

Honorary Doctorate
Professor Matthew Flinders

I want to be very brief and make just three quick points.

The first point is just a huge vote of thanks to Utrecht University for awarding me this honorary degree. Utrecht is undoubtedly what I would describe as a world-class transformative university. It is concerned and committed to both knowledge-creation and knowledge mobilisation and manages to sustain and promote an inclusive and positive research culture which is as beautiful as it is remarkable. This may explain how and why Utrecht University is such an anchor institution with deep roots into local communities and communities of practice, while at the same time acting as an intellectual hub or incubator whose reach and influence is truly global in scope and impact.

I know a little about research cultures because for the last five years I've undertaken two national reviews in the United Kingdom about research culture, in general, and research leadership, in particular. This leads me to a second point and simply to an awareness that anyone who receives recognition or a reward for their research has generally done so by being supported by a vast array of professional colleagues, friends and family members. This is what I call the 'tip of the iceberg' issue. So let me be both honest and obvious – for all the traditional talk of the 'lone scholar model' research is generally and increasingly a team-based endeavour. I've been incredibly lucky in my career to have worked with lots of brilliant and generous people, and to have had the support of a wonderful loving family. Any reward or recognition that comes to me must therefore recognise that I have been supported by lots of people – I just want to acknowledge that fact and thank everyone for their support.

Research teams – just like families – must adapt and change to altered circumstances. That is a fact of life, and it brings me to my final point and to a word about democracy. I was lucky enough to contribute to a conversation about 'the futures of democracy' in this great hall just a couple of months ago and I want to reiterate the point I made back then: democracy is a beautiful but highly fragile form of social organisation, it has no right to exist but must be constantly nurtured and nourished if it is to adapt to changing circumstances. My concern is that we have taken democracy for granted – expecting more and more without nurturing and nourishing the deeper relationships and educational ecosystems that sustain it. I might even suggest that many parts of the world have become 'democratically decadent' but that might be too political...too provocative for a short address like this.

So, I'll conclude by thanking my wonderful family, and thanking everyone here today for this wonderful honour.

Prof. Matthew Flinders