suggests that whilst the R number remains above 1, there are early signs that it may be falling.

We must not let up, but people everywhere can take some small hope that our efforts together may be beginning to work.

I put it no stronger than that. Cases are still rising.

However, as the Chief Medical Officer set out yesterday, this second peak is highly localised.

And in some parts of the country the virus is spreading fast.

Our strategy is to suppress the virus, protecting the economy, education, and the NHS, until a vaccine can make us safe.

Earlier this week Mr Speaker, we brought in further measures in the North East.

However, in parts of Teesside, and the North West of England, cases continue to rise fast.

In Liverpool, the number of cases are 268 per 100,000 population.

So together, we need to act.

Working with council leaders and the mayors, I am today extending these measures that have been in place in the North East since the start of this week to the Liverpool City region, Warrington, Hartlepool and Middlesbrough.

We will provide £7 million of funding to local authorities in these areas to support them with their vital work.

The rules across the Liverpool City region, Warrington, Hartlepool and Middlesbrough will be as follows.

We recommend against all social mixing between people in different households.

We will bring in regulations, as we have in the North East, to prevent, in law, social mixing between people in different households in all settings except outdoor public spaces, like parks and outdoor hospitality.

We also recommend that people should not attend professional or amateur sporting events as spectators in the areas that are affected.

We recommend that people only visit care homes in exceptional circumstances.

And there will be guidance against all but essential travel – essential travel of course includes going to work or school.

Mr Speaker, I understand how much of an imposition this is.

I want rules like this to stay in place for as short a time as possible. I am sure we all do.

The study published today shows us hope that, together, we can crack this.

And the more people follow the rules and reduce their social contact, the quicker we can get Liverpool, and the North East, back on their feet.

We are also aligning the measures in Bolton with the rest of Greater Manchester.

And I'd like to pay tribute to David Greenhalgh, the leader of Bolton Council, for his constructive support.

And the Bolton MPs for all they've done in support of Bolton.

There are no changes to measures in West Yorkshire, West Midlands, Leicester, Lancashire or the rest of Greater Manchester.

It is critical that the whole country acts, together, now, to control the spread of this virus.

So please, for your loved ones, for your community, and for your country.

Follow these rules and do your bit to keep this virus under control.

Hospitality

Mr Speaker, by its nature this virus spreads through social contact.

And so it's had a terrible impact on the hospitality sector, who, in good times, exist to encourage that very social contact that we all enjoy.

So, we have had to take difficult but necessary decisions to suppress the virus.

The only alternative to suppressing the virus is to let it rip and I will not do that.

So whilst I know that many of the individual rules are challenging, they are necessary, and there are those early signs that they are working.

In the measures we have introduced, including the 10pm restriction, we are seeking to strike a balance.

Allowing people to continue to socialise safely, where that's possible, while reducing the social contact that the virus thrives upon.

Elsewhere in the world, they've introduced an evening restriction, and then seen their case numbers fall.

And we know that later at night, people are less likely to follow social distancing.

Now of course, we keep all of our measures under review, and we will closely monitor the impact of this policy as with all the others, while continuing our unprecedented support for hospitality businesses.

Like cutting VAT, supporting the pay of staff, offering rates relief for businesses and giving billions of pounds of tax deferrals and loans.

Mr Speaker, our hospitality industry provides so much colour and life in this country.

And we will do whatever we can to support them – while acting fast to keep this virus under control.

Conclusion

I know that these measures are hard.

And that they are yet another sacrifice, after a year of so many sacrifices already.

But there are some signs that what we are doing together, to respond to these awful circumstances, is starting to work.

So don't let up.

Let's, all of us, keep doing our bit.

And one day, over this virus, we will prevail.

Payments delivered to over 700,000 new and returning students

News story

A blog from Derek Ross Executive Director, Operations at the Student Loans Company continues to make payments to new and returning students



This week we have successfully completed the majority of Maintenance Loan payments to new and returning students for the first academic term. So far this year we have made funding payments to 723,786 students totalling over £1.5 billion, with some students still to receive payments as their courses have not started yet. This means we will provide student finance to more students than ever before and are ready to make further payments to students who are starting courses in the coming weeks.

We know that the start of this academic year is very different to previous years and we are continuing to do all we can to support students. While the majority of students have now received their full entitlement, we urge any student who has started their course but not received all their funding, to provide us with the additional information required via their online account as soon as possible. In most cases, it is easy to resolve outstanding issues quickly. If there are any last minute changes to course, university or college, students can make updates via their [online account](#) too.

To provide further support, we have made a short film explaining what each of the payment statuses mean. The team is also available to help with queries via social media so follow Student Finance England's [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) channels.

[Payment status film](#)

The £1.5 billion that has been paid to students over the last four weeks has been the culmination of months of hard work by the team at the Student Loans Company. It has been a busy few months and will continue to be a busy time as we prepare to make tuition fee payments directly to the universities and colleges on behalf of our customers.

As a result of the Covid pandemic, we have had to quickly evolve to become an organisation that is largely home based. I am pleased to say that we have risen to the challenges and our commitment to support students is undiminished. Looking forward, we will be focused on improving our services to deliver a fully digital customer experience for students to enable them to continue to invest in their futures.

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[Human Rights Council 45: Statement for Item 9 General Debate on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance](#)

Thank you, Madam President.

The United Kingdom remains resolute in our commitment to combating all forms of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia.

It is fitting that this General Debate falls on the first day of Black British History month in the UK, where we seek to recognise and celebrate the contribution of Black people in the UK, empowering us to confront preconceptions about Britishness.

The UK has made great strides towards becoming a more tolerant society, but we have further to go. The Prime Minister recently announced a new Commission to look at inequality in the UK, which will review the areas of poverty, education, employment, health and the criminal justice system. The Commission will set out a new positive agenda for change – balancing the needs of individuals, communities and society, and seeking to ensure fairness for all.

Internationally, we remain dedicated to participating actively in anti racism-related UN mechanisms. Our efforts will continue to focus on the practical steps that states can take to combat racism. We are committed to working with other countries to share good practice and re-energise our joint

efforts on this agenda.

Madam High Commissioner, this year we have witnessed a global movement calling for change.

How can we meaningfully engage in conversations about racism, in order to address these challenges?

Thank you.