Fellow engineers, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all here this evening at the start of my three year term as President of the Royal Academy of Engineering. Engineering has been the life blood of every Company I've been associated with for close on 50 years. Even the Bank of England, whose Court I was privileged to Chair, had a fine standby power station in its vaults. I am therefore very honoured to take on this role at an important stage of development both for the Academy and the engineering profession as a whole and at a time when engineering really is raising its profile and starting to be properly recognised for its essential contribution to our Society.

I also wanted to have the opportunity, very early in my Presidency, to meet as many colleagues from the engineering institutions and other key partners as I can. So a particular thank you to you all for joining us this evening.

The Academy’s Founding Fellows’ purpose – a mere 35 years ago - was to promote engineering for the national benefit, for the progress of wider society and for the future of humankind.

We are now a fully fledged national Academy of 1,500 Fellows. We are small compared with many of the Institution memberships – and deliberately so. But our Fellows are also Institution fellows and members – we are hard wired together.

And a strong, healthy Academy playing an important role as a leading engineering body across all disciplines is, I firmly believe, good for Engineering Professionals and for engineering as a whole. It is also good I believe for the strength of the institutions and the other organisations with which we partner.

The Academy’s vision is to bring engineering into the heartland of society, a sentiment that I am sure everyone here would endorse. There are powerful economic reasons why this is now so important.

Engineering is central to economic growth, to innovation and enterprise. We must build the capacity of UK entrepreneurs and UK enterprises to create innovative products and services, to increase national wealth and employment and to rebalance and strengthen the economy. The creative focus of many companies, from pharmaceuticals to aerospace, is invariably centred on the art and science of engineering.
We must, with the institutions and other partners, promote engineering and the Role of the Professional Engineer vigorously in public life. We must also foster better education and skills such that the needs of the country are met and the aspirations of our young people are satisfied. If we are to have an economy with more technocratic horsepower, then we need more young people to set their sights on becoming engineers.

Engineering is – by its very nature – a collaborative profession. I want to build on the work of Lord Browne in working to bring our profession closer together and I shall work to ensure that our formidable collective strengths are harnessed to create maximum impact and influence on matters of importance. Together, we can make a real difference. We can be more than the sum of our parts.

This, in brief outline, is the agenda to which the Academy will be working during my Presidency.

So I am delighted to see so many of our colleagues from the engineering Institutions and other partners here this evening. We are building a reputation as a cohesive profession that works well together for the national good. This is, of course, instinctive in most engineers; at every level in our careers we are doing just that.

Two of the alliances on which we work together – Education for Engineering (E4E) and Engineering the Future - are now becoming genuinely successful in influencing policy. When the engineering community speaks with a single voice, it is drawing on one of its most enduring qualities. Dealing with big issues requires a lot of collective weight - and that's how effective collaboration with engineering institutions is making a difference. Policy makers clearly welcome a more streamlined process for gathering the advice they need.

Some of you will know that I have been chairing a group of Fellows and Academy friends aiming to raise the necessary funds - £6.5m - to transform the public spaces in this building. This is the final event here before the project starts. When we re-open next April, we will have created a high quality Forum in which we will debate the issues that matter and celebrate the achievements of engineers, showing what engineering is and what it is to be an engineer today.

The Forum will allow the Academy to do more - for and with our partners. We see it as a national asset for engineering. I hope you will welcome and share the aims of the Forum and I hope you will consider it yours as much as ours.

I very much look forward to meeting as many of you as possible tonight, getting to know you and hearing your visions and aspirations for the future.