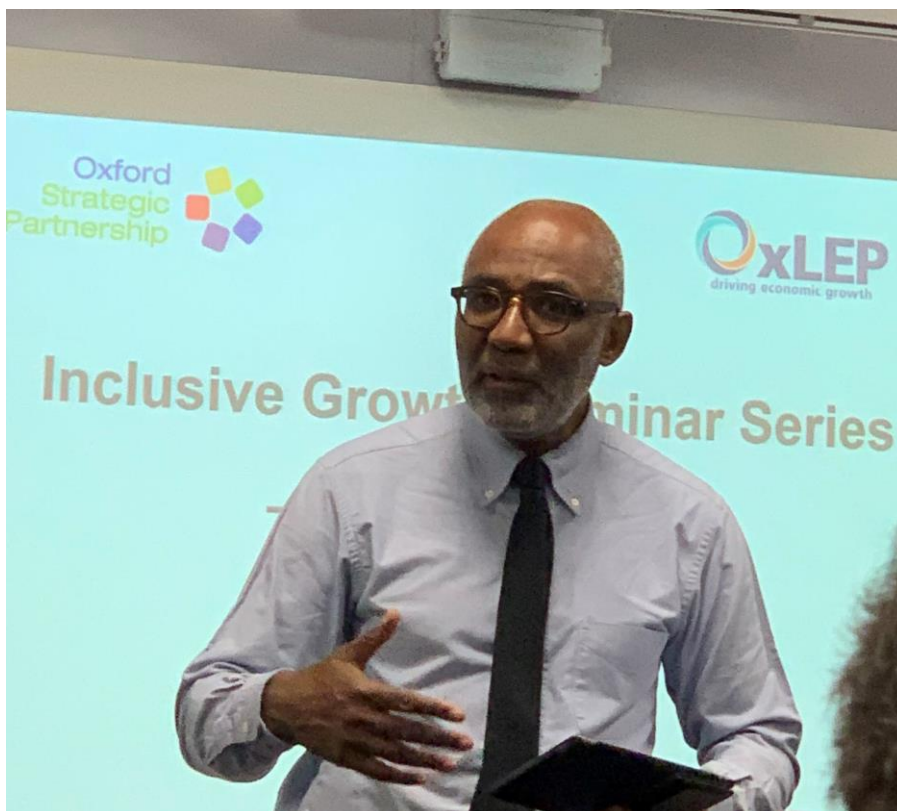


### Third Seminar on the Inclusive Growth Commission

Continuing their series of events looking at inclusive growth, Oxford Strategic Partnership and Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) held their third seminar to discuss and consider challenges and potential interventions associated with economic and social inequalities on 20<sup>th</sup> November. Hosted by City of Oxford College at their Blackbird Leys Campus (close to the BMW Groups's Cowley Mini manufacturing site), the event was moderated by Chair of the Oxford Strategic Partnership, Baroness Jan Royale. The focus was on workforce skills and training, employer engagement and initiatives. City of Oxford College is part of Activate Learning group, which works across further and higher education, schools, apprenticeships and training. Activate Learning (<https://www.activatelearning.ac.uk/>) CEO, Sally Dicketts participated in a panel discussion as part of the event.

A much livelier meeting than the first scene-setting seminar, Baroness Royale questioned whether the term *Inclusive Growth* should be dropped in favour of the term *Inclusive Economy*, perhaps signalling that the idea of growth does not resonate with everyone.



The first speaker was **Trevor Phillips** – a writer and producer, past President of the John Lewis Partnership Council, Phillips is also a former chairman of the Equality and Human Rights Commission. He started by reflecting that the nature of companies is changing significantly; the traditional behaviour and constitution is shifting with exponential growth within tech companies. He identified three big challenges that are impacting on the workforce and skills:

(i) **Digital transformation:** the impact of which he likened to the arrival of the railways during the Industrial Revolution – no-one really thought about or could anticipate how they would change the economy and the landscape until it happened;

- (ii) **demographic change:** an ageing population, a younger generation with different expectations and demands, globalisation with access to skills from other parts of the World; and  
(iii) **Diversity.**

He also reflected on the shift within company balance sheets from tangible, capital assets, to intangible assets such as IP.

