

Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

Oral evidence: Pre-appointment hearing for Chair of the Charity Commission 2, HC 1200

Thursday 24 March 2022

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Members present: Julian Knight (Chair); Kevin Brennan; Steve Brine; Clive Efford; Dr Rupa Huq; John Nicolson; Jane Stevenson.

Questions 1-79

Witnesses

I: Orlando Fraser, Government's preferred candidate for Chair of the Charity Commission.

Examination of witness

Witness: Orlando Fraser.

Chair: We are here for the pre-appointment hearing for the chair of the Charity Commission. We are joined by Orlando Fraser, the Government's preferred candidate. Before we begin, does anyone wish to declare an interest, a position within a charity of any sort?

Clive Efford: I am chair of trustees at Samuel Montagu Youth Centre in my constituency.

Chair: Thank you. Mr Fraser, thank you for joining us this morning.

Orlando Fraser: Not at all.

Q1 **Chair:** It seems unfair: you do interviews, and then you end up with this pre-appointment hearing. Your predecessor being in that seat for about 24 hours probably shows why we need these pre-appointment hearings. I want to find out first why you applied. I know you have had some involvement in charities in the past, working on the legal and financial side. Why did you apply and what do you think you particularly bring to the role as it stands?

Orlando Fraser: I applied because, in essence, the Commission is an organisation that I hugely admire and that I think is doing an incredibly important job. I believe that I have the right overall mix of abilities and experience to do that job.

That leads me to your second question: what is that? That is my experience on the board of the Commission. When we arrived in 2013, it was a Commission that had been condemned as not fit for purpose by the Public Accounts Committee, and when we left in 2017 it had been turned around, the National Audit Office commended us for our work, and the PAC and Parliament were happy. We did a good job, and I was part of that. That is valuable experience which shows what I could bring.

Also, I have been a QC for nearly 30 years. That is all about your ability to analyse problems, to communicate and to be independent, and to stand up for your clients in the face of pressure from judges and others.

Lastly, but by no means least, I have spent nearly 30 years helping the voluntary sector in one form or other. We could go back to '92, when I organised a convoy to help Muslims in Bosnia, taking food and medical supplies. After that, I also helped Westside Housing, which is a social housing operator, and implemented some programmes to help women victims of domestic abuse. Also after that, I have been a governor of a secondary school. I have also done a bit of policy; there were a couple of years with the Centre for Social Justice, looking at how voluntary sector organisations can help fight poverty and other major issues of society. As a result of that, I spent five years on the advisory council of the National



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Council for Voluntary Organisations, and then, of course, the five years that I did in the charity sector on the board, which I did pro bono.

Overall, as a package, I think I bring quite a lot, and I feel as though I am a reasonable appointment in that respect.

Q2 Chair: Your previous time working with the Charity Commission included the collapse of Kids Company in August 2015—or did you go in just after that?

Orlando Fraser: Yes, it did include the collapse of Kids Company.

Q3 Chair: You said that the organisation was turning around during your time there. How is it that you can say that when your time there also saw the collapse of Kids Company, and what lessons do you draw from that collapse?

Orlando Fraser: I would draw the same lessons that the judge and, I think, the Charity Commission have drawn—that it wasn't a bad organisation; it was a good organisation doing wonderful things, with trustees doing their best. They were lucky, they said—this was the judge, Mrs Justice Falk—to have the trustees that they had putting in the time that they did. What they ran, though, was a model that was unsustainable in the end. It didn't have any reserves; it was very hand to mouth. So it was more the systemic basis. The judge said that, actually, they probably would not have collapsed but for the false allegations of safeguarding issues. In a sense they were unlucky, but in another sense, as I see the Charity Commission found in the case review, there were systemic problems with the model they were running. It sounded bad in 2015, but after a huge judicial investigation and then Charity Commission reporting, it wasn't nearly as bad as it seemed in the beginning.

Q4 Chair: I have to say that if my colleagues Mr William Wragg and, certainly, Sir Bernard Jenkin were here, they would probably take issue with the idea that it was not quite so bad. Can you expand on that, please? I am a little concerned that you think that the collapse of Kids Company wasn't quite so bad.

Orlando Fraser: I said by comparison to the perception at the very beginning. There were all sorts of allegations of thoughts of personal gain and that sort of matter. It was only by relation to that. I compared it with what we initially heard, which was extremely worrying and concerning, and the lack of services to the beneficiaries. But as it later transpired from the investigation by the judge, it was bad, but it wasn't as bad as we thought in the beginning. I think I should have clarified that. I am grateful to you for enabling me to clarify that.

Q5 Chair: Okay. The Charity Commission, as it stands, is said to have quite some issues with morale. I am not going to pass judgment on your predecessors, but certainly they took a reformist view of the Charity Commission, and that seems to have caused quite a bit of disquiet in the sector. What is your perception of where you will pick up from your predecessors when it comes to that reforming agenda?



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Orlando Fraser: “Reformist”. Well, we left a Commission that, as I say, had turned itself around. It was a really solid senior management team and it was in reasonably good shape. I have certainly picked up—you can see it, because you can see the personnel—that a lot have been lost and there has been a bit of turnover in the replacements. It certainly appears to have been less settled than it was. I was sad to see that, because I felt we had built up, after a long time, a really good team and done a lot of good work. If I was to be appointed, I would be looking at the Commission in that way, and looking at questions of morale among the senior team and seeing where we are. It would all be a matter of getting my feet under the table, because I have not been there for quite a long time. It would be a matter of opening the bonnet and having a look. I have had experience of building up—helping to build up—a team and I would certainly want to see that come back, because it was a hell of a good camaraderie and we did a lot; and I think it’s perfectly possible to do that again.

Q6 **Chair:** You are quite right to identify an issue there. It’s not so much when you lose personnel; it’s when you then lose the people you replaced them with. That is often an issue, a sign, a red warning light on the dashboard that shows you an organisation is having problems.

Perhaps you could expand a little more than just “opening the bonnet and having a look”, because I wonder what you think has actually happened there—you must have spoken to people in the organisation, either before or during this process, to see precisely what they think has happened at the Commission—and how you think you can genuinely drive change that will see the restoration of what you claim to be a healthy, forward-looking working environment.

Orlando Fraser: I just don’t think that I can say that I know enough about why people left. It would be unfair for me to say I know, because I don’t. Therefore it’s difficult for me to come back and say this needs to be done or that needs to be done. But if I were appointed and went in there, this would be a major issue for me, because that senior management team is vitally important in a complex charitable regulatory world.

