

This year marks a milestone for the Foundation. It's witnessed the culmination of the first five years of our strategy since we came into being as an independent global charity possessing a unique governance structure in 2012. In that short history I'm immensely proud of what we've achieved.

New frontiers.



Professor Richard Clegg
Chief Executive



The past year has been full of new frontiers, bringing together some of the best minds in the world to understand emerging technologies and trends.

From the beginning we've had in place a clear strategy of what we want to achieve. We also have the guiding principle that grant giving, however well intentioned, can fall short if based on assumptions that are wrong, or if operational delivery lets them down. That's why we've paid equal attention to our internal processes as well as external grant giving.

Such efficiency, alongside talking to and learning from other similar charities, has helped us keep our overhead and governance costs comparatively low when benchmarked against others in the sector. Not only does that help in increasing the amount of resources available for charitable activity, it also contributes towards maximising our impact on society. A double benefit.

In 2019 the Foundation awarded new grant commitments of £7.7 million, down on the previous year's figure of £23.9 million. However, our direct charitable expenditure (the philanthropic activities the Foundation engages in directly, rather than by making grants to grantees) is steadily increasing. One example of this is the significant investment we're making in widening access to our maritime heritage collection of 1.25 million documents, by cataloguing, digitising and making them freely available on the web as a unique historical and educational resource. So far this year we've digitised around 200,000 such records.

Annual grant commitments is one metric by which to measure the Foundation. We're also in a fortunate position due to our unique governance structure and endowment that we can afford to take the long view. Consequently, some of our significant grants can be worth over £10 million extending over 5-10 years. Our grants portfolio currently exceeds £120 million and is increasing. Working with our grants community on managing this portfolio and driving it towards impact, is a growing body of work and something we take seriously.

Fundamentally it is mission focused outcomes and impact that drive us. We have a clear impact framework in operation and are careful to see that all our grants have a plausible pathway to application from the outset. We believe that the best way to demonstrate impact is through case studies – real world, practical examples of where we have demonstrably added value. In 2019 we published our first set of impact stories on postcards and are looking to add to them as well as translate them into other languages and formats such as short videos. The wish of the Foundation is to be known for who we are and what we stand for, and the impact we're making in the world. Telling our story helps bring the Foundation to life and further helps in attracting partners who share our deep values and purpose.

The past year has been full of new frontiers. The Foresight Reports and Insight Reports we publish serve as a mechanism for bringing together some of the best minds in the world to understand emerging technologies and trends. Not only do they serve as due diligence for our own grant decision making, they're also invaluable for others to build on. In 2019 we initiated foresight related work on subjects including future engineering uses of the sea, the future of regulation, and food safety. We look forward in the year ahead translating these into programmes of work.

I stated in my first paragraph that this has been a milestone year for the Foundation with the culmination of its first five year strategy. In March this year the Board of Trustees endorsed the next step in the journey with our refreshed strategy to 2025. We will be heightening our focus on becoming challenge-led and evidence-driven. Next year we're looking forward to launching these challenges and also building in-house our new Evidence and Insight Centre.

The success of the Foundation belongs to everybody involved including our grants community and colleagues in LR who work hard to support us. We're also indebted to our Advisory Council members who challenge our thinking and present us with fresh opportunities and ideas. I particularly want to thank our Trustees who give their time and much more pro bono.

Professor Richard Clegg FEng, FRSC
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