

Sir John Cass's Foundation Lecture 2018/19



Fashioning Futures: How fashion education can impact social mobility

Professor Frances Corner OBE
Head of London College of
Fashion and Pro Vice-
Chancellor of University of
the Arts London



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Contents

Foreword	4
John Hall, Treasurer and Chairman Sir John Cass's Foundation	
Fashioning Futures: How fashion education can impact social mobility	7
Professor Frances Corner OBE, Head of London College of Fashion and Pro Vice-Chancellor of University of the Arts, London	
Sir John Cass's Foundation	23
Richard Foley, Clerk and Chief Executive Sir John Cass's Foundation	



Foreword

It is my pleasure on behalf of the Board of Sir John Cass's Foundation to welcome you to this written version of the twelfth annual Cass lecture given in October 2018 by Professor Frances Corner, OBE. You will belong to two categories of reader. For some, among the 200 or so present in October, you are now able to savour the lecture again (if you haven't done so already on our website), with the chance to think more carefully about ideas and examples that first-time round were necessarily propelled along. For others, not in our audience in the Cass Business School lecture theatre, you can understand why those present found the mix of Professor Corner's words and images so challenging and captivating.

This 2018 lecture was notable in several respects. First, it took place in the year during which we have celebrated the tercentenary of the death of our Founder, Sir John Cass. Secondly, it was a particular pleasure that Professor Frances Corner addressed us, for she was a vital part of the 'Cass educational family' earlier in her career, being head of the Cass Department of Arts, Media and Design at London Metropolitan University from 2001–05. Frances also Chairs the International Foundation of Fashion Technology Institutes and sits on the British Fashion Council Industry Advisory Board. Currently she is Head of the London College of Fashion and Pro-Vice Chancellor of the University of the Arts London and will shortly become Warden of Goldsmith's College, University of London.

Our audience was reminded during the lecture of the pioneering educational work of the London College of Fashion in women's prisons, of which the Foundation continues to be a strong supporter. And the College drives other kinds of innovation. It will become, along with its parent university, a principle anchor in the new cultural and educational quarter that is emerging in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in Stratford, east London.

Also new for the audience in 2018, as many would quickly observe, was an absence. For the first time in many years, Dr Kevin Everett, the former Treasurer and Chairman of the Foundation, was absent from the platform. Kevin stepped down from his role after a decade in summer 2018. The Board salutes his unstinting devotion to the Foundation's development in serving the educational needs of the Cass schools and institutions and the wider needs of young people in London. Many previous lecturers will confirm that it was Kevin's strongly-expressed interest in their own educational enthusiasms that caused them to take the lectern.

The Board was pleased to confer the title of Treasurer Emeritus on Kevin and thanks him warmly for his remarkable 29 years of service to the Foundation.

For any newcomers to the Foundation who are curious as to what we do and why, I point you to the afterword by our Chief Executive, Richard Foley. But first, and most importantly, the annual lecture for 2018 ...

John Hall
Treasurer and Chairman
Sir John Cass's Foundation

Fashioning Futures: How fashion education can impact social mobility

Good evening ladies and gentlemen.

May I begin by saying how grateful I am for the invitation to address you tonight. It was an honour to be asked by Richard Foley to do so – Richard and I have worked together for many years now, and I am incredibly grateful that both he and the Foundation as a whole have been such extraordinary supporters of the college's work.

As you all know the core vision of Sir John Cass's Foundation is to contribute to educational policy, practice and research in order to shape and meet the evolving needs of London's young people. This evening I aim to do two things. Firstly, to challenge any pre-conceptions of fashion and fashion education and secondly, set out why I believe fashion education can, and does, affect social mobility.

At the heart of this belief is that to be in fashion education is to be in the business of joining dots and designing patterns.