Q7 **Steve Brine:** I notice you started your three-year term as chair of NHS Resolution, which I know well, on 1 January last year. Are you going to continue in that role alongside this one?

Orlando Fraser: That was Mr Thomas, actually. I am not a chair of NHS Resolution.

Q8 **Steve Brine:** I am so sorry. Well, do you have any other roles that I should know about?

Orlando Fraser: I don’t.

Q9 **Steve Brine:** Okay, fine. Let us just talk about balancing, then. There are so many different interests in the Commission—so many different balls that you have to keep up in the air. You have the different stakeholders. You have the charities. You have the trustees. You then have Ministers. You have the public. Everybody wants a piece, don’t they?



Orlando Fraser: Understandably.

Q10 **Steve Brine:** It's something we are familiar with. How do you see the commission balancing that?

Orlando Fraser: I have alluded to this a bit. What I am looking to achieve, over a period, is an approach by the Commission that is, and is seen to be, fair, balanced and independent. I think that if that is the messaging that goes out, that is the way you will really continue to earn the respect of your diverse stakeholders over the period.

Let me explain what I mean by that. Fairness is a legal concept that we all know; it's what you expect to see in a regulator. Balance—picking up your point—is about recognising that on the one hand you need a robust regulator, to give confidence in the sector for donors and volunteers, but on the other hand this is not a for-profit sector; it is a sector that is full of a thousand acts of kindness, compassion and love.

The trustees are doing their best, and you have to enable them and help them; and sometimes, you have to stick up for them in the public eye if they are coming under media attack and so forth. Those two balance, and then there is the independence point, which is, as we know, written deep into the Brighton rock of the sector, and of the Commission and its statutory framework. That is something I am very keen on. It is about balancing those values. I feel that if you could push those values, you would satisfy most people—people coming from all angles would understand that.

Q11 **Steve Brine:** Would they be any different from those of your predecessor, Baroness Stowell? It is very hard to disagree with any of those three, isn't it?

Orlando Fraser: I hope so. I think there was a perception among my predecessors that the dialogue was too critical—excessively critical—and that it was all about being robust, or maybe an imbalance. I think I would probably rebalance that a bit, because I think you have to recognise there are many different stakeholders in the sector and in the Commission, and you have to get the right balance.

Q12 **Steve Brine:** What are you most looking forward to and what are you most anxious about in doing the role?

Orlando Fraser: I am most anxious about the cost of living crisis, the pandemic, the sanctions and the global economic shocks, in the sense that I worry about the effect that will have on many charities, small charities in particular. Trying to help charities through that period is all about helping them regulatory-wise, helping them to build up the reserves that they can, helping them in all sorts of ways. I am also worried about the Commission, because we are a very small body of people regulating a very big sector—only 400-odd. We have a relatively small budget and an enormous sector. We have to have the brightest and the best, and we have to have the best technology. Both of those will suffer in a downturn, potentially. That is my biggest anxiety.

My biggest excitement is this thought: the Commission is a wonderful institution that is regulating a sector full of great people doing wonderful things. I have loved being a part of that all my life, and I am excited to help that process.

- Q13 **Steve Brine:** It is a wonderful organisation, but your fear is that it is pretty underpowered.

Orlando Fraser: Yes, and I don't think I'm the first person to think that.

Steve Brine: No.

Orlando Fraser: It punches way above its weight, and that is generally understood within Whitehall. I always think there is room for manoeuvre or hard-hitting presentations in terms of getting more budgetary recognition of that and pushing the envelope and getting more. What it does is amazing on a budget of £30 million.

- Q14 **Steve Brine:** So how can you change that? Would you be campaigning to change that?

Orlando Fraser: Increases in those funds would be so modest in the size of the national budget that, frankly, you would hope that the Treasury would be open to a proper plan about specific matters. For example, the Commission is being challenged more often in the courts, and therefore it has legal costs of bringing in outside QCs and so forth or needs more lawyers of its own. That is eating up more and more money, but the legal area is very important. I could see me saying, "Our legal budget specifically needs to be increased," or, "Our budget for more investigators needs to be increased," or, "We need more budget for enablement." This is about specific plans. We would have a new five-year strategic plan if I was appointed, and we would work that out and its priorities and then, if appropriate, head off to try to increase this extremely modest budget, for specifics.

- Q15 **Steve Brine:** Does your budget plan include lots of train tickets? Can you see yourself getting out and about and around? I think I am right in saying that Winchester, which I represent, is right up there with Bath in terms of the number of registered charities that exist within the city walls. Are you going to be in Winchester, Bath and all over the country?

Orlando Fraser: Me personally?

Steve Brine: Yes, you personally, because the remoteness of such an organisation is a problem, isn't it? They want to see you and the commissioners.

Orlando Fraser: That is a very fair point. If you look at public recognition, it is quite good for the public sector at 50% or so. However, I agree with you that actual awareness of what the Commission does is much lower at about 30%. I think there is a definite argument for sending people out. We obviously have great regional presence in Liverpool and Taunton and in Wales, and we have annual public meetings in places. But encouraging me, the senior executive or board members to go and be a



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face and to do more events is a good idea. I would be a spokesman, and that's what you have to do: speak.

Steve Brine: Great.

- Q16 **Clive Efford:** The previous Secretary of State expressed concerns about a "worrying trend in some charities that appear to have been hijacked by a vocal minority seeking to burnish their woke credentials." He then said, "I have instructed those leading the search to ensure that the new leader of the Commission will restore charities' focus to their central purpose and empower Trustees to be robust." Were you quizzed about that when you were interviewed for the job?

Orlando Fraser: Not particularly. There was no question about woke or non-woke, because it is completely meaningless in regulatory terms. You wouldn't be able to enforce it as a regulator—what do you mean by woke or non-woke? Where the question arises is, would the Commission be prepared to act, or be robust in acting with charities that are going beyond their objects? That, of course, is charity law. If people are going beyond their objects, the Commission is obliged to act, but that is not particularly dramatic; it is something we would expect to do.

- Q17 **Clive Efford:** Were you involved in the controversy with Rowntree? Did it go beyond its objects?

Orlando Fraser: That is an interesting one, the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. That was a specific point about the charity financing a non-charitable organisation called Cage. Cage had given a long press conference in which it praised Mohammed Emwazi, also known as Jihadi John, who was executing unarmed hostages in Syria, including charity workers—British charity workers—on video. When that came out and we knew that JRCT was a supporter of Cage, understandably we wanted the charity to distance itself from Cage. That was to protect the charity and other charities, and out of a sense of natural horror.

