

# Sir John Cass's Foundation Lecture 2019/20



## **Moving beyond the “I” to the “we”: how the education system can help heal a divided society**

David Isaac CBE

Chair of the Equality and  
Human Rights Commission



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A lecture presented at Cass Business School,  
City, University of London on 25 September 2019



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# Chairman's Foreword



## Dear Reader

The appeal of the lecture as a device for imparting knowledge and stimulating debate seems undimmed. Indeed, variants of the form are finding new audiences at literary, science and other festivals across the world and in videos. The Foundation's own thirteenth annual lecture succeeded across the board. First on a simple numerical measure: the lecture theatre was full. Then qualitatively, there was great attention to our lecturer, David Isaac CBE, during the lecture and a lively engagement in the question session at the end and in foyer conversations. David showed mastery of the art-form and brought his own life experience into the narrative in a very compelling way.

As in previous years, the lecture and discussion are captured on video on the Foundation's website at [www.sirjohncassfoundation.com/publications/films](http://www.sirjohncassfoundation.com/publications/films). This print version reaches two distinct audiences. Most obviously there are readers who couldn't be present at the lecture. We welcome their interest. And then there are those who were present but might appreciate the opportunity to re-visit David's thoughts and to reflect at leisure. The text, incidentally, is offered here in printed form but also online.

To the audience present at the lecture I introduced David in the following way. I suggested that he could be our distinguished lecturer for any number of reasons, including his understanding of how technology will influence our futures, or his experience of chairing a university governing body, or from serving on several national charities and bodies.

But two aspects of David's illustrious CV stood out. The first was his chairing of Stonewall from 2003–12, during which time Section 28 was abolished and civil partnerships were recognized. He also introduced the Stonewall Equality Index and must have been particularly proud when his own legal partnership, Pinsent Masons, came top of the index in respect of employing LGBTI staff.

The second aspect that I mentioned was his chairing the Equality and Human Rights Commission for England, Scotland and Wales since 2016. The Equality and Human Rights Commission website puts the Commissioners' mission very clearly: 'A mandate from Parliament to challenge discrimination and to promote human rights.'

In both of these roles, our lecturer had been confronting behaviours that indicate deep divisions. (And many commentators in print and on screens larger and smaller have described political divisions, and the discourse around them, as widening during 2019.)

How apposite, then, that the title of David's lecture should be: *'Moving beyond the "I" to the "we": how the education system can help heal a divided society'*

You will find that his view of the 'education system' covers all ages and stages and identifies challenges for the learner and the teacher, the law-maker and the regulator. Through the medium of print and on screen, you are now invited to meet our lecturer and to enjoy his lecture.

John Hall  
Treasurer and Chairman  
Sir John Cass's Foundation

# Chief Executive's Foreword



**As an endowed Foundation, we feel incredibly fortunate to**

be in a position to be able to improve the life-chances of young Londoners; to perform our work in accordance with the wishes of our Founder, Sir John Cass, is a responsibility everyone at the Foundation understands.

We should like to offer our sincere thanks to David Isaac CBE and all our guests who attended the thirteenth annual lecture in 2019. We hope everyone found the evening to be an insightful and encouraging look into the role education may provide in classrooms of the near future – we certainly did. The lecture was very well received and copies will be widely disseminated, including to all members of the Houses of Parliament. We look forward now to working closely with the University of the Arts, London (UAL), and in particular with David in his role as Chair of Governors at the university. More details of our exciting new partnership with UAL can be found elsewhere in this publication.

Over the past year, we are delighted to be able to report that we have awarded grants to organisations throughout our fourteen London boroughs and in all our priority focus areas. Under our umbrella of *Widening Participation*, the Foundation has begun working with King's College London on its mentoring programme for care leavers. The Widening Participation priority also happens to include our individual grant-giving programme, providing bursaries and scholarships either directly to young students or through our partners such as King Edward's School, Witley and Pembroke College, Cambridge.



