Good afternoon. My name is John Bell and I am happy here to welcome you on behalf of the Law Faculty and on behalf of the university. I hope you have already had a very good time looking around Cambridge, looking around the colleges and talking with people about the faculty; you will learn a lot more this afternoon. I only want to make a couple of points. The first point is that law is fun and it matters. I have been studying law now for slightly under 50 years and it’s still fun and intriguing, still something that gets you up in the morning and wanting to look at stuff. Especially in a country that we have of 66 million people, the rule of law matters. Society is very complex and there are different ways in which complexity can be managed. Law is one of them. What law does is to develop rules which people agree on and then people agree to comply with them.

Now, of course, not all problems can be solved by rules, so what happens is that we agree that certain people will make decisions and we agree the procedures which they have to follow and the law ensures that those procedures are complied with. That’s very different from politics. Politics reduces complexity first by getting people to vote for a governing party and its manifesto, a programme of action, and then on more detailed matters coming to decisions by way of compromise and negotiation between interested groups. You can tell how much these two different processes are trusted.

On the left-hand side of the screen you will see the trust in governments, the orange bar represents trust in government and trust in parliament in Europe and in the UK you will see on average compared with the EU we trust governments and parliament even less. By contrast, if you take lawyers and judges, the UK tends to trust judges and lawyers even more. For those of you who are teachers in the room, don't worry, teachers are trusted 90 percent in all these surveys. You can see that if governments are trusted around 20 percent and judges and lawyers 60 at least, if not 80 percent, there is an important responsibility of lawyers to ensure that the rule of law is complied with.

Studying law at Cambridge is not a matter of learning from experts and repeating back what they say. Law is dynamic, it changes. There are new laws and there are new judicial decisions every week and we expect even first year students to be able to engage with these new developments. Our lectures and particularly our small group teaching supervisions are places where teachers and students explore together the current developments in the law. Because the law is changing, teachers do not have readymade answers to questions about what the law is. Rather, what they do is with their students explore the ways in which the law might be interpreted and might be understood.
In Cambridge what we do to ensure that this is done to its best is to employ the best academic staff from across the world and we aim to recruit the best students, irrespective of their background. As the heading says, the best academics learn with the best students. So don't be put off if no one else from your school or your area is applying to read law at Cambridge. I was a pupil of a state comprehensive in Hull and I was the first in my 45 years of my school's history to go to university to read law. I am now the first person in my college in its 650-year history to be a professor of law. So have a go. We hope you will have a very informative and inspiring day and we hope that you will think of applying to law and will think of applying to Cambridge. Welcome.