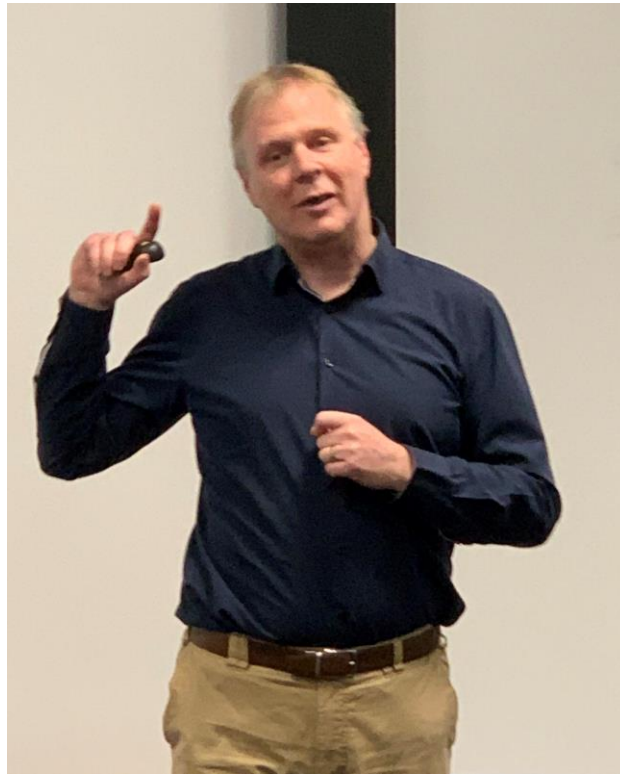
Building on the issue of digital transformation, Trevor noted that the ratio of company value to the number of employees within tech companies was completely different to that of traditional industries, with much smaller and leaner workforces. He also noted that while we think about the San Francisco Bay area as being the most significant tech hub in the US, it was actually cities such as Houston, Texas and Memphis, Tennessee, which were homes to major hubs for the oil and gas industries and logistics, respectively. This demonstrated how technology disruption was impacting on established industrial sectors. He also made the point that the future world of work was unknowable, so how do we prepare our next generation workforce?

Drawing on his own experience within television, he talked about how technology had led to the loss of roles that had previously been critical within production teams. Traditional career pathways were being disrupted as a result. He highlighted the role of 'Production Assistant' – a job often taken by women – which provided a transition role from administrative and secretarial entry points within broadcasting and created a pathway into production and direction. These positions no longer exist. Turning to culture within organisations, he also talked about the sometimes “quirky” people that can be found within tech companies; no longer the odd one out, organisations were having to rethink their culture as a result.

Drawing to a close, Trevor Phillips identified a number of things that he thought would be important to the workforce moving ahead:

- It is an error to believe that we can understand what tech skills are going to be needed – technology itself continues to disrupt what tech skills are important.
- Autonomy within the workforce is key – workers should have the authority to institute change.
- Roles have to be sustainable and worth the money that they are paid – interestingly, he here challenged whether it was right that there should be a minimum living wage, particularly where people could be replaced by technology.
- Team culture is very important, alongside the ability to work in teams.
- There would be changes in ownership of assets – diversity in the future would be marked not by who earns what, but by who owns what.

As he concluded, Trevor noted that the reason that the UK football leagues were populated by European, rather than British, managers was not a result of greater skill, strategy or training, but rather a measure of the ability to speak a number of languages and therefore to get the best from the players, typically from all over the world. As a self-proclaimed Chelsea fan, hailing from North London, it was clear that Jose Mourinho's appointment at Spurs was on his mind.



Returning to Oxfordshire, the next speaker was Dominic Hare, CEO at Blenheim Palace. Dominic talked about the important relationships between Blenheim and its local communities. He said that the future of Blenheim depends upon flourishing communities around it (and vice versa) and was clear that long-term thinking was at the heart of Blenheim's relationship with the communities around the estate.

