

Your Royal Highnesses, Prime Warden, Masters, Distinguished Guests, Liverymen, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is my privilege to welcome you all on behalf of this Honourable Company to Drapers Hall and to the 2016 Livery Dinner.

We have been superbly looked after this evening, and my thanks go to the staff here for their hospitality.

Our Principal Guest is His Royal Highness The Duke of Kent, Liveryman of our Company. His Royal Highness joined what was The Guild of Air Pilots and Air Navigators in 1991, following in the footsteps of his father, who became our Grand Master in 1938.

His Royal Highness is a graduate of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and was for many years a professional army officer. Sir, you are most welcome among us as a fellow Liveryman of this Company this evening.

We are also honoured to have with us His Royal Highness Prince Hamzah bin al Hussain of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, who I congratulate most warmly on becoming a Liveryman of this Honourable Company today. His Royal Highness is also a graduate of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, and also followed a career as a professional army officer thereafter. Prince Hamzah is a qualified rotary & fixed wing aircraft pilot and enjoys, among other sports, target-shooting and horseback riding.

Sir, you are most welcome among us as a fellow Liveryman of this Company this evening.

I would like to welcome also my personal guests: Wing Commander Keith Jarvis, former Commanding Officer of our Affiliated Unit, the University of London Air Squadron; Squadron Leader Alan Melmore, Commanding Officer of 618 Volunteer Gliding School based at RAF Odiham; Captain Jason Holt, Vice President Flight Operations for the cargo airline Cargolux; and my Father, Timothy Benn, London Publisher and member of the Stationers Company.

Looking to the military field, it is an honour for our Company to know that we have been granted an affiliation with HMS PRINCE OF WALES, one of the two new aircraft carriers for the Royal Navy.

Entry into service of these superb statements of national power and intent will mark the full resumption of a maritime-led Joint Carrier Strike capability, as long as the requisite number of aircraft are procured to constitute the full Carrier Air Wing on board.

That would surely be a fitting testament to the incredible life of the supreme Naval Aviator, Captain Eric 'Winkle' Brown, who sadly passed away this year, and in whose memory this Company is proud to dedicate three new annual gliding scholarships.

We also pay tribute to Army Air Corps Aviator and Astronaut Major Tim Peake, orbiting somewhere overhead as I speak, for his outstanding work in inspiring young people by his example.

Defence is nothing without the people that commit themselves to it, and UK aviation as a whole has benefitted beyond measure from the incredible service rendered to it by the Air Training Corps, staffed in greatest part by volunteers, whose long service and outstanding record we pay tribute to this evening, in this, their seventy-fifth anniversary year.

Their slogan; 'The Next Generation' is never more relevant than now, for it demands of us that we ask what 'The Next Generation' might look like in so many ways – in defence

aviation, in civil airport infrastructure, in airline careers, and in the outlook for young people wishing to enter our profession.

The Air Cadet Organisation has inspired and motivated generations of young people to enter aerospace, and has made the so-called STEM subjects: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, come alive and be relevant to them.

If we are to win what our Government has rightly called 'The Global Race' then Air Cadet flying, and specifically flying training leading to solo standard, must be the goal of the organisation, for it is that which has the capacity to inspire, and which has given us generation after generation of air-minded, technically-orientated young people.

As The New Warden Captain John Towell has said, This Honourable Company plays its part, particularly in inner city schools, by providing gliding and powered flying scholarships to young people, but not on the scale of the Air Training Corps.

Alongside the Air Training Corps, the foresight and vision of the founders of the Royal Air Force in setting up the University Air Squadron system must be recognised. Although the Air Squadrons still exist, much of their role in flight training has been lost.

This forces me to ask – where are those ladders of opportunity now, when neither the Air Cadet movement nor the University Air Squadron system is able or tasked to produce the amount of flight training that they did to such a superb standard for decades?

Airlines need pilots. Estimates suggest 400,000 are needed worldwide in the next twenty years. UK flight training, using techniques pioneered by another of our affiliated units, the Central Flying School of the RAF, is still the world leader for quality.

How can it possibly be then, that VAT is still levied against such a critical activity in the UK when, once again, our competitors in many cases in countries just across the channel in Europe, do not do so? This anti-competitive anomaly must be eradicated to save our vital flight training industry.

Pilots need to be financed to train for those careers. I cannot be alone in being disturbed that a member of our Young Air Pilots group told me at a recent event that he has paid £100,000 to a training organisation for his Airline Transport Pilot License but must now find another £30,000 to pay his new employer for his type rating on the airliner which he will fly with them.

As Past Masters before me have said most eloquently, this is not a sustainable model for airline recruitment in years to come, and relying on the so-called 'Bank of Mum and Dad' to fund trainees is neither fair nor durable.

It is my belief that the arrangements that make pilots pay for their own type rating on top of their Airline Pilot License should be outlawed by all regulators in Europe. This activity HAS to be an airline responsibility. We salute those airlines which have picked up the mantle of providing fair and realistic financial support to trainees

The careers that new professional pilots enter must be seen to be sustainable and rewarding if recruitment and retention is to succeed.

New Flight Time Limitations as promulgated by the European Aviation Safety Agency, as it is termed, have great potential to cause fatigue. Fatigue can render pilots incapable of decisive action, and yet it is deemed by many in flight safety organisations to be one of the leading threats to flight safety today. Airlines aiming to out-compete one another on

productivity may lead to a dangerous downwards ratchet that could have a desperately prejudicial ultimate outcome.

Fatigue among airline crews must be addressed, and not left as the silent threat to air safety.

The European Aviation Safety Agency also intend a wide ranging-review of aspects of Pilot mental health. This review must recognise that professional pilots spend their lives working to create safety in flight operations and must not seek to create a climate of suspicion that engulfs the innocent, whilst failing to spot those with the cunning and conceit to conceal an evil intent.

Adequate and experienced regulation is vital to a safety critical industry such as aviation. Events in 2008 proved that adequate regulation was equally vital to our financial services industry. Regulation is a difficult task that needs practitioners who are up to date and highly experienced.

Now may be the time to adopt a new model, where professional pilots with a safety and management background are seconded for a period of time in their careers to the Regulator as a matter of course, with employment costs shared between the sponsoring airline and the regulator. Perhaps this model may work for our vital financial services sector as well.

In any event, both regulators and regulated need an open and inclusive dialogue, something this Company will always support. In this way we will achieve both lasting and workable outcomes, as is so necessary following the tragic events at the Shoreham air show.

'Winning the Global Race', as it is so accurately described, also demands that Government see the airline business as a critical enabler in the growth and prosperity agenda, for it is the the airline industry which enables the connectivity and communication that is the essential prerequisite to creating investment, growth, and jobs.

As such, Air Passenger Departure Duty simply makes our airline industry uncompetitive against its peers, and exports that traffic abroad to rival airlines. It is time to scrap this regressive and self-defeating tax.

Government must join in an effort to reach a global settlement through ICAO that addresses air transport emissions.

Now is also the time to make a bold decision, and to start the long overdue process that leads to a third runway at London Heathrow. We have been out-competed by our European neighbours for too long.

Aviation is at a crossroads in the UK. If Government persists in neglecting the legitimate needs of aviation then it will fade away; embrace the challenges facing us, however, and it will contribute, as it has for decades, to the prosperity and development of our country for years to come.

In this seventy-fifth anniversary year of the Air Training Corps, I borrow their motto because it forces us to ask ourselves what kind of aviation future we seek, and to work harder than ever to make sure we achieve it.

And so I ask you all to rise and join with me in a toast to: "The Next Generation".