TRANSCRIPTION OF MARK DRAKEFORD'S SPEECH THE DEVELOPING MINDFLNESS CONFERENCE 21ST NOVEMBER 2019

Bore da, diolch yn fawr am y gwahoddiad i siarad yn y cynhadledd. Dw I'n falch iawn i fod yma i ddangos cefnogaeth a rhoi syniadau. Thank you very much indeed for the chance to be here. It's great to have opportunity to share some thoughts with you and to make a few suggestions about the way in which the mindfulness movement as it has been and as it has developed here in Wales might face challenges here in the future. I'm here as a result of an invitation to speak that came at a meeting with Chris Ruane and colleagues in March, and it's great to be here with him. In that meeting we talked about the benefits of mindfulness as a therapeutic tool, its potential to contribute to changing the culture and leadership of our public services here in Wales, and you've just been hearing about some of the ways those ideas have been taken forward.

In some ways it's not a surprise I think to learn that the mindfulness movement has found a particularly positive echo here in Wales, because Wales has such a long tradition of meditative practices designed to build resilience and reflection and that goes back right through our modern recorded history. Back in the summer I finally managed to stop on one of my many journeys between north and south Wales on the A470 to visit the medieval monastery Abaty Cwm Hir right in the very centre of Wales and even for someone who doesn't have huge spiritual leanings such as myself – to go there and to stand in that spot is to give you a sense of that calm moment, that sense of reflection that that place was built on and is still somehow still captured in the stones and in the context. That long tradition continues to this present day and the mindfulness movement is in a way an inheritor of that long history.

Just as today you have been discussing the insights and practices of mindfulness and noting the way in which they have spread into such a wide range of workplaces - education service, probation service, community settings to name just a few. There is huge work going on to increase access to mindfulness techniques across those communities and in our public services. You've heard this morning and I've met myself since our meeting in March Civil servants in Welsh Government are using this training with the aim of improving resilience and effectiveness in their day to day work. Here in this room we have people from that very wide range of disciplines looking at ways in which the application of mindfulness can be made in a very wide variety of services and settings here in Wales. This conference is a fantastic opportunity to consider how mindfulness can be moved to the next stage by learning and working together and finding opportunities to incorporate these skills into everyday life.

I could spend this brief time that I have with you telling you things you know already better than I do and celebrating the success of mindfulness here in Wales but what I thought I would do instead is to offer 3 thoughts, 3 challenges in a way, which I think are there in the way that we need to think about how mindfulness can be developed into the future.

First challenge

My first challenge is to say **good intentions by themselves are never enough**. I started my own working life as social worker working as probation officer here in Cardiff – I'm afraid I saw far far too many times people who believed that simply because they intended to do

good, that good would inevitably follow. These were fantastically well motivated people who absolutely believed that what they were doing was going to be the right thing but they were often astonishingly resistant to evidence. They somehow believed that motivation by itself was a guarantee of success, and quite plainly as you stand back from this proposition you will know that it doesn't stand up at all. Simple good intentions are no guarantee at all that results will be what you hoped they would be. That's why evidence is important.

I listened to Rachel was saying about rationality and I maybe have slightly different view on the subject. It's completely true to say human beings aren't not simply rational individuals but rationality is part of what we are. It's not the whole of what we are but it's not to be set to one side as though it plays no part of what we are. Therefore the pursuit of evidence in the way in which we think of mindfulness in future seems to be a very important part of the way in which we can we offer guarantees to people we would work with that we are not simply offering them our good intentions, but that what we offer them are good intentions grounded in a sense of what the evidence allows us to say.

That's why the Leverhulme ethnographic study of mindfulness in the UK is so important and I know that there will be people in this room will have contributed to it. It's the biggest research effort of its type in the world already and I believe will offer us some very interesting insights and information as its emerging findings come to be published next year. This is very consistent with what we have thought about these things about this in Wales already – the Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice in Bangor was one of first research institutions to set this in therapeutic context and being in a university setting then of course the creation of evidence, application of knowledge, drawing of conclusions from research has always been part of way the Centre has gone about its business. We're engaged here in Wales in studies and innovative application of mindfulness for a variety of purposes and that way of doing things, going about the business in a way which has a research scepticism – scepticism in the positive sense of that term – scepticism which means that we are openminded to what the evidence will show us, a willingness to ground our practice and the development of the ideas in the body of knowledge that we create as we go about the things that we do.

So that's my first challenge - that we move beyond simply believing that because we intend to do good that by itself that will be enough– we have many of the raw ingredients we need in Wales to do that already.

Second Challenge

My second challenge is one which I know people in this room are much engaged with already. That is**, how we move mindfulness beyond something that focuses simply on the individual but focuses upon individuals as social beings,** as people who live their lives in relationships with others and whose social way of behaving forms the essential context in which those individual lives are led out. Now the social model of mindfulness I'm trying to point to is something that leads us to ask not simply how we respond to each individual, but how we respond to the relationships and structures in which those individuals operate so we can allow people to flourish together. Some of the ways we have tried to introduce mindfulness techniques into the Welsh Government I think moves us into that social understanding as well. Of course, as you've heard we've built those principles into the

legislation reform WBFG Act. Requires us to take that long term collaborative and integrative approach which involves people who are affected in the decisions we make.

Research at Aberystwyth University has used a radical combination of training in behavioural insights and mindfulness to how public servants can become better decision makers and provide better advice. I want to see all of these insights contribute to the kind of leadership I want to see in public service in Wales.