Further highlights this year include, under *Truancy, Exclusion and Behaviour Management*, a project from the Young Urban Arts Foundation addressing the emotional wellbeing of young men at a secondary school based in Southwark. Alongside this, and through a number of inspiring charities working in *Prisoner Education* such as Key4Life and Create(Arts), we now support educational programmes in five prisons which hold young Londoners. Lastly, under our *New Initiatives* priority, we have re-established our partnership with the Tutu Foundation UK and its round-table programme, aiming to foster better relations between police and young people.

As described above, our day-to-day work is, of course, grant-giving and so we are particularly proud to be publishing an in-depth review of our activities over the past ten years. The 2009–2018 Impact Report showcases a cross-section of the projects that we have supported and leads with the remarkable headline that grants and gifts-in-kind over the decade amounted to over £50 million. A further imminent publication is a research paper the Foundation has commissioned from Dr Graeme Atherton looking at the issues surrounding progression into higher education for young people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds. Both of these publications – one prospective, one retrospective – will be made available in hard copy and on the Foundation’s website alongside many others from years gone by.

We look forward to next year’s lecture, our fourteenth, which is to be delivered by Diane Lees CBE, Director-General of the Imperial War Museums. 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](http://www.sirjohncassfoundation.com) or find us on Twitter @SJCFgrants.

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

# Moving beyond the “I” to the “we”: how the education system can help heal a divided society



**It's a great honour to give this year's Cass lecture and to** follow in the footsteps of my distinguished predecessors. I would also like to thank the Chairman and Treasurer of Sir John Cass's Foundation for his warm words of welcome.

You will all be aware of the history of Sir John Cass's Foundation and the desire of Sir John Cass to educate the children of London. With that in mind, I would like to offer some reflections on the importance of education and how I believe it has the power to help create a more cohesive society.

My thoughts this evening are informed by my three professional interests:

- ▶ the law – as a lawyer in the City of London
- ▶ equality and human rights – in my role as the Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission
- ▶ education – as the Chair of Governors of the University of the Arts London (UAL)

For at least the last 70 years, British society has sought to promote the virtues of shared values. We live in the shadow of great wars and we have tried to learn their lessons. We have also committed to the benefits of universal human rights – internationally and domestically.

As the Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, I see how a single idea – that everyone is equal before the law – is enshrined in the Human Rights Act and the Equality Act. Both pieces of legislation provide important tools for the Commission to level the playing field for everyone and to tackle discrimination.

**‘** Many people in Britain say they have experienced some form of prejudice in the last 12 months and there appears to be less tolerance and acceptance of people of faith.’

As a lawyer, I am confident that the world is enhanced by the protections and insights that the law provides. I believe that as a result of the bravery and persistence of those who demanded legal change, this important framework now provides improved protections for larger numbers of people. Though we should acknowledge that lack of financial means can still limit access to these rights.

We have witnessed a number of significant legal changes that have fundamentally altered the way certain sections of our society are now regarded.

As former Chair of Stonewall, I’m particularly thinking about the way in which legal equality now exists for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. I have to confess that I never imagined that such profound legal and cultural changes would take place during my lifetime. Indeed, as more and more people in this country attend the gay marriages of family, friends and colleagues, it’s easy to forget that until relatively recently the majority of people were opposed to any form of legal recognition for gay relationships.

But despite many positive changes in the way that LGBT people, women, and black and minority ethnic communities are treated – and acknowledging that Britain is in many ways ahead of other countries in the field of equalities legislation – sadly, this country still isn’t a fair place for everyone.

In *Is Britain Fairer?* (2018)<sup>1</sup> – the statutory snapshot of equalities in Great Britain that the Commission is required to produce every three years – we found that for certain sections of our society Britain is far from fair.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/britain-fairer-2018>

Disabled people continue to find themselves excluded from mainstream society in education and the workplace. The disability pay gap persists, and the likelihood of disabled people being in low-pay occupations has increased. Disabled people are more likely to be in poverty, lack access to suitable housing and experience disability hate crimes.

Black African, Bangladeshi and Pakistani people are still the most likely to live in poverty. Along with Black Caribbean people, they are more likely to experience severe deprivation, which is damaging their health, education and work prospects.

And while women's equality has progressed significantly in some ways, there are still many factors holding women back at work – gender stereotyping at school, and widespread bullying and sexual harassment in the workplace and in education. Sexual and domestic violence is a persistent and growing concern, which disproportionately affects women and girls.