Joining Dots and Designing Patterns

Our education and research expertise afford us the ability to understand the complex context of our current environment and to look outside of our own classrooms and curricula. This gives us a unique perspective and capacity to elicit and design patterns. But I do not mean the type of patterns that lead to the making of clothes. These are the patterns that are core to our society and future opportunity. Patterns of behaviours, relationships and of interdependencies – the series of dots representing both current barriers as well as significant prospects, these include our school system, language support, confidence building and creative practice, as well as skills development, investment and policy making.

Reports regularly reinforce how we, as educators, are collectively failing to address the issue of social mobility – telling us that we are, in fact, going backwards.

Meanwhile we are faced with the industrial and economic context that our graduates are going into and, for the fashion industry, in particular, we are bound up within a landscape of significant change. The effects of online retailing, global competition, manufacturing, new technologies, as well as the impact of our industry on the planet, are becoming more evident and more critical across this global industry.

The crucial questions for fashion educators are:

- ▶ What sort of world do we want our students and young people to be a part of?
- ▶ How do we help them to address issues of climate change, modern slavery, ethics and new forms of capitalism?
- ▶ The minds that have created the difficulties of our global context are not the ones who can solve it – so why aren't we working harder to ensure greater diversity and a wider plethora of thought and contribution?

For educators that means looking beyond our typical set of relationship patterns. We need to diversify our student cohorts and work with different communities. We need to encourage those from non-traditional backgrounds to view the fashion industry as a long-term and viable career option which will also provide meaningful change to the way we design, make and consume for a better world.

Universities are the link to schools, communities, industries, disciplines, government – both local and national – policy makers, NGOs, as well as established global networks. Our privileged position is often viewed as just that. This privilege sometimes outweighs the impact we are able to have in bringing about real, and potentially radical change whilst withstanding the vagaries of policy shifts.

The pattern we are currently operating in is complex. It includes demographics, geography and politics, rates of poverty and rates of unemployment. Consider all of these factors and then look at the specific context of the fashion industry, its skills and manufacturing needs. These interlinking components are to be first understood and then joined up.



London College of Fashion has one more advantage. We can use the power and universal appeal that the subject of fashion provides to build bridges. Joining dots to design new patterns that will inevitably encourage new approaches. This is what we are doing at London College of Fashion, and it is giving us a new way to address social mobility and change the diversity of our future creative industries.

Work by Stamatia Megkla, MA
Costume Design
for Performance,
at Sadler's Wells
December 2014.
Photograph by
Alex Traylen

Creative Industries and Change

When I was asked to give this talk, it felt like the culmination of a longstanding relationship. Having personally worked with Sir John Cass's Foundation for nearly 20 years it has been a collaboration born out of a joint commitment to the role of education, and in particular creative education, in changing peoples' lives. Changing the lives of children but also those who may never have had the chance of a formal education.

We jointly believe that this is what our communities and our economy need and that through education based projects social mobility can be improved.



Air purifying Red Planet. Dress by Prof Helen Storey & Prof Tony Ryan. Photograph by Shaun Blood

In his introduction to the Social Mobility Commission State of the Nation report of March 2017, Alan Milburn stated:

“Britain has a deep social mobility problem which is getting worse for a whole generation of young people and has left whole communities feeling left behind and socially hollowed out. One of the biggest barriers to social mobility in Britain today is an unfair education system, which is why the Commission has repeatedly called on government to tackle the issues that prevent children from fulfilling their true potential For opportunity areas to be a success, we need local communities, employers, schools and universities to work together with government to ensure a child doing well in life no longer depends on where they have come from.”

And this is not just a general problem – it is also specific to the creative industries.

The recent “Social Class, Taste and Inequalities in the Creative Industry” report explains how a key characteristic of our British cultural and creative workforce is the lack of people from working-class backgrounds. Similarly, there is significant under-representation by women and minority ethnic communities.

The report argues that the story of social class is one of exclusion. It states, for example, that apart from ‘craft’ no creative occupation comes close to having a third of its workforce from working-class origins – which is the average for the population as a whole.