The quote you saw earlier shows my expression of frustration at the hierarchical leadership structures we have in so many of our public bodies and public services. I myself am entirely uncomfortable at hierarchical structures – I want us to develop what is called a **distributed model of leadership in our public services in Wales**. That example on the screen came from my frustration of the weekly experience of being prepared to answer questions on the floor of the Assembly. Every Thursday I receive the questions I have to answer on floor of the Senedd on the following Tuesday. I would sit down with civil servants every Monday to help me so I'm as best prepared as I can be. At the very start of being First Minister would involve me sitting down with people who were right top of tree in hierarchical way civil service is organised – by the time I sat down with them I was talking to people who knew no more about the subject than I did – they would have spoken to the person who spoke to the person who was responsible for the person who knew about the subject and who had written the briefing. This would have been passed up the chain of command and eventually I would meet with the person who was the recipient of these fifth or sixth hand conversations

What happens now is that we meet in a bigger room with more people and I now also meet the person who has written the answer and who works on the subject I'm being asked about. In the civil service this is revolutionary stuff I can tell you because there are huge hierarchical gaps now between the person I am speaking to and those who normally think I should be speaking to them. That is one tiny example of a much bigger picture of what I mean by distributive leadership.

One more anecdotal example. I was the Health Minister for quite a long time and I sometimes used to caricature my experience as Health Minister as receiving letters through the post which would start with
"*Dear Minister, I am an astonishingly important person in charge of a major part of your health service providing vital work for the people in Wales*…." and then it would go on to describe in the middle part of the letter all the woes of the world this person lived in. The inal paragraph would always read "*So Minister what are you going to do about it?*" I always wanted to write back to that person saying "*I thought your first paragraph said "I am in charge of things*"".

The reason why I am suggesting today that we should be interested in a social model of mindfulness and why mindfulness links to ideas of distributive leadership is that distributive leadership tells you that first question you ask when you come across an issue that needs attention not "Who can I pass this to?" or "Where in the hierarchy can I send it for attention?" Instead the first question you ask yourself is "What contribution can ***I*** make in the job that I do in the part of the organisation I'm in to the solution of this issue? And how

can that small contribution be added to all the other contributions other people have to make in order to come to an answer?" If you think about distributive leadership in this way this tells you that every single person in every organisation has a leadership responsibility and not only leadership responsibility, but they have a leadership potential which distributed leadership unleashes. It's quite a hard message to send out because so many people in our organisations have been taught for so many years they don't have a contribution to make and they don't have any power in the organisations they belong to and that the real answer is to send it to someone who does.

Distributed leadership is more radical that getting the right people in the room to talk to but a whole different way in which our organisations operate in which the social relationships with people have become part of the way in which those organisations are powered. The expertise of the person on the front line is every bit as important and significant as the contributions of other people in different parts of the same organisation will bring to that team. That idea I think takes you into a different sense of how individuals get linked up with other people in order to create collective responses to problems that are faced.

Third Challenge

That takes me to my third and final challenge for the morning in relation to mindfulness. Not only that it has to be grounded in evidence not good intentions alone, not only that it must be more than a focus on the individual but on the social. But thirdly that it has to have **some attention to the causes not simply the consequences** of social distress. Looking at Rachel's canary example, if canaries are the sounders in the mine of things which have gone wrong then the answer is not simply to reconcile people to the difficulties they face. It is also to find ways **with** them to find out together how they can work together to effect the causes as well as the consequences of those experiences. That's my final challenge for the morning.

How do we do that? How do we find a way of allowing those individual experiences to come together in a more collective focus on solutions that get to the causes of the difficulties that are faced? Well, let me offer just one more possibility alongside distributed leadership, and it's another aspect of that and that is **Shared Leadership**. It is leadership that particularly in our public services moves beyond the organisations in which we work, that in particular recalibrates the relationships we have with the people who come through our doors every day bringing issues that public services need to attend to.

While I am a huge admirer of the 1945 Welfare State and think how incredibly fortunate almost all of us in this room have been to have lived our lives in a time when we have had all benefits that that settlement has brought to us, one of the most fundamental ways in which we would think differently today to the founding formers of the Welfare State thought is in the relationship between the user and the provider of the service. Back then I don't think there was any doubt that the formers of the welfare state believed that the person coming through the door was the passive object of the benign concern of the person providing the service. That patients were there to do what doctors told them, pupils were there to learn what teachers taught them, tenants were there to behave in the way that the council thought they ought to and that if they did all those things it would be good for them.

Today I think we have a different understanding. In a shared leadership sense when a person comes through door to see us they bring with them a set of experience, a set of expertise, a set of understanding of the circumstances of their lives which makes them co-equal experts with the person who is providing the service. Of course their expertise is different but it is equally valuable.

First question we should ask the person as they come through the door should never be in my view "What is the matter with you today?", but it should be "What **matters to you** today?" Because if we understand from the person as they come through the door what matters to them we will put the issue in the centre of the table and understand that by contributing our expertise together with their expertise the chances of collectively fashioning solutions that matter to them will be strengthened from that very first sentence.

Final challenge for the morning
For mindfulness to find ways as well in which it is able **mobilise those collaborative and collective conversations** in which the strengths of everyone in the room can be mobilised together to create insights and then some solutions to the issues that people who need the assistance that can be provided that bring them to our door in the first place.

With those three things and many other things that you will be talking about this morning then the astonishing success that mindfulness and those who have been associated with it have achieved in less than a decade I think will go on and be strengthened still further, will allow yet further usefulness to be obtained through it and the shared ambition that we have to go on working alongside our fellow citizens here in Wales to bring about improvement in their lives for the benefit of us all has an even better chance of being realised.

Diolch yn fawr, thank you all very much indeed.

(Probably first time in the world that a government leader has addressed a mindfulness conference – another first for Wales)