Many people in Britain say they have experienced some form of prejudice in the last 12 months and there appears to be less tolerance and acceptance of people of faith.

Beyond those legally defined as having 'protected characteristics,' many other people in this country feel disenfranchised. Some others feel that the interests of minorities, whether legally 'protected' or not, are privileged over their own as a result of alleged 'political correctness'.

Right now, our differences over Brexit seem to be laying bare some of the fault lines in UK society. But although today's social and political divisions may seem exceptional to those of us living through them, in reality profound differences in our society have always existed.

Yet there seems to be, in some quarters, a nostalgia for an imagined and idealised version of how Britain used to be – a homogeneous society, where everyone was relatively affluent and happy. We should be mindful that a nostalgic appeal to a version of the past is usually simplistic, and can be one of the tropes of populism.



That version of the past ignores the fact that poverty, inequality and discrimination aren't new; and that British society is and always has been more complex and diverse than people imagine. Even a series like *Downton Abbey* sometimes demonstrates aspects of that!

Though some voices have been privileged over others, there have always been multiple narratives. We have had immigration in this country for a very long time; there have always been people of colour, people with disabilities, LGBT people and people of different faiths in British society. Universal education has benefited many people, but currently I would venture to suggest that it isn't benefiting everyone. There has also always been a gap between the cities and the countryside, the North and the South, and between the rich and the poor.

Last year, as a Board member of 14–18 NOW, I was privileged to be involved in the production of *They Shall Not Grow Old* – Peter Jackson's colourisation of historic footage from the First World War. One of the many things that was shocking about that film was the grinding poverty and appalling teeth of the young men sent into the trenches, in many cases the rural and urban poor. It was a sharp reminder that in reality, British society was never just about warm beer, cricket and old ladies cycling to church.

So perhaps our society has always been divided – but right now it seems more divided than ever. These long-term issues, combined with the crushing austerity following the financial crash and the bank bailouts, have undoubtedly led many people to feel disenfranchised – unheard, ignored and de-prioritised. And there can be no doubt that socio-economic issues underpin so many of these feelings.

Fast technological change and globalisation have added to these feelings. Whilst social media and the internet allow many of us (though remember, not all of us) to connect with an infinite range of people and ideas, it is all too often an echo chamber that merely connects us to those people who share and amplify our own views and anxieties, and broadcast them back to us and others in an increasingly strident fashion, which at worst can allow hatred and harassment to spread.

The Brexit crisis may be a lightning-conductor for many of the issues dividing British society, rather than their cause. For that reason, any resolution of Brexit issues is unlikely to resolve the deeper societal issues that divide us: the divide between those who David Goodhart has nicely summarised as the people from somewhere and the people from anywhere.

Identity politics has without a doubt allowed many marginalised voices to be heard and coalesce into movements that have generated real political progress in changing our society for the better. Whilst there is still a lot more to be done, there has been significant improvement in legal protections based on race, gender and sexual orientation. But these protections don't seem to have led to the development of broader shared values and a sense of common ground: often, it seems instead that we are faced with a field of competing identities that fragment and polarise our discourse, that divide and atomise our communities. That are presented as a zero sum gain.

**“** Identity politics has without a doubt allowed many marginalised voices to be heard and coalesce into movements that have generated real political progress in changing our society for the better.’

Education is vital because it provides the crucial point of interaction between individual young people from all backgrounds, civil society, academia, democratic institutions and industry.’

One only has to look at the debate about transgender rights to see how polarised this discourse has become. It’s a good example of complicated issues and competing rights. We must reach a sensible accommodation to ensure that the rights of both women and the transgender community are protected.

In too many ways, we seem to be retreating into our various tribes, moving from what I call the “we” to the “I”. Populism, I fear, often makes simple appeals to those tribal instincts, moving us from wider, more inclusive, shared civic values to a narrower form of introversion and individualism.

So how can we move from the “I” to the “we”? How do we join up the parts of an increasingly fragmented society? How can we acknowledge the complexity and diversity of our society, and stop shouting at each other, whether we’re on or off-line?

