**Courtenay Griffiths QC Speech**

**Delivered at Millicent Grant’s, CILEx Presidential Inuaguration**

**Thursday 13 July 2017**

Yesterday I was privileged to attend the graduation ceremony for law graduates from the University of Kent. It was held in the splendid setting of Canterbury cathedral. That representative image of England set in stone. Yet what struck me was not the magnificence of that setting. No what struck me was the make up of this graduating class of 2017 lawyers.

* + I estimate that perhaps as much as 70% of the graduates were female.
  + Those females came for a multiplicity of backgrounds. African, Muslim, Chinese, Indian and numerous other areas of origin. It was an extremely diverse group.

These facts, which I know are replicated in many other universities both here and overseas in e.g, the Caribbean and Africa. And I know this from giving guest lectures in all these places, worldwide.

Now it seems to me that there is a lesson to be learnt here about the future shape and constitution of the legal profession.

Yet tonight when I come to celebrate Millicent’s election as the incoming president of CILEx, I want to make it clear that I am not here to celebrate diversity. No I am here to mark:

* + The shape of things to come; and more importantly to pronounce
  + A victory for equality as opposed to diversity.

The simple point, which Millicent’s election to my mind demonstrates, is that given equal treatment quality will win out. This is not about the comestic need for a diverse work force and profession. This is about equality, that is equal treatment within the legal profession

Now, CILEx offers a unique route to a legal career and becoming a qualified lawyer without a requirement to have a law degree, although law graduates and graduates with non-law degrees can also qualify as a lawyer through the CILEx route. Entry is accessible to those holding a variety of qualification levels.

Speaking as someone who made the major blunder of studying law at university, perhaps the worst mistake I ever made in my life. First in my family of 9, me the second youngest to go to university. No one was there for me to ask about the various routes into the profession. I have never been so bored in my life, and further:

* + Perhaps 90% of the law I learnt in university I have never had cause to use;
  + Further in my area of work, criminal defence, the law is perhaps the least potent weapon in my armoury (explain)
  + There are so many other skills that are required. Skills which come from experience, from making mistakes, from working at the coal face.

That is the beauty to my mind of CILEx. The practice of law, and the art of the advocate requires time and practical experience to develop. You do learn on the job.

At a time when graduates from bar school, having shelled out £15-£18 on the BPTC, yet facing a limited chance of getting pupillage, there is an attraction about the CILEx route which many young people are unaware of.

So Millicent, whilst congratulating you on your appointment, I am encouraging you to become an evengilist for CILEx. I want you to seak to students at schools; from GCSE to A level, explaining that in this time of increasing student debt, much highlighted in recent weeks, there is another route they can take into law.

This is an opportune moment to give CILEx a bigger profile on the legal landscape

Millicent, you and I share an interest in developing young people, particularly in the inner city. Your work with young people in Brixton is mirroried in the work, the charity I chair in Lewisham, does in that borough. Here is an opportunity to use your role as president of CILEx to connect with a generation who may think an entry into the legal profession is beyond them.

For the legal profession has to shed the image of eliteism which so stunts the ambition of so many in our society. For that elite whilst recruiting in its own image,

* + Bestows upon itself a mistaken and misplaced mystique, and thereby
  + Creates an invisible barrier to those conditioned by their social position and their education to think that certain professions are outside their reach, beyond their intellect. I refuse to accept that.

So this is your manifesto. You will need your 20,000 members behind you. That is a great responsibility. But can I advise:

* + Do not promise to build any walls,
  + And certainly do not call any snap elections when you can’t predict the outcome.

But what do I know about leadership anyway.