This is highlighted further in the Milburn report, which states that Britain’s professions remain dominated by those from privileged backgrounds with women and ethnic minorities facing a double disadvantage in earnings. Even if a working-class individual gets into a creative profession, they will find it harder to progress. Asking for pay rises, having access to networks and self-exclusion for fear of not fitting in, are all realities.

Reports such as Milburn’s highlight many factors as barriers to social mobility. Employers, geographical inequalities and variations in the take up of further education opportunities by differing ethnic groups are all cited.

It is often claimed that London and the South East are protected from these barriers, this is not so. Some of the worst examples of child poverty and social inequity lie in our east London boroughs. And for London College of Fashion, understanding the circumstances of these boroughs has never been more important.

Ahead of the College’s move to a single campus as part of the Mayor’s vision for East Bank on the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, we are committed to working with like-minded, local organisations to join the dots and ultimately affect social mobility here. Statistics for east London are startling when we consider levels of ambition and attainment, worklessness among women, unemployment, and above all poverty. For example:

- ▶ There is a 13 percentage point gap in GCSE attainment between Newham’s disadvantaged school children and those not facing disadvantage. With the exception of Redbridge, the proportion of 19-year-olds without Level 3 qualifications across all east London boroughs is at least 30% and rising to beyond 40%.¹
- ▶ The Institute of Employment Studies highlights the phenomenon of ‘Cultural Worklessness’ as being particularly prevalent among Bangladeshi and Pakistani women in east

¹ 16 to 19 attainment statistics, DfE, data for 2015/16

London: 'Newham also has a very large economically inactive population of 57,100, with rates of inactivity particularly high among Bangladeshi and Pakistani women. Of the inactive, 3,200 men and 6,100 women say they would like a job'². The Institute of Employment Studies have also observed that the Newham employment rate is particularly low for women, with only 46% of working age women in employment (compared to 62% in London).

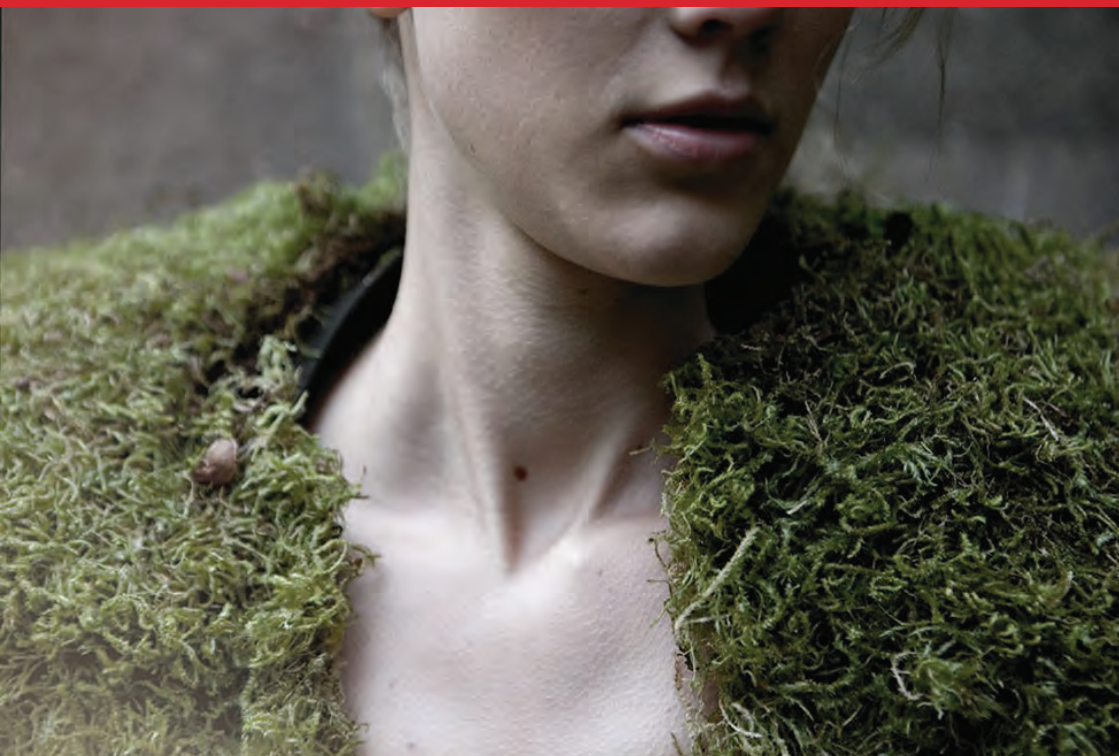
- ▶ Tower Hamlets has the highest worklessness rate in London, at 7.7%, while Newham has the fourth highest rate of unemployment in London. 36% of working residents are classified as 'low paid' – the highest percentage in London.
- ▶ 43% of children in Tower Hamlets are living in poverty, and the borough has an overall poverty rate of 39%, the highest in London. Rates of infant mortality and premature mortality are also significantly above the London average.
- ▶ In the London Borough of Newham, the poverty rate is 37% – ten percentage points higher than the London average and, among London boroughs, lower only than the poverty rate in
- ▶ Tower Hamlets. Indeed, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Hackney have the highest rates of poverty in London³.