There is no one solution, no simple answer, and certainly none that is immediate in effect. But this evening, I would like to offer some reflections on my belief that education is fundamental to addressing many of these issues.

Because education happens to the individual, we can tend to see its potential in individual terms rather than for its wider benefits to society. My contention this evening is that changes to education can fundamentally contribute to the creation of a less divided society. Education can build consensus and reduce the fear of difference. At its best, it inculcates shared values. And the evidence shows that the longer you stay in education, the more valuable it is.

To start off with I would like to say something so obvious that it is rarely articulated: education and the workplace are the two main contexts in life when you find yourself in sustained contact with people who are different to you – though my partner reminded me that you can rarely choose the person in bed alongside you in an NHS hospital! I profoundly believe that as human beings we learn and grow from encounters with difference.

It's another truism that our early lives and encounters will shape our later attitudes to some of society's issues. The decisions taken for us during our education, by society as much as by our parents, are critical. Education is vital because it provides the crucial point of interaction between individual young people from all backgrounds, civil society, academia, democratic institutions and industry.

In recent years, there has been a disturbing move away from the belief that education – particularly higher education – is valuable in general terms and of benefit for its own sake. That idea has been narrowed down to something more utilitarian: in a move away from the “we” towards the “I”, we now feel that we should educate people up to the level at which they can get a job. This, for example, is the thinking behind the recent government push on T-levels, the new technical equivalent to A-levels.

Of course, people should be able to get jobs as a result of their education. Better qualified people get better paid jobs, and you need to know the right things to get the right job. As a working-class boy coming from a small town in 1970s South Wales, I am living proof of that: we knew that passing exams would change our lives.

But equally importantly, properly structured education should create the fertile compost of social cohesion through developing shared values. I passionately believe we must encourage mixing between children with different protected characteristics, especially as we're seeing significant segregation in schools in terms of faith and class.



Mixing of children from all backgrounds, all faiths, able and disabled, will increase their understanding of the lived experience of others. It helps build greater resilience but equally importantly ensures longer-term social cohesion.

Recent work in the field of social contact theory has found that social contact between children from different backgrounds leads to a reduction in prejudice. Properly structured cross-group contact that is long-term and fully integrated into the curriculum can improve intergroup relationships.

Cross-group friendships enable close contact, encouraging the building of trust and self-disclosure. They can increase cultural openness and heighten perceptions of similarity across cultures, which in turn can reduce anxiety about future encounters with difference.

The findings of social contact theory are complex, and this is an area that the Equality and Human Rights Commission is committed to exploring over the next few years.

Schools have a vital role in integrating migrant children and their families into society, to the benefit of all. But it's not just about different cultures: increasing the socio-economic mix within schools may not only reduce prejudice, it may also improve the performance of disadvantaged students without any apparent detrimental effect on overall performance.

So the common experience of education undoubtedly breaks down barriers and creates the potential for common values and a respect for difference.

And a respect for difference means that it's possible to disagree respectfully and tolerantly.

All schools in England currently have a duty to promote community cohesion and, since 2014, a duty to promote the 'Fundamental British Values' of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

The national curriculum states that pupils should be taught about the ‘diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding’. Academies and free schools do not have to follow the national curriculum, but they do have to cover Religious Education – as well as English, Maths and Science.

Fine in principle and theory, though if our schools suffer from segregation along faith and race and socio-economic lines, that may hinder social mixing and create a catalyst for segregation in later life.

In my view, we need a new emphasis on teaching children from a very young age that there is a social pact – that there are rights and responsibilities attached to being an active citizen of the UK.

My belief is that these values should be taught within a strong framework of information about equality and human rights. Education needs absolutely to mainstream human rights in its strategy and curriculum, developing young people’s understanding of them as the cornerstone of individual liberty and the fundamental underpinning of shared values based on tolerance, understanding and respect.

In April of this year, the Equality and Human Rights Commission responded to Ofsted’s draft Education Inspection Framework to highlight the importance of having human rights learning embedded into the curriculum.

**I** In my view, we need a new emphasis on teaching children from a very young age that there is a social pact – that there are rights and responsibilities attached to being an active citizen of the UK.’

David Isaac CBE, Chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission with Richard Foley Clerk and Chief Executive of Sir John Cass's Foundation (left), John Hall, Treasurer & Chairman of Sir John Cass's Foundation (second from left), Professor Sir Paul Curran, President, City, University of London (third from right), Sophie Fernandes, Deputy Treasurer and Chairman of Grants of Sir John Cass's Foundation (second from right), and Professor Paolo Volpin, Dean of Cass Business School (right)



There needs to be a framework to improve individuals' understanding of how they should be treated and how they should treat others in an open, democratic society. As they grow older, it should provide information about the legal protections they can rely on when exercising those rights and it should encourage individuals to respect the rights of others.

It would create an increased tolerance that doesn't undermine your ability to practice your faith or your ability to speak your mind respectfully, even if others disagree. Such a framework would take these themes and engrain them into every decision a headteacher makes, every interaction children have with each other in the classroom, and every one-to-one talk between a parent and a teacher.

It needs to begin in early years. From primary to junior, secondary, at A-level, through colleges and universities, ultimately building citizens who are confident, resilient and accepting of each other – even when their values and traditions collide.

A human rights based framework for education will enable us to raise children who not only instinctively refuse to discriminate on the bias of race or gender or disability or sexuality, but also have a deeper understanding of why they refuse to do so. Who automatically listen to each other and celebrate a diversity of talent and views.

Education has to be a preparation for the complexity of 21st-century Britain – to prepare young people for their encounters with difference, whether in their schools, when they move into the workplace, or when they are in any other public setting. To enable children to be properly equipped to understand what our laws require of them when they become adults.

The idea that as part of their general education about the world, primary school children should not be made aware that same-sex couples exist is as shocking as the idea that Christian children should not be taught about the existence of other faiths. Failure to acknowledge the existence of different lived experiences – simply to acknowledge the fact of the existence of difference – effectively edits people out of the script. To eradicate them from the narrative of 21st-century British life is effectively to wish them out of existence, and cannot be acceptable in an educational context.

My point here is that an inclusive education cannot and should not deny the lived experience and beliefs of all of us – whether those beliefs are socially liberal, or socially conservative.

Moving to another area, we know that gender roles are adopted early on in life and influence much of what happens in the home, school, personal relationships, family life and employment.

As the Swedish statistician, Hans Rosling, points out in ‘Factfulness’: “educating girls has proven to be one of the world’s best ever ideas. When girls are educated, all kinds of things happen in societies. The workforce becomes diversified and able to make better decisions and solve more problems. Educated mothers decide to have fewer children and more children survive. More energy and time is invested in each child’s education. It’s a virtuous cycle of change.”<sup>2</sup>

We know that boys and girls often follow different paths in education and employment, which lead to overall differences in pay. Today, women not only earn less than men overall, they are more likely to be low paid. But some of the issues that ultimately lead to the current gender pay gap start in school.

**2** Hans Rosling, Anna Rosling Rönnlund, and Ola Rosling. 2018. *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We’re Wrong About the World—and Why Things Are Better Than You Think*.

**‘** An education system that teaches the inherent value of all pupils – whatever their gender – is vital to addressing pay and promotion inequalities.’

Subject and career choices remain highly gendered, with girls being far less likely to continue studying science and maths after school. This is an issue that follows children into their working lives and is hindering progress towards a fairer working environment. An education system that teaches the inherent value of all pupils – whatever their gender – is vital to addressing pay and promotion inequalities.

And let’s very briefly think about role models. As part of their encounter with difference, we should ensure that primary school children see a diverse teaching workforce in their schools, lest unequal messages about gender and ethnicity stereotypes follow them into the workplace. But in 2018, a government report on state-funded schools in England highlighted that 3 out of 4 school teachers were female and 86% of all teachers were White British.

So we need more teachers who reflect the student population – in primary schools more male and more ethnic minority teachers; in universities and colleges more racially diverse staff; and more senior black and ethnic minority and female professors.

On shared values: I fundamentally believe that education should be a journey towards the development of greater empathy through increased knowledge and understanding.

Empathy requires an act of imagination: to imagine yourself inside the skin of someone else, inside their history and all aspects of their life. A life whose context and detail may well be very different – and alien – from your own.