My recommendation was, "I think that we should have a statutory inquiry to look into this." That was not adopted by the Commission. The executive did something different. They said, "Well, you can't ever fund Cage again." The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust agreed that they should not support them at the time, and they came away, which was a good thing. In due course, Cage and the charity disputed that and felt that the charity should not have been compelled never to fund Cage again, and I can see the legal issue with that. So, there was a court case and, in due course, it was settled.

The good thing happened, which was that the charity distanced themselves from Cage and Mohammed Emwazi, and we reached accord. I would like to go on the record that I have the utmost admiration for Joseph Rowntree, his legacy and the charity itself. But that was a one-off.

- Q18 **Clive Efford:** From my perspective, you look remarkably like the previous incumbent of the position of prospective chair of the Commission. Is it a coincidence that so many of you have been members



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of the Conservative party?

Orlando Fraser: I have absolutely no idea whether Mr Thomas was ever a member of the Conservative party. I was. My own political involvement, which you brought up—

Clive Efford: You seem to all come along quite frequently. I suggest that you get together and set up a bus company, given the frequency with which you all turn up. We seem to have a procession of Conservatives who stand for public office.

Orlando Fraser: It is difficult for me to comment on other candidates, isn't it? I can comment on you raising my own political association, if you would like, because I think I should.

First, the regard I have for the independence of the Commission is sacrosanct. I showed that when I was on the board, and I would show it again. My own political involvement was nearly 20 years ago, in 2005, when I was a political candidate. I did that such a long time ago that most reasonable people would think that, given the overall abilities that I have and my qualifications, that should not really be a serious bar or cast serious doubt on me being able to do it.

Secondly, after that political episode in 2005 to 2009, I was appointed to the board of the Charity Commission and to the board of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, because I was considered sufficiently politically impartial and interested to do good work in that respect. I acted entirely independently in that period. So, there is no suggestion of partiality.

Finally, there is a suggestion—I would like to go on the record on this—that because my father was the Conservative MP for Stafford and Stone, Sir Hugh Fraser, I am in some way bound to be subject to that allegiance. Although I loved and admired my father, I also loved and admired my grandfather, Frank Longford, a great Labour party member, social reformer, member of Attlee's Cabinet and architect of the welfare state with Nye Bevan. He is enormously important to me, but that does not get reported. In particular, his work now is important, because we have the Longford Trust. As you may know, that is a charity run by Peter Stanford, the journalist, that helps rehabilitate prisoners who have got out of prison. I am proud to be a patron and supporter of that, so the position is more balanced with me, at least. I cannot talk about the other—

Q19 **Clive Efford:** You raised your ancestors, not me; I was actually referring to you. The reason I raised the question about your Conservative past is that the Secretary of State's statements about woke-ism and wanting to influence the selection process, and you being a Conservative, call into question whether the Secretary of State could have influence, through you, on the work of the Charity Commission, given the statements that have been made. It is a legitimate question. Can you give us some examples of how you have stood up to that sort of pressure?



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Orlando Fraser: Yes. You say “you being a Conservative”. I am not a Conservative. I was back in 2005, and I was thoroughly independent on the board before, from 2013 to 2017. I would be so again, so I do not think it is fair to say that about me.

In terms of my own independence, I have been working at the independent Bar for 30 years. We have to stand up to all powers—judges, other parties in massive litigation—and be unafraid to stand up for our clients against intense pressure. I would have no difficulty in doing that again if any pressure were brought by the Government. I have to say that during my interviews I made it absolutely clear that I would be running a very independent Commission if I was appointed, and the interviewers had absolutely no problem with that. They understood that.

It is also something that you see within the Commission. When I was there, there were 400-odd employees, and it is incredibly important to them. The Commission is a regulator, and the fundamental part is section 13(4), which states that it must be independent of Government. It runs right the way through. I understand that you must feel obliged to raise these points, and there is no criticism there, but equally, I think worries in my respect are slightly overblown.

- Q20 **Clive Efford:** There is another issue I think we ought to raise, because it has been raised with me; I do not know if it has been raised with other Committee members. That is comments you made when you were a parliamentary candidate for the Conservative party about Devon women being “notoriously hideous”. I am sure you would accept that that is a misogynist comment.

Orlando Fraser: It is. It is an awful thing. They were comments—a joke someone else had made. I repeated it foolishly to a journalist, and she understandably wrote it down and it has gone into folklore. I was profoundly sorry at the time for the offence that I obviously caused, and I remain profoundly sorry, but it was an event 20 years ago. I was a young, slightly foolish man. I am older and wiser, and I hope it is not held against me in regard to this job.

Clive Efford: I think that is a fair enough comment. I will leave it at that. Thank you.

- Q21 **Dr Huq:** There is a sense of déjà vu about this—it is not that long ago that this Committee was doing this same interview. In that last round, Ministers did have concerns about the lack of female, BAME and disabled candidates who were interviewed in that process, but then it was a return to the same pool to get a second choice, I am afraid to say. Were you surprised when they did that, rather than launching a fresh search?

Orlando Fraser: I thought they were going to launch a fresh search, actually, and then I was contacted and they indicated that they wanted to appoint out of the appointables. In that sense, I was surprised, but from my point of view, this is not a process I have run. I know this is groundhog day for you, and I am sorry, but it is not my fault.



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I have entered a process; the Government now wants me to do the job. It is an important job; someone's got to do it. I think the responsibility is that if you are asked to do it, you should do it, and I think I have the abilities to do it, so I am pleased to be the preferred candidate. I am looking forward to getting my feet under the table and getting on with the job—if appointed—taking on, of course, some of the points you are making today. It is quite helpful at the beginning of a period that one has something to go into the Commission with—some of these points that you have raised today, and indeed the ones you raised with Martin.

- Q22 **Dr Huq:** Is it slightly retrogressive to replace a woman, the previous chair—there were the accusations of political bias—with a man? In the Labour party, if there is a woman retiree MP, they always have a woman candidate. Given that in the balance of commissioners there are twice as many men as women—six to three—is that a bit of a worry? What are you going to do to improve this?

Orlando Fraser: Going forward, yes. I obviously cannot speak for the composition of the board and how it is made up, but I certainly can have a statutory role in its composition going forward in terms of advising and inputting into the Department. I will very much try to ensure there is a more diverse board. There is quite a lot of opportunity; there are some retirements this year and other opportunities.

