

## Mark Longford Speech 29 January 2016

May I begin by welcoming you all to our first annual dinner as 'Sussex'. We are midway along our journey towards the year 2020.

We took our first steps after our Centenary in 2012. Several of us looked at one another and reluctantly agreed we were ageing. Without new blood Brighton would struggle to survive ten years. An urgent plan was needed and we engaged with a number of local employers who nominated their young professionals to join us for an evening workshop here at The Grand Hotel. Bravely we asked them what needed to change in order for them to join in. Many of that original group are here tonight and their honest response was a wake-up call. Collectively they saw us as male, pale, middle-aged and retired and, in short, not a group of people that they would wish to spend their time with after work.

That hurt ....but we took it on the chin. Many went on to become founder members of our "2020 Vision" initiative and together we wrote a blueprint for change. The key point was that we had lost connection with them, their workplaces and where they lived. The CII had little relevance beyond exams. Brighton was seen as exclusive and this drove us to a rebranding project so that we became Sussex last May. By April we will have held events in Brighton, Crawley, Eastbourne, Haywards Heath, Horsham, Lewes and Worthing. Next year our footprint will extend further afield.

The team urged us to scratch below the surface and deliver a plan to modernise and have greater appeal to students and qualified members. They recommended becoming a networking group that went beyond our ongoing education remit.

The name change to Sussex presented the opportunity to streamline our structure. We now hold fewer, shorter, council meetings in professional surroundings with clear agendas, and ownership of actions. We introduced conference calls to enable greater participation in team meetings.

Our focus as the primary insurance and financial services professional educational body is unchanged. This year we have hosted an average of one event every two weeks and co-hosted a regional conference with our colleagues from North Downs. Feedback from attendees is consistently above 90%.

As well as a Secretariat the Programme team is flanked by two new teams.

The first, Membership Engagement, connects us with members and employers. Within this team is our new group of Company Champions representing and promoting our institute in nearly 20 companies. They work closely with our 2020 graduates.

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Some members are less active and this led to the introduction of our very successful Sussex Seniors' afternoon tea.

Thank you to all supporting employers. In return for your support we are complementing your work to recruit and train multi-skilled professionals to your businesses. May I thank especially Paul Emery from N&G for encouraging me to take up my role as President and James Roberts from Zurich who recruited me into Brighton in 2008. We'd love to work with more companies like yours.

The other initiative was the introduction of a Corporate Social Responsibility team pulling together our charity work and outreach into the community. In the coming months we will be embarking on a community project, perhaps clearing a local waterway and working as mentors with a school or college. Our Annual Quiz now supports local charities and in November raised funds for the community affected by the Shoreham Air Disaster.

I encourage other institutes to look at our model as it provides an opportunity for new members to join and become involved quickly. Please also tell us what works for you as we can learn together.

Our institute has helped people to develop and explore new avenues within a supportive framework. Last year one of our 2020 team addressed a large conference for the first time. And did it brilliantly! Another who showed leadership potential but had little opportunity at work to put it into practice led a successful team for us. Others took on Social Media, Negotiation and Event Management. Gaining confidence and discovering untapped talent benefits everyone.

It's not all about the young! Our blueprint recommended that we become more inclusive and during this year we have gained from mixing people at every stage of their professional lives and outside interests. An institute like ours is indebted to those who continue to contribute after retirement and without whose help we would struggle. Our council now represents the mix found in successful companies. I'm thrilled that the energy around our Council table is balanced male, female, young and more experienced.

As you will see tonight Sussex is a team. Rather than read a roll-call of individuals, I would like all of those on our council to stand along with those who supported us throughout the year so that we can show our appreciation.

Thanks to the support of our Regional Membership Manager, Victoria Rees-Price, we have reached out to other institutes, supported the CII centrally and seen our name in The

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Journal on several occasions. Our weekly newsletter, Simply Sussex, is read far beyond our own institute and has become a journal describing our inaugural Sussex year.

On your tables you will each have a card with our social media connections and a QR code for those with a smart phone, which will take you to our website. Please connect and follow us and let us have your ideas on how we can continue improving.

Tonight is a celebration and we are extremely grateful to tonight's sponsors, Total Systems, Pavilion Recruitment and Bennett Christmas. Through their generosity we have been able to put tonight's event together without impacting our training programme. All these companies have representatives here tonight and, although off duty, I'm sure they will be happy to tell you more about what they offer.

So what about the year ahead? In December our council gave unanimous backing to Richard as our preferred candidate at the AGM elections. With this endorsement, Richard knows he has the support of the team and can prepare for his presidential year. Richard has recently been elected Chairman of Sussex PFS and is both an Associate of the CII and Fellow of the PFS. We are especially proud as Richard was one of our first 2020 members, proof that nurturing our young professionals works! Our very best wishes to you, Richard.

To sum up, we are absolutely delighted that you have joined us for our party. We hope to see many of you during the forthcoming year and would welcome support in any area of our activities as we develop and inspire the next generation of insurance leaders and practitioners.