The projects London College of Fashion has achieved in partnership with Sir John Cass's Foundation are an essential part of our social responsibility. We are immensely proud of what we have been able to achieve together. But these statistics only serve as a reminder that there is much more work to be done.

I believe Creative Education is a mindset, and an approach to uncovering the best in each and every individual. Creative Education is not just about art and design. It fosters talents and encourages new thinking. And that is why I am certain that setting up improved access to creative education will lead to the sort of shift in representation and social mobility that the creative industries so acutely needs.

² Institute of Employment Studies: 'Understanding worklessness in Newham: Final Report', (Sissons, Dewson, Martin, Carta, 2010)

³ Data source for table: Office for National Statistics, collated by Trust for London <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/data/> (2013/14)



The Power of Fashion Education

In the introduction, I talked about how I consider universities are ideally placed because we have so many connections to communities, industries and stakeholders. We can, and do, make major economic and social impact.

Tara Baoth
Mooney, MA
Fashion and the
Environment 2011.
Photograph by
Sean Michael

London College of Fashion was established over 100 years ago to educate young women to work in the couture houses of the West End thereby offering skills, financial security and consequently independence. We have kept that as our DNA, the belief that education can make a difference in women's lives worldwide.

As a college, we have 5,500 students studying all aspects of the fashion industry from undergraduate through to research. And our subject, our common purpose, holds the most significance – that we are about fashion. Many have heard me argue that fashion is the subject for the 21st century. Because it requires so many skills, it encompasses technology, both old and new, and is inherently entrepreneurial. But I am sure many of you will be wondering. How and why can fashion affect social mobility?



Charlotte Bull, BA
(Hons) Hair, Make
up and Prosthetics
for Performance.
Photograph by
Hanna Puskarz

In talks, I will often ask people how long they have spent getting their clothes ready that morning – 5–10–15 minutes? For the average women its 16 minutes and 15 the night before- and we do this not because clothes are not important but because how we present ourselves to the world matters.

The clothes we wear say something about how we respect and consider others. And it is not just the clothes themselves but the way they are sold, the stories they tell, the communities and skills they develop and the economies they build.

Fashion is extraordinary.

It has a physically close relationship with us because the clothes touch our skin. And it is socially vital – after all walking around naked is not only unacceptable it can also get you arrested! As humans, we can easily survive by wearing the same thing day in day out, just as we could survive by consuming the same basic foods every day. But basics do not meet our other very human need for things that have more meaning. That better reflect who we are and what we feel.

It is this that goes to the heart of what it is to be human – our underlying need to both stand out and fit into the crowd. This is what makes today's fashion industry so significant. The global fashion industry is worth over \$3 trillion and employs 300 million people world-wide – 80% of whom are women.