There are some board positions open at the moment—there is a legal member and a Welsh member. That goes on till mid-April. I would encourage candidates of all suitable backgrounds to apply if they can. There is one more for definite coming up in November—that is a two-term retiree—and then there are some others that may or may not be renewed. There is certainly opportunity for refreshing the board, as it were, so I take your broad point. I agree with it and share your view, and I look forward to doing something about it.

- Q23 **Dr Huq:** So there will be active steps rather than just an ambition.

Orlando Fraser: There will be active steps. I will be there taking part in it, so there will be active steps, yes.

- Q24 **Dr Huq:** The Commission's gender pay gap is a bit embarrassing too, and it is getting bigger. The gap between men's remuneration and women's is 3.2%, and it was 2 point something per cent. last year. What will you do to address that?

Orlando Fraser: That is something I would need to look at if I were appointed. It is something that the chief executive, as the accounting officer, is most responsible for, under the supervision of the board. I would sit, for example, on the governance and remuneration committee, as I have done previously. That is exactly an issue that we used to look at, and I am sure they have focused on it. The pay gap—between staff of varying levels and overall—is always an issue to be looked at. I would expect to look at that and I am sure the Commission is, but as a takeaway from here, I will make doubly sure that we do.



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Q25 Dr Huq: Can you appreciate concerns people have about restoring trust—there have been scandals with Oxfam and things like that—given the previous party political concerns of this role?

Orlando Fraser: The fact is that public trust in charities is going back up again. Most people are seeing them as incredible organisations, filled with kindness, compassion and love, and doing great objects. I am no exception; I am a big fan and supporter. In terms of restoring trust, it is on the way up and that is very positive. The Commission has played a good role in that, and the Commission itself is in a good place, but nothing is perfect. The Commission, of course, needs to be looked at in these various ways, and we will do that.

Q26 Dr Huq: Again, do you have an action plan of steps rather than just lofty ambition?

Orlando Fraser: In the sense of the gender gap, I have said that I will sit on the remuneration committee if I am appointed. That is something that I will take as a priority to look at.

Q27 Dr Huq: You said you have renounced your party affiliations. So that was just some weird, out-of-character episode in 2005, as were the remarks about women.

Orlando Fraser: Yes—it's not out of character; it was something that I did then, but that was 20 years ago, and I don't do that now.

Q28 Dr Huq: So you're not a card-carrying member. You mentioned the National Council for Voluntary Organisations. In its advice to us, it said that it was very concerned; it wants someone completely political neutral. You may still have those networks and other things you might have an eye on, such as going back or going to the other place. You probably have the sort of CV of people who go there, you've got mates there. How can you assure the National Council for Voluntary Organisations that you will not be leaning towards the Government?

Orlando Fraser: I was on the board of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations advisory council for five years after my political involvement, so it knows that I am capable of being politically impartial and working to improve the sector.

Dr Huq: It says here—

Orlando Fraser: No, I know. It knows that I am capable of that. The way one is going to do that is by ensuring that the Commission acts in an impartial way, without fear or favour to any entity, as a regulator should, over the next period of my term, if I am appointed. That is the best way: actions, not words. You can talk about words and that is all very well, but that is what we will be doing.

Q29 Dr Huq: Is there a sense sometimes with these public appointments—Clive Efford mentioned this anti-woke idea—that there is a bit of a lurch the other way; people have thought that it is often lefty people on these boards, and now it is going the other way? Is there a sense that quite



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often, even irrespective of political colours, it is the same old, same old? I remember when I served previously on another Committee, we were interviewing someone for a prisons job and I said, "When did you last set foot in prison?" and he couldn't remember. I appreciate that you have a good CV on the charitable side, but it seems that the system replicates. I did not know that your grandfather was a lord and your dad was an MP. Could we not broaden out the type of people who get these posts?

Orlando Fraser: I can't really comment on the system. I can only talk about my own personal experience, I'm sorry.

Q30 **Chair:** I just want to ask you about the process you have undertaken in order to get this job. Were you asked to supply any references or give the name of any referees to the Department during this process?

Orlando Fraser: No.

Q31 **Chair:** Does that strike you as unusual?

Orlando Fraser: I don't remember it being a requirement last time.

Q32 **Chair:** I don't mean last time; I mean generally. Presumably in your working life, whenever you've moved from job to job, you have had to give some form of reference or at least a referee.

Orlando Fraser: You often give referees if you want jobs; we can take that as understood. I can't say that that has ever happened to me because I have been a barrister for a very long time.

Q33 **Chair:** So between the first application and the second application, was there no change as to what you were asked for or about?

Orlando Fraser: Oh I see. No. Once they came back to me, after Mr Thomas had withdrawn, there was a request for consent for them to do due diligence. They didn't say, "We want particular referees." They said, "Can we do due diligence on you?" and I said, "Yes. Ask whoever you want, whatever you want." So they did then do that. I don't know what they did—you would have to ask them.

Q34 **Chair:** Is all they said "due diligence" or did they make any explanation of what that actually meant?

Orlando Fraser: Not from memory, no. It was just "due diligence". I assume it was to do with charities.

Q35 **Chair:** Normally with these things you get calls back. For example, when I got clearance for Downing Street, I had calls from friends and relatives to say that they had been called.

Orlando Fraser: No, it wasn't like a security clearance. I understand that, and it wasn't that.

Q36 **John Nicolson:** Welcome. Can I mention a couple of interests? I am a trustee of the Greek Thomson Egyptian Halls restoration project, of the Spitalfields Trust and of Dennis Severs' House. Mr Fraser, you mentioned earlier on that you are not a Conservative party member any longer, but



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then you also said in answer to another question, "I'm not a Conservative." What was it that persuaded you to abandon the Conservative party?

Orlando Fraser: It wasn't an abandonment of the party. It was just a part of my life—an episode—that had stopped. Really, I began to do more stuff to do with charities. Probably the dividing line was the work for the Centre for Social Justice, when we were looking at how small, independent charities can reach the most disaffected and disadvantaged areas of society. That work reflected my interest in charities going back to when I was in my early 20s and was an area that I was more interested in, so that is really the route. Then I went on to the board of the Charity Commission, and that—

Q37 **John Nicolson:** You could have stayed a Conservative while doing that. Did you become alienated from the Conservative party because of your charitable work?

Orlando Fraser: No. I think in charitable work you feel it is a safe space from party politics, so therefore you naturally have less involvement anyway. Maybe the culture of it comes into you. It is difficult to say you renounce being one or other, because nowadays people—well, outside here—are less tribal. The membership of these things is very much smaller than it used to be in the '50s.

Q38 **John Nicolson:** But it is hard to imagine this Prime Minister or this Secretary of State wanting you to do this job unless they thought that you were a safe pair of political hands. They must see you as a Conservative. Have you ever been asked in this process, before this point, whether you were a Conservative?

Orlando Fraser: Have I ever been asked in the process if I was Conservative? No. I think they ask you about political stuff that you have done or would declare, but I don't think they ask you culturally what you feel like you are.

Q39 **John Nicolson:** Did you tell them that you were no longer a Conservative?

Orlando Fraser: I find it difficult because I do not know what you mean by "no longer" being a Conservative. You make it sound like a definitive change, and, in my experience, it was a process. I had done some political work—

Q40 **John Nicolson:** I am just picking up on the fact that you said, "I am not a Conservative." I just thought it was interesting that you used that. Do you socialise with the Prime Minister? Are you a friend of the Prime Minister?

Orlando Fraser: I will go on record here: I wouldn't normally answer questions about my friendships—on any parties or people. I am entitled to a private life.

Chair: Of course you are.



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Orlando Fraser: However, I will in this case, because it has been raised. I want to say, on the record, that I am not a friend of the Prime Minister, and I have never been a friend of the Prime Minister.

- Q41 **John Nicolson:** In a previous hearing, the Committee wrote to the then-Secretary of State, Matt Hancock, telling him that the Committee could not support an appointment. It was Baroness Stowell, and the Committee referenced potential impartiality as an issue. Do you think that political impartiality is vital for jobs like this?

Orlando Fraser: I think impartiality is vital for jobs like this. That is my first point—I agree. Secondly, I think you can be impartial. You can have many good people who come straight into charity or regulation from politics—David Miliband going into the International Rescue Committee is an example—and some of you may want to do that in future, because politicians have a lot of talent, ability and people skills, and I think they are capable of coming into organisations and being impartial.

The key point is, rather like with BBC journalists, we must accept that they are capable of leaving their previous allegiances behind and doing the job properly. That is what you are looking for. I do not think it is impossible to be impartial if you have had a previous political involvement. On the point about Lady Stowell, and impartiality, she was a serving political leader in the House of Lords. It was quite different, I think, from my own circumstances of involvement 20 years ago.

- Q42 **John Nicolson:** You mentioned the BBC, and picking up on my colleague's line of questioning, the new chair of the BBC is a Conservative party donor. He has given a huge amount of money to the BBC. The last chair of the Charity Commission was a Conservative peer, and the new chair of Ofcom is likely to be a Conservative peer. It all seems terribly cosy, doesn't it? The talent pool is enormously narrow. You would be forgiven, as an outside watching this, if you thought that being a Conservative and moving in Conservative circles was enormously advantageous in getting jobs like this one.

Orlando Fraser: As I said earlier, I cannot speak for other candidates in other appointments. It is simply not within my ability to give you relevant evidence about that. I can say that, looking at my own CV, and my experiences and skills, I believe, genuinely, that I have the appropriate overall mix to do this job well, and I wouldn't be here if I didn't think that I did.

- Q43 **John Nicolson:** It is just blindingly obvious that all of the people I have just mentioned—whatever their fine qualities as individuals—are all white men in the prime of middle youth. It just does seem like a very narrow talent pool, and that must be frustrating, for you, presumably, as somebody who wants to see the widest possible range of talents being brought into public life.

Orlando Fraser: Of course I want to see the widest possible range of talents brought into public life. I agree with that.



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- Q44 **John Nicolson:** You mentioned charities moving beyond their remit. I would like to ask you about a charity that was recently awarded charitable status—I mentioned this to Martin Thomas. It is a rather sinister group called the LGB Alliance. It has targeted Members of Parliament—including myself—encouraged people to post abuse about those Members of Parliament and then has rewarded those posting abuse and donating to it with retweets. It was given charitable status. I know that has caused a great deal of distress among many LGBT communities. Is there not something very wrong when an organisation like that is given charitable status?

Orlando Fraser: First, I am so sorry about what has happened to you and others in this matter—it sounds awful. Secondly, I cannot say much more beyond that, because the decision to register them is in the courts. It is under review by the courts, so it is sub judice. Therefore, I think you understand that I cannot say more on that.

What I can say is that if there are any ongoing instances that are known about, or if there is any evidence of misconduct or activity you regard as misconduct, we can assess whether it is or it isn't, so please bring it to the Commission and we can absolutely look at that—

- Q45 **John Nicolson:** People did. Before they were awarded charitable status, there was vast reams of evidence including various tweets sent to me, which were given to the Charity Commission, but none the less the Commission went ahead with the appointment, which just seems extremely odd.

Orlando Fraser: I saw reference to it—the evidence brought in—in the decision and I saw the reasoning of the decision. I just cannot say anything more because it is in a legal process and I would not want to impact negatively on that; I'm sure you would not want to either, really. However, I do get exactly where you are coming from.

- Q46 **John Nicolson:** Finally, you are sitting here and answering our questions fully, but this whole process is ultimately really pointless, isn't it? I say that because you know that you are going to get this job; we know that you are going to get this job. So it is hardly nail-biting for you.

When we object to a candidate and write to object to the candidate, the candidate gets appointed anyway. It gives the impression of parliamentary scrutiny while being utterly toothless.

Sitting on the other side of that desk, taking part in this toothless and pointless process, how does it make you feel?

Orlando Fraser: It doesn't feel toothless or pointless—[Laughter.] Not from where I'm coming from. Look, I am not responsible for the powers of the Committee, or under statute, or the fact that you don't have a veto. That's not my responsibility; it's the responsibility of Parliament. Parliament—

- Q47 **John Nicolson:** Do you think we should have a veto?

Orlando Fraser: It's not my responsibility—



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Q48 **John Nicolson:** I know that, but do you think it would be a good idea for us to have a veto?

Orlando Fraser: I have absolutely no views on that; all I'm saying is that it's not my responsibility.

What I wanted to say is that this hearing is not pointless, for me, in two ways. First, if you decided to reject me or say you wouldn't recommend me, as you are entitled to do, I would read the reasons, I would consult the Secretary of State and if I felt that it made it impossible for me to do the job, I would withdraw. So that's the first point; there is a point. The second—

Q49 **John Nicolson:** That is a very good lawyer's answer, because you have not actually told us whether you would withdraw or not; you just reserve the right to withdraw.

Orlando Fraser: And I think that's fair. I am indicating that I would take into account your decision; that makes this exercise not a pointless one.

