

Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir Paul Curran's speech at The Chancellor's Dinner, Mansion House, 20th April 2016

My Lord Mayor, Your Royal Highness, Pro-Chancellor, My Lord, Sheriffs, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I stand here at the heart of the greatest capital city in the world. The phenomenal success of London has been attributed to many factors but one stands above all others and that is talent. London can lay claim to the greatest concentration of talented people on the planet. It has a higher proportion of graduates than any other major city, which is underpinned by more world-leading higher education institutions than anywhere else. London is a city that attracts global talent and where global talent can find opportunity. Moreover, it has maintained its excitement down the ages, it was Charlotte Brontë who captured it so well when she said:

"I like this spirit of this great London which I feel (all) around me. Who but a coward would pass his whole life in hamlets?"

City University London has been an integral part of London's success story and 2016 is a key date in our history. This is the year in which we celebrate the anniversary of our Royal Charter; join the University of London and launch our ambitious strategic plan to take City to 2026 and beyond.

The evening is marked, uniquely by the presence of two Chancellors. Alderman, The Lord Mountevans, Lord Mayor of London and the fiftieth Chancellor of City University London and Her Royal Highness, The Princess Royal and tenth Chancellor of the University of London. The baton will pass imperceptibly between them during the summer when Her Majesty the Queen fixes the Royal Seal to our new charter and we become City, comma, University of London.

It has been a great honour and a personal privilege to lead our great University through a period of unprecedented change. We have, in just five years, doubled the proportion of our academic staff producing world-leading and internationally excellent research, modernised our campus and I'm delighted to say, increased the satisfaction of our students by more than any other University in the country. One thing that hasn't changed is our purpose. What we do day in, day out, year in and year out is to transform the lives of around 20,000 students, create new knowledge, use our expertise to support business and the professions and of course, contribute to the global good of society.

City's story started in the 1880s. London had become the world's largest and arguably the most powerful city but suffered from binge drinking and skill shortages. The response was a Draconian alcohol tax that was hypothecated to match-fund the establishment or development of ten advanced educational institutions across the capital.

They included Birkbeck, which was to focus on part-time learning, Battersea, which was to focus on science and became the University of Surrey and Northampton, which was to focus on engineering and became City University London. Our matched funding came from the Marquess of Northampton, Earl Compton his son and the City's Livery Companies. The Islington-based institution opened its doors in 1894.

Our early growth was based on students, from some of the poorest areas of London, who read for a University of London degree in engineering. This was to change in the aftermath of the Second World War when our fortunes and those of the capital became ever more closely entwined. As London grew, we grew as a College of Advanced Technology and then as a University but were stopped in our tracks by major cuts to higher education funding in the early 1980s.

In response, City retrenched, consolidated and concentrated its efforts on business and the professions, international and masters students. This was aided by the acquisition of St Bartholomew School of Nursing and the Inns of Court School of Law and very close alignment with the needs of a rapidly changing London.

Before long, we had the largest postgraduate law, postgraduate journalism and postgraduate speech & language provision in the country and we tracked the capital's rise as it became the world-leading centre for business and finance. Our Cass Business School is now among the global elite of business schools with accreditation from all three quality agencies and an MBA ranked among the world's best.

Today, our capital has around 50,000 academic staff, is a magnet for research funding and is home to more international students than any other city in the world. Since Victorian times City's students, staff and supporters have sought to play their part in London's success. At the celebration of our centenary in 1994, my predecessor, Professor Raoul Franklin noted:

"City's future is inextricably bound to the prospects for London as a great international City. The full networking of London-based institutions has yet to be achieved and the tremendous potential strength of London as a centre for education is not fully realised".

Joining in partnership with our friends at the world-renowned University of London will, I'm sure, help us to realise that tremendous potential.

Thank you.