Blenheim has set itself a number of clear goals and is focused on measuring their impact on the community (Oxford Brookes has undertaken this evaluation). Dominic did, however, caution around what indicators were used and their relevance. The Coop Community Wellbeing Index is being used by Blenheim and he recommended that people take a look at this (<https://communitywellbeing.coop.co.uk/>) *Note: You can input your postcode and a scoreboard for your locality will be provided, covering a range of indicators grouped around people, place and relationships.* Blenheim has a goal to triple their economic contribution to the local economy. Affordable housing is a key issue, as was employing local people and Blenheim is active in supporting apprenticeships and local start-ups where they can really impact on their success.

Picking up the theme of procurement, which was discussed within the first seminar, and heralding a theme for the panel discussion to follow, Dominic talked about Blenheim's local spend target: 44% of non-payroll spend stays within 20 miles of the estate.

The final part of the event was delivered through a panel discussion, moderated by Jan Royale, (first to the left) who was joined not only by Sally Ricketts of Activate Learning (left), but also by Penny Rinta-Suksi (right) a partner at law firm Blake Morgan and a non-executive director of OxLEP and by Paul Roberts (second right), Chief Executive Officer, Aspire (<https://www.aspireoxfordshire.org/>). Established in 2001, Aspire has been tackling the most complex social issues in Oxfordshire for over

18 years; supporting vulnerable local people into and towards employment and housing, as the most powerful way to break the complex cycles of homelessness, re-offending and poverty.



In a wide-ranging discussion, the panel talked about the importance of education. Given that this event took place during the general election campaign, there was considerable discussion about further education funding, adult learning, the burden on teachers to deliver a set curriculum and the amount of money flowing into education across the whole spectrum of learning. Sally Dicketts drew on her own experience of leading a large, cross-county F.E. provider to reflect on the importance of developing the social skills that would equip young people to operate effectively within the workplace. In her experience with some young people, there was need for long-term input to develop these skills, not just the one or two years that were funded within FE colleges. The expectations of Gen Z were discussed, as they along with millennials (I had to look up the definitions by the way!) had very different expectations from work and workplaces. On the one hand, there were issues in raising the confidence of younger people, on the other hand, they have no problem in saying what they want, and they interview employers as much as it is the other way around.

The debate moved to involve the audience. There was some anxiety about how to open up the issue and discussion more widely, beyond the 'middle-class' people in the room. Thinking was needed about how to get a wider set of views. Trevor Phillips, now from the audience, wondered what there was to learn from the transformation of London schools and the huge rise in achievement. He stated that this was widely attributed to the ethnic mix within schools and the attitudes of families to learning and attainment and the value that was ascribed to this.

Discussion turned to how to get the "private sector" to buy into the idea of an inclusive economy and to open up opportunities. However, you cannot paint business as one homogenous entity. Oxfordshire has businesses of all sizes, sectors and interests. Smaller businesses are often entirely focused on survival, securing their next deal, business opportunity or investment tranche; they do not have the capacity or interest to engage, let alone to think through how and when an apprenticeship might be an appropriate way to address skills needs. Thought needs to be given to how inclusive growth/the inclusive economy is presented to businesses, and this should be done in a



way that will engage, appeal and get them involved, recognising that you need to focus on companies that have the maturity and capacity to contribute.

Picking up from Dominic Hare's talk, the panel agreed that procurement, encouraging the use of local firms, products and skills, was important. Transparency can be a useful lever for change, equal pay audits for example meant that companies could not hide their pay gaps any longer and were having to address them.

The meeting ended on an upbeat note. There were people in the room who wanted to collaborate and there was a determination to see change.

The final event within the series takes place on 29<sup>th</sup> January, 2020, turning to the development of proposals and action.

*This note was written by Sarah Haywood from Advanced Oxford. As a member of the audience, it reflects her personal notes and perceptions from the event.*