The second point is that even if I am appointed and we go away, I will have had the benefit of hearing you on these subjects and also the benefit of the subjects that you raised with Martin, because we have got a transcript. So, I have got a template—a sheet—of issues of concern that you have. You are the responsible stake-holding Committee for the Commission; I will be coming back to you in due course. So I have got stuff that I can go on with, it seems to me.

Therefore, although you would regard this session as toothless and pointless, I would say that it is not pointless and from this end it does not feel toothless.

Chair: We have missed you, John, in the last—[*Laughter.*] We have missed you condemning us as “toothless” and “pointless”. But anyway—

John Nicolson: Just on this particular appointment, not in our general work, of course.

Q50 **Jane Stevenson:** I was going to say, John, that you should ask us how we feel about being “toothless” and “pointless”. But Mr Fraser, I would like to move back to how you will carry out the role if you are appointed.

One of the chair's roles is setting the strategic priorities for the Commission. The current strategic plan runs out in 2023. For the benefit of colleagues, I will just read out the five strategic objectives: “Holding charities to account... Dealing with wrongdoing and harm... Informing public choice... Giving charities the understanding and tools they need... Keeping charity relevant”—that is, “relevant” for today's world. Of those objectives, which ones do you feel are worth carrying on and how would you pivot and shift in your strategic plan?

Orlando Fraser: Setting the strategy is a massive job, really; think of it as an enormous ship you have got to set on the right path. And that is not something that I can sit here and say, “This is what we're going to do”.



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What I can say is that I want a strategy going forward that reflects the overall messaging that I have given today. Using that as a template, I then want to sit down with the board—the new board, because there will be new members—and the Commission, and work out how best to do that within that framework.

Within that area—so, let's say enabling and helping—I think that my point of view from outside the Commission, because I am not inside yet, is that it appears to me that more work could be done on digitisation.

We need to get to the position of having a trustee portal—a personalised portal. We need to get to the position of having really good data capture. And that is hard. The Commission has come a long way from 2013, when we started very backwardly, on all sorts of aspects. We got rid of our servers. We digitalised the annual returns and the RSIs. We have got an intelligence director looking at information. We have made a lot of progress, but the real holy grail will be digitalising filing of accounts, because that will mean all sorts of data can be taken off, worked and analysed, and that is a huge deal. Companies House hasn't even done that yet. They haven't got there, but we want to get there.

Something around digitalisation and the prominence of that would be something that I would be thinking of. Data capture does not just help us to be an effective regulator; it of course also helps the sector, in so far as we can share that. So that's one of the areas that I would be putting up as prominent within that overall schematic. But setting a five-year plan is a big thing, and I am very pleased to have the opportunity to be able to be involved in that.

Q51 Jane Stevenson: Would you look beyond board members to formulate this plan? Where else do you think you could get some—

Orlando Fraser: Obviously you have the board and then you have the senior management. And if you think you need expertise outside that—a lot of the work within the Commission is fed by outside expertise, particularly on the digital side. I think you would be pulling in the best, because it's going to be a very key period, I suspect, going forward, and I suspect a lot of this economic stuff is going to be a big problem, so you have to factor that in and how you are going to address that.

Q52 Jane Stevenson: From among the objectives that have been in place, where do you think the Charity Commission has been successful and which of those do you think needs improvement?

Orlando Fraser: I haven't given it detailed thought. I think the robustness side has been good. But you don't quite know. When we arrived in 2013, a lot had not been addressed, and suddenly erupted. I don't know, because I haven't been in there, what the procedures are. I can see some of the same committees are there, but some have gone. And in terms of the board scrutiny, what that has been like—it feels as though robustness has been good, but I would want to see and hear more about that.



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In terms of enabling, this is a small point but, I think, an important one. The boldness of standing up occasionally for the sector, for charities, which are coming under what we genuinely think is unfair media attack—I think we should be prepared to go out there and say, “Hang on. They’re doing a great job. The actual problem is smaller than that,” or whatever it is. I think that is something to be thought about. It’s not something we do particularly often, but I think we should be more prepared to do that.

So those are matters I would mention.

- Q53 **Jane Stevenson:** We have heard from John and Clive, I think it was, who raised the hopefully very rare occurrence that a charity is a bit dodgy or has aims that are undesirable to most people in the country. Do you think the system for weeding those out is robust enough? Would you be seeking to make any advances there?

Orlando Fraser: The data suggests, I think, that only 60% of registrations succeed, so we are weeding out 40%. It’s not simply a case of filling in, “We have the right purposes. Are we in?” Quite a lot of analysis goes into it, so the scrutiny is quite robust, even at that early stage—and particularly, obviously, if complaints come in, as they do. And sometimes in that process, you can see improvements. From the look of it, from the case decision on the charity John was referring to, the process of complaint and scrutiny did lead—so it appears—to some changes, beneficial changes, of conduct on the part of the charity.

We had a similar one. I don’t whether any of you were around for the Preston Down charity, which is the Exclusive Brethren, back in 2013 and 2014. This, again, was very contentious. It was a lot of things to do with exclusion and difficult practices. People complained that they shouldn’t be on the register or shouldn’t be applied—we looked at it. On the face of it, it fulfilled purposes, but it was a difficult one, because there were allegations—similar ones—of detriment and harm. And people were having a terrible time, actually, as a result of some of the practices of the brethren, who were a religious organisation.

Because of the scrutiny and the work we did on that, a way forward was reached that has brought a lot of positives, going forward, for the people involved in that and for the charity itself. The registration process can help in that way and, in my experience, can be quite robust.

- Q54 **Chair:** There are 166,000 charities in this country, with a total £48 billion in annual turnover, which I think is more than we spend on defence. Are there too many charities? Is it too easy to get charitable status?

Orlando Fraser: First, it is important to say that the Charity Commission cannot say that there are too many or too few charities, because it is not up to us. What happens is that Parliament sets the purposes, and if a charity comes to us with the purposes and the public benefit, we have to register—there is no discretion, there is no limit. It is not like, “We’ve reached 170,000, sorry, come back later if something else goes.” We do not have discretion, so in that sense it is not for the chairman of the



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Charity Commission to say, "Yes, there are too many", or too few. That is important.

Also, I would not want to be in a position of someone coming in, as someone who is personally involved in and positive about the sector, and saying, "There is too much charity." I don't agree; I think that there should be more charities, in a sense, personally, but—

Q55 **Chair:** What, more than 166,000?

Orlando Fraser: I think that you don't want to discourage charitable works. People often find the motive for charity work and giving is many and multifaceted.

Q56 **Chair:** Are you confident that all 166,000 charities are charities in the true sense of the word, or are they, frankly, other organisations with the masquerade of charity? One hundred and sixty-six thousand.

Orlando Fraser: I have not been within the Commission, so I have not observed the registration process for the past five years, but from what I have known of the Commission in the past, and as we have been talking about, I think its registration process is very robust. I would be confident that they are all bona fide charities.

Q57 **Chair:** On the size of the job at hand—£48 billion and 166,000—it seems as if you are struggling against the tide. Such a huge swathe of work comes your way as an organisation that, frankly, it is almost too much to ask that you do thorough due diligence all the time, that you spot the next Kids Company, so to speak.

Orlando Fraser: It is a big ask, and there are not that many people and we do not have that much money, but I was impressed in my time previously, and remain so, by how much it is able to do. A lot of that stuff is that we recognised—because there were problems with some charities, the beginning of the problems in 2013 and 2014—the need to have risk-based technology, to have a sensitive approach to regulation, and to be able to spot red flags, and those sorts of matters. That has been huge. There has been a lot of investment, and there is a whole intelligence directorate. That has to be the way forward, that kind of investment in—

Q58 **Chair:** How do you see that developing? Would you use more algorithms, for example?

Orlando Fraser: We are not really there yet, but yes, AI has got to be part of it going forward, but that is not cheap. This is what I was coming back to in terms of budget, five-year plans and things like that—if we are looking in that sort of direction, the Treasury has to expect to help out occasionally.

Q59 **Kevin Brennan:** Welcome, Mr Fraser. Seven people were interviewed for this position. Obviously, you are the second person that a Minister has picked out from that seven, but all seven were deemed appointable to the job. Do you know whether any of the others were women, members of ethnic minorities or disabled people?



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Orlando Fraser: I don't know.

Q60 **Kevin Brennan:** You had no oversight at all of whom else was on the short list. It was all done virtually, presumably—you weren't all in a room there, sweating—

Orlando Fraser: No, we were never in a waiting room, sweating.

Q61 **Kevin Brennan:** I know you will understand that this is not personal, but do you understand why the Committee is pretty fed up with the way that the public appointments process seems to throw up—I know you are an individual—almost identikit candidates in front of us? That is, men of a certain age—I am a man of a certain age as well, by the way, so I understand—who have had links, and often tell us they no longer have, with the Conservative party, whether as a donor or a political candidate, in many of these public appointments. The whole process around allowing Ministers to intervene in public appointments five years ago was watered down by the Government to give Ministers a greater chance to pick people and to approach people. Do you understand from that why the Committee—without being personal about you—is frustrated at what we keep seeing put in front of us with regard to public appointments?

Orlando Fraser: I cannot give evidence about that. It is not something that is within my remit or experience, nor something that could assist you.

Q62 **Kevin Brennan:** When you are chair of the Charity Commission, you are going to have to deal with this in your own organisation, in terms of diversity and so on. You are saying that you cannot comment on the fact that the Government cannot operate a public appointments system that produces any results that offer us any diversity in these sorts of appointments. You cannot comment on that, and yet it is your job in the Charity Commission to go away from here and do exactly that.

Orlando Fraser: Yes, I will be doing exactly that. Of course, we have a great role as an independent body and greater control and input into our own appointments, so you will, I hope—if I were to be appointed—see a more diverse board. There are tremendous skills on the board as it stands.

Q63 **Kevin Brennan:** When you were contacted following the Martin Thomas debacle, who was it who contacted you, and what did they say to you about this appointment?

Orlando Fraser: I had an email asking if I would be interested.

Q64 **Kevin Brennan:** Who was it from?

Orlando Fraser: It was within the directorate general.

Q65 **Kevin Brennan:** So it was from a civil servant?

Orlando Fraser: Yes.

Q66 **Kevin Brennan:** Did any Ministers speak to you following the Martin Thomas debacle and your appointment? Have you subsequently had any conversations with Ministers?



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Orlando Fraser: No.

- Q67 **Kevin Brennan:** So there has been no contact at all with the Secretary of State or any of the Ministers in the Department? You did kindly tell the Committee earlier that you are not and never have been a friend of the Prime Minister. Have you ever met him or had any dealings with him?

Orlando Fraser: I have only ever met him in a public environment. I have never had any personal contact like that.

- Q68 **Kevin Brennan:** When you said it, there seemed to be a little bit of venom in your voice. Did I misunderstand your tone?

Orlando Fraser: Oh yes, you have misunderstood. There was no venom.

Kevin Brennan: You are taking on the role of chair, so you will obviously have an opinion about what the role involves and how predecessors carried it out. What is your opinion of the way that Sir William Shawcross carried out the role of chair of the Charity Commission?

Orlando Fraser: I thought he carried it out very well. I thought it was a good board under him, and I thought we achieved a great deal. I thought that, but so did the National Audit Office and Parliament. I was on his board, but in a way, that is outside validation of that view.

- Q69 **Kevin Brennan:** You may be aware that between 2008 and 2009, I was the Minister for the third sector in the last Labour Government. Although it was not my appointment, the chair of the Charity Commission at that time was not male, interestingly; it was Dame Suzi Leather. What do you think of the way that she carried out her job as chair of the Charity Commission?

Orlando Fraser: That goes back a long way—

- Q70 **Kevin Brennan:** You have explained that you have been involved for a long time in and around charity, and charity law and so on.

Orlando Fraser: Yes, I have, and I was going to—

- Q71 **Kevin Brennan:** You are not suggesting that you have forgotten about it, are you?

Orlando Fraser: Well, that is quite a long time ago. I was going to finish by saying that my greatest knowledge of it was the National Audit Office report in 2013, after she stepped down, and it was not good, I am afraid—it is out there on the record. Margaret Hodge, then Chairman of PAC, said that it was terrible, not fit for purpose, that the powers were not being used, and that it was a culture of inactivity, of laissez-faire, of whatever it was—I am summarising. That is not my own impression, but what we were given as an end-of-term report, as it were, and in that respect, where it had ended up at that time was not good. That is probably the best answer I can give you.

Kevin Brennan: Clive Efford asked you earlier about the previous Secretary of State's remark about wokeness in talking about the kind of



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candidate that the Government were seeking for the role of chair of the Charity Commission. You responded that, wokeness or not, it was not something that you, as the Charity Commission, could regulate. Would you get involved in discussions and arguments where a charity is being criticised by the press and by Ministers for deciding, for example, to remove a statue because it represented somebody who had been involved in the slave trade? What would be your response to that as chair of the Charity Commission?