It drives economic and societal change, but it also has many significant challenges. It is the second most polluting industry after oil. It causes significant water depletion, pesticide overuse, animal exploitation and, of course, abuse of its workers, including bonded labour and – in the worse cases slavery.

As a college, we are committed to using the positive forces that fashion has to address its negatives, and as such we have developed our Better Lives agenda. At the heart of this agenda are the concepts of social mobility, diversity, sustainability and ethics. My vision has always been to elevate fashion as a force for positive change:

- ▶ To use it as a guiding principle.
- ▶ To develop a dialogue between staff, students and the wider community.
- ▶ To redefine the role of fashion and its related industries and so bringing about real social and economic transformation.

We are educating students to develop and push the industry to tackle issues of environmental sustainability and worker exploitation. I believe that 5,500 students, if equipped with knowledge and the confidence to succeed, can change the industry from within. Integral to this belief, is to ensure that those 5,500 students come from the most diverse backgrounds.

London College of Fashion believes fashion is borderless and creativity flourishes when communities of people come together from all perspectives and backgrounds. The concept of our Better Lives agenda came at a time when fashion as a discipline needed to extend and expand its influence, to counter the traditional stereotype of fashion as a lightweight subject not worthy of research.

Instead, there was a clear case for fashion to set the pace for developing areas of research and to extend fashion's influence.

But when fashion is considered in the broadest sense, beyond frocks and fast fashion, it has the power to explore some of the most complex global problems. Areas such as health, textiles, sustainability, ethical design, wellbeing and science, (including nanotechnology, medicine, engineering and cosmetic science) present fashion with a paradox; how should these issues be brought into the mainstream whilst also meeting the fashion industries' need to develop and ultimately manage the bottom line?

So, through various projects, where we have been supported by the Sir John Cass's Foundation, London College of Fashion has started to affect real change. Not least through the development of our Making for Change centre.

Our Projects and People

We established our Making for Change unit to develop expertise around the challenges encountered by women and young people in particular societal groups. This evening I would like to take you through some examples of this project work. The first example is our work with women offenders.

Last year the "Corston Report – 10 Years On" questioned how far we have come since 2007 for women affected by the criminal justice system. In her original report, Baroness Corston published 43 recommendations calling for a gender-distinct, women-centred and holistic approach to supporting women affected by the criminal justice system.

So how far have things come?

Our prisons remain in crisis, and with growing consensus that there is an urgent need to reduce the prison population so it would seem that Baroness Corston's recommendations are still relevant. The original report highlighted how women are disproportionately sentenced and the effects on their children are catastrophic, thus perpetuating a total cycle of disadvantage.



At London College of Fashion, we wanted to find a way that fashion could become a solution to some of the barriers experienced by these women. To provide education and training, based in a prison, for the women to develop new life skills and to match these to the manufacturing skills that the industry so keenly needs.

BA (Hons) Fashion
Contour by Céline
Marie Wenninger.
Photograph by Josh
de Souza Crook

The growth of London based fashion design companies means there is a requirement of at least 150 new skilled machinists every year. So, by developing a manufacturing unit at HMP Downview, London College of Fashion now gives women offenders relevant skills so they can begin to support themselves and their families on release and the industry also gets the skills it needs too.

But it is not just about training; it is also about developing and creating deeper relationships and educational opportunity.

London College of Fashion was originally established to train women and girls. That is an important legacy to us, not least because our student cohort is 85% female. In the year where we are celebrating 100 years of women's suffrage London College of Fashion sought to develop a project that linked these elements and celebrated this achievement.



DESIGN + MAKE
accessories
workshop with
Art Against Knives.
Photograph by
Hanna Puskarz

This second example is about a nationwide mass-participation artwork project arranged by public art production company Artichoke. On Sunday 10th June this year women and girls across the UK were invited to come together as part of a living portrait of women in the 21st century, in four large-scale public events in Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh and London.