This is why an arts education is so crucial: it stimulates the imagination and allows us to see the world differently. Engaging with the creativity of others stimulates our own. It helps us find complexity and difference enriching and stimulating, rather than threatening.

I fear that diminishing the role of arts subjects in the curriculum will diminish our young people's imagination, their creativity, and their curiosity. It will reduce their confidence, their capacity for empathy, and their openness to others. Without it, I have no doubt that our society will be poorer.

As Chair of UAL, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Sir John Cass's Foundation for their exceptional support of the university and, in particular, their work with the London College of Fashion.

Thanks to their support over the past decade, the college has been able to undertake some truly pioneering work with female prisoners, especially teaching them fashion manufacturing skills as a way to break cycles of reoffending. This work is an excellent example of why arts education is so transformational.


As anyone living in Britain in 2019 can attest, society feels increasingly divided.

Only now are we beginning to fully appreciate the threats and limitations of technology – whether in relation to protecting our privacy or understanding the inbuilt prejudices of those who programme the algorithms we increasingly rely on.

Globalism has moved us beyond the parochial, but is costing us dearly when we consider its impact on the well-being of our planet.

I can't be alone in being moved by the powerful call for meaningful action on climate change by Greta Thunberg at the UN on Monday. She criticised we adults for having “stolen her dreams and her childhood with our empty words”, and for turning to children for hope.

Just as our generation has a responsibility to address climate change, I also believe that we have a duty to put in place the meaningful foundations for a less divided, more cohesive and respectful society. One that prepares our children to live and accept the reality of the 21st century.

 Albert Einstein said that: “knowledge is limited, whereas imagination embraces the entire world, stimulating progress, giving birth to evolution.”’

We can do this by teaching children about their rights and responsibilities and by explaining what inclusive citizenship looks like so that the next generation can respect different heritages and understand that people can make different choices:

- ▶ about whom they wish to live with, and with whom they wish to create families
- ▶ how they worship
- ▶ how they will flourish and find fulfilment – whether in the world of work or by rearing children

Albert Einstein said that: “knowledge is limited, whereas imagination embraces the entire world, stimulating progress, giving birth to evolution.”

Education builds knowledge and stimulates imagination.

Knowledge reduces fear of difference.

Imagination is the root of empathy,

and empathy is the root of tolerance.

I’d like to conclude by daring you to imagine an education system that teaches knowledge, imagination, empathy, tolerance and inclusivity and has human rights at its core.

One that puts the wider benefit of society at its centre and moves us back towards the collective “we” rather than the individual “I”.

If we can deliver that sort of education, I believe that we can provide Greta Thunberg and her generation with fewer empty words and more hope.

Thank you.

# London College of Fashion, UAL



The new London College of Fashion, UAL campus will open in East Bank in 2022. Image credit: Ninety 90.

## **Sir John Cass's Foundation is delighted to announce a**

£4m grant towards the work of the London College of Fashion (LCF), UAL. This significant commitment is the culmination of our 10-year partnership with the College – delivering public benefit through community projects with an educational focus across London.

This grant will support two key areas of the College's future plans:

- ▶ A £2m grant towards the development of a new campus for the London College of Fashion in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. Having been located across six sites for many years, in 2022 LCF will be moving to a single purpose-built site as part of the exciting East Bank development alongside the BBC, the V&A, and UCL. This arrangement offers great opportunities for collaborations and cross-disciplinary partnerships, which adhere to the highest standards of social investment. These opportunities will transform the prospects of individuals within local communities and attract long-term investment to the area.



- ▶ A £2m, ten-year investment in LCF's community engagement and social impact initiatives, including the award-winning *Making for Change* programme at HMP Downview. Recognised for its exceptional achievements in offender rehabilitation, the Foundation has been proud to support *Making for Change* over many years – and will now also play a crucial role in the success of new initiatives in Poplar, Stratford, and throughout east London.

In recognition of this grant, UAL has proposed the creation of the Cass Centre for Social Impact at the London College of Fashion, a new hub of expertise for its social impact programme which will be located within its prestigious new home on the East Bank.