Orlando Fraser: First of all, the chair offers oversight; it is the executive that deals with individual cases, and that is very important. That is part of the structure, and we do not want to overstep that—the National Audit Office has made that point before—so *prima facie*, these are issues that the executive would be looking at as to whether or not there is an issue of charity law. Only in that exact, narrow, legal prism does the Charity Commission act, and it should not be considering acting outside that. If there is a problem, it should do something, and if there is not a problem, it should not. This was where I was going: let's say we have assessed it and looked at it and we think there isn't a case to answer, but still a charity that otherwise does very good works for people is being damaged by what looks like an unjust media attack, that is the point at which, if the Commission is satisfied, it should be prepared to say something.

Q72 **Kevin Brennan:** You will be aware that there is a very strong political agenda in this place, which the Government is pushing very hard at the moment and which is backed up very strongly in certain elements of the tabloid press, to say that charities—the National Trust, for example—should not be able to take decisions about how they would like to contextualise and explain the history of the properties that, for example, they display to the public, even when there are huge, overwhelming statistics showing that they really need to improve their access to people from ethnic minorities and so on. Can you assure the Committee that this is not an agenda that is of any interest to you, and that you are not going to get involved in ministerial attempts to use this as a divisive political tool to gain votes?

Orlando Fraser: Absolutely not. We would not be an arm of Government in any way at all about that kind of issue. All we would ever do is look at the facts and decide the position in accordance with charity law, full stop. If there is an issue, we would do something about it; if there is not, we would not.

Q73 **Kevin Brennan:** There was some criticism raised earlier in the Committee, and ACEVO, the chief executives' organisation, also wrote to us with some questions that they thought we should ask you. It went back to this issue about the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and your time when you were a commissioner. The criticism, I suppose, was that you perhaps went beyond your role as a commissioner and were pressing for an inquiry, even though you admitted that that would probably be subject to legal challenge and might well result in the Charity Commission losing that legal case—and in the end it had to back down under judicial review, didn't it, in relation to this whole incident? Is that an unfair



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characterisation of what happened at the time?

Orlando Fraser: Yes, I think it is unfair, actually. What I was urging in those emails—which the Lord Chief Justice, who was taken through the emails, thought was entirely sensible or sound, or he understood where we were coming from—was an inquiry to see what the links were between the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust,¹ Cage and Mohammed Emwazi. My point was that we have to be robust and have confidence in our own judgment, even if there is a risk of a challenge. If we think we are legally right, we should have confidence to do that. That was my point, and that was what that was getting at.

Q74 **Kevin Brennan:** Did you think that the Charity Commission had the power, or ought to have the power, to compel a charity like the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust not to donate in future to an organisation that you objected to?

Orlando Fraser: That was not my suggestion—I think I made that clear. What I was interested in was a statutory inquiry. The executive took a different approach and asked for assurances not to fund Cage ever in the future, which the charity gave. The obvious problem is that if you issue a compulsion, you are therefore fettering the discretion of the trustees going forward, and you can see the argument that that is against the framework for charitable status and the way it is run. You can see the difficulties in that approach, hence in due course, a settlement was reached.

Q75 **Kevin Brennan:** So you never favoured that approach at all? You never supported that approach at any time?

Orlando Fraser: I never even knew that that would be—

Q76 **Kevin Brennan:** Okay. Can I just quote back at you what you said in, I think, the questionnaire you supplied to the Committee about risks? “It is also likely that the commission will continue to be dragged into polarising political issues, and I would intend to manage that by aiming to ensure that the commission confines itself simply to applying the law without fear or favour to any entity, as you would hope and expect the regulator to do.” The accusation, in a way, is around the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust issue—that, perhaps, you went beyond that; you have said that that is not the case. Can you give the Committee an absolute assurance that, as chair of the Charity Commission, you would behave exactly in the way that you outlined?

Orlando Fraser: Yes, absolutely.

Q77 **Kevin Brennan:** I should say that I met your grandfather, Frank Longford, when I was a student.

Orlando Fraser: Did you?

Kevin Brennan: He is someone who was savaged by the kind of people we have been talking about—the *Daily Mail*, the *News of the World*, at the

¹ The questioner was referring to the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, but the witness’s answer referred to the Rowntree Foundation.



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time, the tabloid press, Tory Ministers—because of his campaigning in relation to prisoners. Some of it was, perhaps, misguided. If Frank Longford was around today, campaigning on the same sort of issues, would you support the Ministers accusing him of wokeness and behaving in a way that caused some sort of outrage in the culture wars? The Government seem to want to use the Charity Commission to promote their agenda there.

Orlando Fraser: No. As I made clear, I wouldn't have the Charity Commission being an arm of Government and assisting in any woke or anti-woke agenda full stop—whether that was with Frank Longford or anyone else. Speaking of your knowledge of him, he had, as you say, a whole heap of rubbish held over his head constantly for standing up for subjects he believed in. He was a very independent man whom I admired hugely. He is one of my role models in terms of independence. I think that he would understand, as I understand, what we are talking about in terms of standing up to Government. On that point, I have spoken about occasionally being prepared to step in if there is an unfair media attack—a sort of approach that would not find favour with those entities you are talking about, I might add.

Q78 **Kevin Brennan:** Finally, if you had been asked for a reference, who would you have given as your referee?

Orlando Fraser: Er, maybe my wife? *[Laughter.]*

Kevin Brennan: I am not sure that would be allowed, but I won't press it any further.

Chair: You are obviously not asked to give references that often, if that is the case.

Q79 **Dr Huq:** Final quickie from me: the version of the CV that we were supplied with did not say anything about whether you had been to school or university. We are all employers here—we look for that kind of thing. Just out of interest, and for the record, can you tell us where you went to school and university? It may be interesting, on the question of same old, same old.

Orlando Fraser: I do not know whether it will be interesting for the Committee and I do not know whether it is a matter of private life. Chair, would you like that information?

Chair: I think it is probably on Wikipedia.

Dr Huq: I have been looking; it is not on Wikipedia. Tell us! It is not a state secret.

Chair: If you wish to name your school and university, that is fine. If you don't want to, that is not a problem either.

Orlando Fraser: No, I am very happy to say. I went to St Paul's School, which is an independent day school in west London, and I went on to Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge.



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Chair: Thank you. That concludes our session. Thank you very much for your attendance today, Mr Fraser.