

Summer Dinner 2017 - FINAL

Good evening ladies and gentlemen.

Before I do anything else, can I also offer my thanks to our sponsors this evening – Mott MacDonald and MyCSP.

Mike I hope you and your team are having a fine first-time sponsor experience – and also that Matt Thurstan and the MyCSP team and guests are enjoying their fifth consecutive year as drinks sponsor.

It's hard to believe it's a year since we last gathered together for the EOA Summer Dinner – and for those of you that were here in 2016, you'll remember it was just days before the Referendum vote.

We do seem to be making a bit of a habit of being here at key political moments!

I don't find speech writing that easy. For those of you that have given speeches, you'll know it's a challenge to get the balance in the narrative just right so that the speech both informs and entertains – especially when speaking to a group of people who have just enjoyed a few glasses of wine!

So as I prepared for this evening, I reviewed my speech from last year – and please forgive me if I remind you of what I said then;

*“Whilst the EU referendum campaign has been polarised –the one thing that most commentators do agree on - is that **no-one** can*

*predict the outcome **and** that life **after** the Referendum will most definitely be **changed**, regardless of the result.”*

Like many commentators, I expected a different result to the one we got in the Referendum – however, I certainly couldn’t have got even close to predicting the significant political, economic and societal changes that followed that landmark decision for the UK to leave the EU.

However, one consistent element of what I said last year that **still** rings true today is that of **change** – and the opportunity change inevitably provides for us to pursue **our** mission to mainstream employee ownership.

So I’m delighted that the focus of our host and speaker this evening, Baroness Bowles, has been about the relevance and timeliness of employee ownership at this time of such significant change.

Baroness Bowles has been part of the economic and political mainstream her entire career, and so her appreciation of the bigger role that EO might play in the economy is therefore highly reassuring as we plan for the launch of the new Ownership Effect Inquiry next week; a new Inquiry which will seek to evidence the impact and effect of EO and the opportunities for EO as an economic and social enabler in a post Brexit economy

So as I mused over what I might include in this speech, and in the middle of watching yet another election debate, I started to consider what **might** have been in the manifesto of a new political party, the *Employee Ownership Party*, in 2017.

If you can indulge me for a few minutes, I'd like you to imagine that you are the Cabinet of this new Party and let me outline for you, our manifesto for **Better Business**.

Our first commitment is to deliver Better Corporate Behaviour.

The EO model is one in which employees have a meaningful stake – and therefore their voice **must** be heard. So corporate governance in EOBs is inclusive and involving. Our manifesto promise is to ensure that ALL stakeholders, and especially the employee shareholders, have the opportunity to have a voice and to be heard, and, through representation on Boards, Trusts or employee Councils, play their role in shaping the future of their business.

EO will also deliver a business structure that is trusting and transparent, with openness, dialogue and sharing of information an everyday practice. No need to protect financial information from the employees; because the business is owned by the employees, they are **entitled** to share in such information, as well as using it to enable them to fully play their part as owners and to make the most effective contributions.

Our second manifesto commitment is to build More Profitable and Resilient Businesses.

Employee owners think and act in the long term interest of their business. As guardians of the business of today, they invest for the benefit of the business *of tomorrow*. They don't necessarily look for a quick return on investment, or a quick exit from markets – but recognise that to grow and thrive requires patience, investment and development. So unlike those organisations that **have** to react to the unpredictability of the stock exchange or the appetite of absent shareholders, EOBs respond proportionally to their environment, and in doing so are, in the longer term, both more profitable **and** more resilient.

So our promise to the UK is, that through EO, we will deliver more businesses that have the **resolve**, the **reserves** and the **resilience** to survive, even when times are hard and unpredictable, which will be increasingly important in the lead up to and beyond Brexit.

Our third commitment is to Do Good Whilst Doing Well.

EO will deliver business models and cultures which result in more efficient, productive and profitable businesses, but which also will employees, and respecting the contribution of **everyone**. In contrast to the Board Room greed seen in some other business structures, EOBs use their resources to reward contribution proportionately

and, when times are good, everyone shares in the success, not just a chosen few.