Artichoke also commissioned *100 Years 100 Banners*, where one hundred female artists worked with various women's groups to produce reflective banner artworks as part of a programme of creative workshops. London College of Fashion's Artist and Professor Lucy Orta, worked with women in HMP Downview and the *Processions: Voices of Downview* project was one of these one hundred commissions.

A resource pack which included books on women's suffrage and 21st-century feminism together with artist materials was delivered to every one of the 330 women in the prison. The women were offered different ways to engage including attending workshops, submitting creative work on the theme of women's suffrage and women's rights, or completing questions around what prison means to them. Both individual and social engagement opportunities were offered to enable all women to participate.

Experts came to the prison to share their knowledge and insights: Gillian Murphy, Women's Library archivist; Clare Hunter, specialist banner-maker; and LCF MA Fashion Futures students all worked with the participants through craft activities and the sharing of information.

For example, the Women's Library showed suffrage memorabilia, which included artefacts sewn in Holloway prison 100 years ago. One item was embroidered with signatures of suffragettes, and participants responded by embroidering their own names onto fabric.

Another of the workshops was delivered by our MA students, who gave a brief history of important moments in women's history over the last 100 years and taught basic screen-printing techniques.

The participants responded by making prints of powerful, passionate and feminist words and statements. The banners were created and carried in the Procession in London on the 10 June.

Here is a short film encapsulating the project and its effect.

One of the factors we have begun to understand through Making for Change and within local communities is that breaking a cycle of long-term unemployment simply can't be addressed through advertising jobs.

Confidence, skills development, inspiration and support all need to be factored in.

We are also interested in how, through supporting mothers, we can inform and inspire their children about the possibilities of a creative education and a career in fashion. This led to the creation of our 1000 Coats Project – the third project example I would like to share with you this evening.

This is a collaborative project between London College of Fashion artist Whitney McVeigh, our Making for Change unit and East London communities. Working with up to 100 women from the boroughs of Newham, Tower Hamlets and Hackney, 1000 Coats will be designed, made and gifted to children.

Throughout this next year, London College of Fashion will lead professional sewing skills workshops with groups of women, and every individual will follow a clear path of development in order to create coats which will be distributed to children in partnership with the charity Family Action. The project will culminate with an exhibition alongside which will be a maker space where the final coats will be completed and a workshop programme designed to engage local families in creative activities.

East London is home to some of the most deprived boroughs in the UK. It is known that the effect of deprivation in an area will come hand-in-hand with a range of social issues in the community, for example; ill-health, poor education, crime and social isolation.

Working with specialist partners such as Poplar Harca, Community Links, Bow Arts and Family Action is enabling us to work creatively with families in a community where some of these issues are very real.

The aim of our 1000 Coats project, is to see society come together through shared points of connection, to create and give back something real and tangible. As each coat is gifted, it makes the symbolic statement of a collective future and a stronger community. This project will not only impact the lives of 1000 children, hopefully inspiring them to become engaged with creative activities, but it also provides them with a brand-new coat.

Finally, it is intended that the women might further their skills and gain employment in the manufacturing unit we are establishing in Poplar as part of the second phase of Making for Change.

Opening in 2019 this second unit will have jobs for 30 women manufacturing clothes and samples for London's fashion designer sector.



Fashioning Futures

And so, London College of Fashion knows first-hand that fashion can be used to transform people's lives. Whether it is through training female offenders, collaborating with communities in Ethiopia and Mongolia through our UN Orange label project or working with Syrian refugees in Jordan – Fashion has an incredible ability to foster communication amongst people.

When the college moves in 2022 to a single campus on the Olympic Park, we will continue to work with local, national and international partners, ensuring that we provide access to all those who want to engage with the subject of fashion. To develop their learning, their skills and inevitably, their scope for individual opportunity.

Enhancing London College of Fashion's offer to young people from low income and other disadvantaged backgrounds has long been a priority. Last academic year, the College's home full-time undergraduate student body included 36% from low Socio-Economic Classifications. Our profile in respect of students from black and minority ethnic groups was 31% – this is well above average when compared to other UK universities.

Processions banners project in collaboration with Artichoke, to celebrate 100 years of votes for women, at HMP Downview. Photograph by Lance Tabraham

As part of our preparations for a move East, London College of Fashion is developing a new Schools Engagement Strategy aimed at benefitting young people from Key Stage 3 level upwards. Key to this strategy is the integration, at curriculum level, of an arts-based programme of learning, support and progression into arts higher education. The core ambition is to create new opportunities and raise the aspirations of young people across East London.

This new strategy builds upon the University of Art London's further education established outreach programme Insights, in which our University currently partners with 110 schools and colleges across Greater London. Our University's Insights programme targets children and young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose parents or guardians have not attended university themselves. A progression model is in place, supporting students aged 16 and over with development of their portfolios and University applications. These students are guaranteed interviews for places on our University courses. Success rates are high – currently, 78% of those students applying through Insights gain a place at London College of Fashion.

The College's move to one site provides us with a chance to consolidate our thinking and expertise in this area, and in particular to work with a very specific part of London – which, we all know – is in real need.

As I draw this talk to a close, I want to reflect on how it is no good being a world-renowned teaching institution like London College of Fashion has been for over 110 years, if the offer is just for a lucky few. Our world needs diversity and creativity, and it is incumbent on us as educators to find ways to offer opportunities for all. London College of Fashion's future is centred on our commitment to bringing about real change and seeing economic, industrial and social transformation. As an educational provider we cannot do this alone, but we can highlight all of the dots and we DO intend to join them up.

Sir John Cass's Foundation

Promoting participation and achievement in education

Established in 1748, and now a major independent educational charity benefiting young people across London, the Foundation takes its name from its founder, Sir John Cass. Born in 1661, he served as Alderman, Sheriff and MP for the City of London and was knighted in 1712.

The Foundation prides itself on developing long-term partnerships with key educational establishments and it is now 18 years since the Foundation made a multi-million-pound grant to City University's Business School, subsequently re-named the Cass Business School. The Foundation continues to provide on-going support to this and seven other establishments bearing the name of the founder, including the London based Cass primary and secondary schools, of which it is Trustee.

Over the past year, the Foundation has continued to support the innovative First Star Academies as they expand their work to support more care leavers to move into higher education. As part of this expansion, the Foundation is pleased to have provided funding to support First Star Academies and the Centre for Social Justice in producing new research, entitled, 12 by 24, which aimed to highlight the needs of young people in care, bring together evidence on outcomes for children and local authority care, and influence the national context for reform. The Foundation has also continued its support for the Lyric Theatre's START programme, which provides an accredited training course for NEET young people to re-engage them in education, employment or training.

The Foundation has established partnerships to distribute scholarship and bursary funding on its behalf, including with University of London, the Building Crafts College, King Edward's School Witley and Pembroke College, Cambridge. We are also pleased to be collaborating with the University of Westminster on their care-leaver completion bursary programme.

As the Foundation marked the tercentenary of the death of its founder Sir John Cass, we reflect on the long history of bringing young people from all backgrounds into education. The Foundation remains at the forefront of debate, stimulating meaningful discussion and exploring new and often challenging topics faced by young people, professionals and the wider education sector.

The Foundation would like to thank Professor Frances Corner OBE and all our guests who attended the twelfth annual lecture in 2018. We sincerely hope everyone found the evening to be engaging and thought-provoking and we now look forward to next year's lecture which is to be delivered by David Isaac CBE, Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

For further information on the work of the Foundation and to read more about our annual lecture series and watch videos of past lectures, please visit our website at www.sirjohncassfoundation.com or find us on Twitter @SJCFGrants.

Richard Foley
Clerk and Chief Executive
Sir John Cass's Foundation