

David Cameron

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a great privilege to be here today in the company of the Right Honourable David Cameron MP, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, on whom the Board of Governors of De Montfort University (DMU), on the recommendation of the university's Conferments Committee, has resolved to confer the award of Companionship.

This honour - our highest - is conferred upon people of intellectual, cultural and professional distinction, for whom the award would be a proper form of recognition by the university.

It acknowledges the introduction of The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act in March 2014, and, in particular, Mr Cameron's courageous support of this legislation which enables gay couples to enjoy the same rights as heterosexual couples.

This award goes beyond politics. It is about honouring a man who has fought for the introduction of a new law which has improved the lives of millions of parents, husbands, wives and children in the name of equality.

The nomination for this award comes from the opposition benches in the House of Lords. The Lord Alli, who has recently completed 10 years in office as Chancellor at DMU, is a proud campaigner for equal rights and played a significant role in paving the way for same-sex marriage in Britain. It is his nomination which has led to the conferment of the Companionship today.

Here in Number 10 Downing Street, we are at the heart of government, but it is a personal and human commitment to which we pay tribute – a sincere belief that holds that the State makes no sense unless it accepts the mysteries of the human heart.

The Prime Minister is a man with great faith in the institution of marriage. He believes in the case it makes for commitment, and the signal it sends about sacrifice and reward.

Most importantly, the Prime Minister understood that the very integrity of marriage risked being undermined the longer its rewards could only be enjoyed by some, and not all of us. Rules founded on sexuality risked turning something meaningful into a divisive convention.

Many politicians talk about tough choices. But in his unswerving commitment to same-sex marriages, the Prime Minister really did make his own, far from easy choice, especially given some high profile critics in both the media and in politics. It is this moral courage and leadership, therefore, which we also recognise today.

Some might argue it was an easy choice, because it was right, and it was time.

But it was the Prime Minister who grasped surely, saw clearly, that love – ineffable, unquantifiable – had immeasurable importance to the public good. The change in the law that he championed says something about the sort of society we are now – one that honours a tradition of respect and tolerance by widening its ambition.

As our honorand himself said: “When people’s love is divided by law, it is the law that needs to change.”

The campaign for equality has defined the UK as a trailblazer. Since that leap forward, Ireland has followed suit and in June, same-sex marriage was made legal in the entire United States of America after a Supreme Court ruling. Such changes inspire globally and bring hope to LGBT communities in other countries who continue to face vociferous and often violent opposition to their desire for equal rights.

One only has to look at the throwing of gay men off buildings by the despicable so-called Islamic State, the recent stabbings at the Pride event in Israel or the repressive anti-gay legislation in Russia to see a very different environment for LGBT people in other parts of the world.

DMU encourages its whole community to challenge convention and test perceived wisdom and unchangeable norms, if there is a better way. Witness #DMUglobal, which aims to send 50% of our students overseas as part of their degrees, the largest international mobility scheme in the UK by far.

Or DMU’s award winning Square Mile, which amongst other things is transforming educational provision in 22 Leicester schools.

Or our #DMUpride festival which allows our 20,000 students from 114 different countries to celebrate our university’s continued commitment to equality and diversity, and the notion that pride should run deep within us.

All of this is about making a powerful, positive statement and we are proud that we actively celebrate all the voices of our community. Real success is seeing people comfortable in their own skin. They are the ones best equipped and ready to go out to make a difference. This is a key priority for a university that has just entered the top 25 of the employability league table.

Prime Minister, the boldness and the purpose you have demonstrated go hand in hand with the values we hold dear at De Montfort University. You have had the confidence to speak out for, and work for, what is right and the fierce determination to make real life better for real people.

For your leadership, in a defining chapter in British life, we thank you and I call upon the Pro Chancellor to confer on you the award of Companionship of De Montfort University.