These businesses will also deliver more positive impact for their local communities and for their employees. Embedding themselves locally, most often without an interest in a future trade sale or in off-shoring jobs to minimise costs, these businesses will become vital to their regions, helping to support strong supply chains, investing in local skills, creating greater social mobility and driving more prosperity.

Finally, our manifesto concludes with a fourth commitment to deliver businesses that truly Engage Everyone.

EOB's are known for their higher levels of employee engagement – after all it's this key trait which brings employee ownership to life.

We will therefore deliver businesses with structures and cultures in which employees are fully aware of what is happening in the business – not just because it creates a more trusting environment but because it helps the employee owners to work more effectively, responding and adapting to their customers and clients needs.

This culture will differentiate these businesses as attractive employers for future staff, will help retain the best talent and will directly support better wellbeing. This in turn will unlock the discretionary effort from employees that leads to higher levels of

productivity as every employee experiences the impact of the ownership effect.

So as the Cabinet of the new *Employee Ownership Party*, we have a powerful Manifesto promise of **Better Business** and 4 key commitments:

Better Corporate Behaviour

More Profitable and Resilient Businesses

To do Good whilst Doing Well

To Engage Everyone

And most importantly, these are commitments that we know we can keep because **you** and **your** businesses are delivering them now – so no U-turns here!

The other thing a successful political party needs of course is a clear and compelling message **and** a successful campaign to enable it to reach out to its target audiences.

And fortunately, unlike other new political parties starting out, the *Employee Ownership Party* is already blessed with each of these.

We have our message and promise – that EO delivers **Better Business**.

And whilst we may not have the traditional ‘battle bus’ taking our message to every corner of the UK over an intense six-week period, we’re much better prepared than that; we have a network of over 320 of **your** businesses spread out across the whole of the UK, in every sector of the economy, who are living and breathing EO 365 days a year.

Your businesses exemplify the success of EO, and through **your** everyday work, are demonstrating how employee ownership delivers Better Business. And **your** stories, **your** successes and **your** experiences are far more powerful at demonstrating why EO delivers than any party political broadcast.

Of course, every successful political party also has its personalities – the leader who often makes, or sometimes breaks, the party. The *Employee Ownership Party* is no different. But that leader is not just me or Simon or even members of the EOA Board; again we are blessed with not just one, but over 320 voices of the EOA membership who are our active ambassadors, our local leaders and our sector spokespeople.

You speaking about and promoting EO in **your** local communities, with **your** customers and suppliers and across **your** own sectors through trade media, on social media and at events creates levels of awareness and interest in a way that no one person or small group on its own can ever do.

So there's just one last thing to add for the new *Employee Ownership Party* to be complete, the traditional autumn get together. And of course we already have that too.

The EOA Annual Conference continues to be a focal point for all of you to come together to be inspired, to become better informed and to get involved and we're really looking forward to welcoming over 700 of you to Birmingham again later this year.

Whilst I've never really had any serious political ambitions, it's clear that our proposition for EO is more compelling than ever before – and I would like to think that had we had the '*Employee Ownership Party*' on the ballot paper this evening, we could have secured a good proportion of the vote!

And that's why our timing of The Ownership Effect Inquiry could not be more timely.

The Inquiry provides a unique opportunity for us to capitalise on the demands of society for a fairer, more inclusive and progressive form of capitalism.

It's **our** chance to shine a light on everything that your businesses do that is normal to you, but different to others; that showcases great employee engagement; that delivers productive and profitable enterprises whilst being responsible, fair and inclusive – at a time when the British public is crying out for different and better business.

So I'm very much looking forward to each and every one of your businesses being involved and represented in the Inquiry as you help to strengthen our campaign to mainstream employee ownership.

Employee ownership has never been more important.

Employee ownership has never been more relevant.

And employee ownership has never been more needed.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen.