

# Integrity

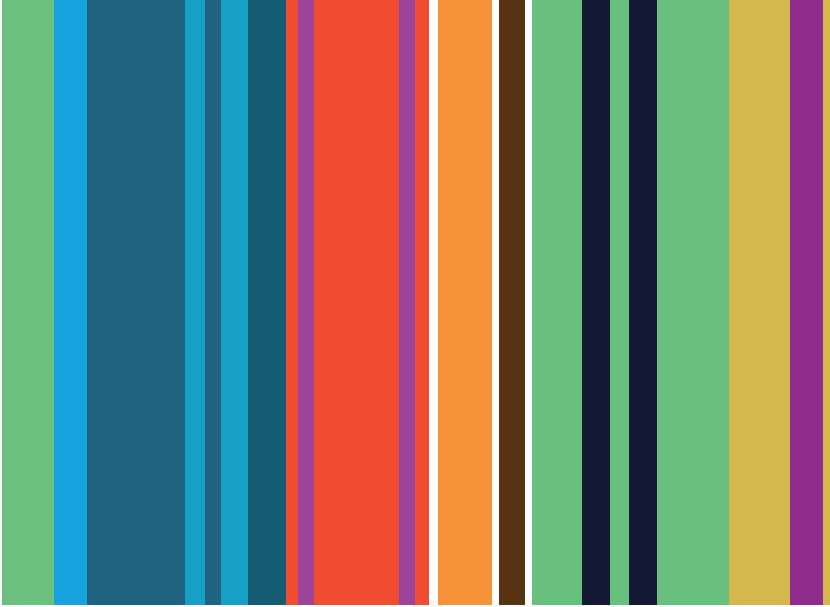
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for Education,  
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**Professor Andrew Corbett-Nolan,  
Chief Executive,  
Good Governance Institute**



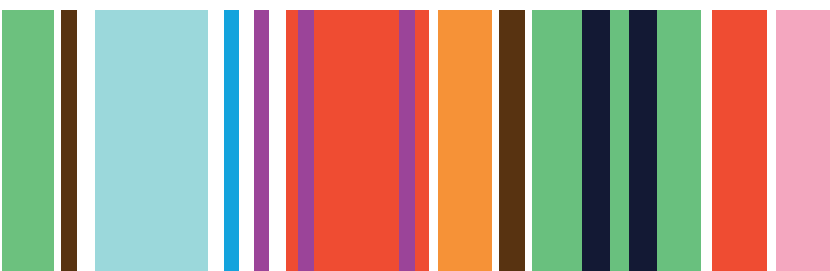
Jaco Marais: Hello, and welcome to the Good Governance Institute, the Public Good podcast. In this pre-recorded episode, we'll be discussing integrity. Integrity is the quality of being honest and having moral principles. That's what we're talking about today. It's a firm adherence to a code of values, and a person with integrity does the right thing and acts right even when no one's watching.

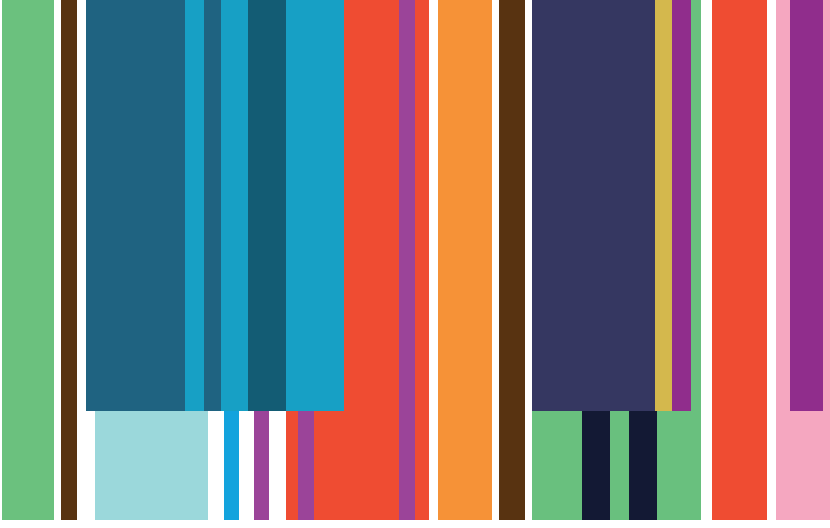
But is integrity open to interpretation? Can you have integrity in a leader if the system they lead is compromised?

My name is Jaco Marais. I'm your host, and I think you'll want to listen to this.

The Civil Service defines integrity according to the Nolan Principles as putting obligations of public service above personal interests. I'd like to expand this question of integrity. I'm joined here by Jane Davidson. She's Pro Vice Chancellor Emeritus at the University of Wales, Trinity St David, and she is the author of *#futuregen, Lessons from a Small Country*, the story of why Wales was the first country to introduce legislation to protect future generations.

Also with me today is Professor Andrew Corbett-Nolan, professor of governance and





chief executive of the Good Governance Institute. Welcome. Thank you for joining me.

Andrew Corbett-Nolan: Nice to be here.

Jane Davidson: Lovely to be here.

Jaco Marais: Jane, what does integrity mean to you?

Jane Davidson: I think that everybody will have, to some extent, a slightly different notion of integrity in particular circumstances, even though they will have a general understanding of what integrity is. I remember conversations from my childhood, when we were taught very much that lying was a really bad thing, and therefore we should tell the truth at all times. And then told that actually out of care for others, you might not want to tell the absolute truth, for example, if you thought somebody had dressed particularly badly, or whatever.

So you learn to manage your engagement with the world. And I think that in the context of public office, it is about the sin of commission as well as the sin of omission. Because if you are directly asked about something in the context of the role of public office, you are bound under the Nolan Principles to be honest and truthful in your answer, irrespective of the outcome following that answer.

Andrew Corbett-Nolan: The word, I think, extends beyond how I would use it in governance. I think it's particularly apt in the political world today. I would say it's a portmanteau word; I'd include in it things like independent when taking actions, having a moral and evidential basis for decisions. I think integrity is a hallmark of good character. It's a badge of an exemplary public servant.

Jaco Marais: I'd like to ask a question to Andrew, please. Should the overall aim of governance be integrity?

Andrew Corbett-Nolan: A well-governed organisation creates value, and it creates long term value because it thinks of stakeholders.

If people believe you and trust you, because you've got legitimacy, you can do important things, and we need to do important and consequent things in this world.

My particular area of interest is very much the health service. And in the health service, you've got these myths of the 40 new hospitals, or social care being fixed, or the idea that the NHS is awash with money. What we really need to do, because it's very necessary to level with the population, is we've got to tell the truth about where we are, because where we are is totally explicable. It's not a sort of edifice of feckless managers running around creating bureaucracy for the hell of it or acting incompetently. If you put a country through almost 15 years of austerity, you disinvest in real terms from public services. You have a pandemic, and you cut off supply of labour through leaving the single market and freedom of labour, there are inevitable consequences, and that's what we're seeing now in the public





service.

We won't be able to get any further until that very good output of good governance, which is legitimacy, is returned to those who have to make difficult decisions on our behalf. And in the health service that means the boards of the new integrated care systems and it means the boards of NHS trusts who need to be trusted by their staff and by their local populations to be making the necessary and difficult decisions at the time.

But that really is predicated by - and we return to the word integrity - being level with population, about where we are. And it's uncomfortable, because there are real pressures on people. If you've been on an NHS waiting list, or you found it difficult to get an appointment with your GP, or you're suffering with many of the consequences of the last couple of years, it's easy to suck up, frankly, indulgent lines from some of the politicians that actually things are all right, there's loads of stuff, it just needs a little tweaking, and we're almost there.

I understand it's difficult for politicians and leaders of all kinds really to say it's bad, and it's probably going to get worse for a while, but you need to know that, because very significant decisions we need to take are going to be difficult, and they're going to involve compromise. But it is a necessary prerequisite of getting anywhere. And to me that's at the heart of the difficulty of integrity, which I totally agree with Jane is absolutely essential if we're going to confront some of the big issues.

Jaco Marais: Can an organisation have integrity?

Andrew Corbett-Nolan: Is that to me? Yes, absolutely. An organisation in a very legal sense is a personality, and when it is animated by a board, one of the things the board has to attend to is the conscience of that organisation, which includes integrity.

But I think it's crucial that organisations spend time trying to make the word real. So it's just beyond the glib badge 'but of course we act with integrity and we are people of integrity.' I think that you then have to work through different scenarios. and say, 'well, how would that mean I would do things differently? How would I act if we were acting with integrity?'

Jane Davidson: So yes, veracity is at the heart of it. But it's more than that. It's a way of behaviour, when you are explicitly ensuring that your actions do not give you personal, familial or friend benefit, and that they are in the interests of the population that you serve. So I think integrity is something that's easy to grasp when you see it being failed and harder to describe. But I think it's incredibly important that actually all holders of public office demonstrate integrity.

Jaco Marais: So would you say that the first thing to do to get integrity into a system or an organisation is to ask what is the purpose of that organisation?

Andrew Corbett-Nolan: Gosh, you do ask good questions. I think an organisation that doesn't understand its purpose isn't one that can act with integrity, because you're just flip-flopping from one thing to another.

Organisations often confuse their vision and mission and purpose with a mission statement.





So I think your vision needn't necessarily be a snappy one-liner. But it's really important for an organisation to understand what it is. And I would say, what would the world miss if you didn't exist? So, if a hospital in Never Wallop didn't exist, it's quite easy to say what the world would miss, or an electricity generating company, or the Forestry Commission. It's quite easy to say that, but it's really important to focus on that.

Jaco Marais: I did want to introduce the listener to the work of Dr Nicholas Kirby. He's director of building integrity programme, a research fellow in philosophy and public policy at the University of Oxford. Now he is working together with his students on public integrity, how to create public integrity. He has a hypothesis that it is very much about the purpose of an organisation that creates integrity. So the overall purpose of society,

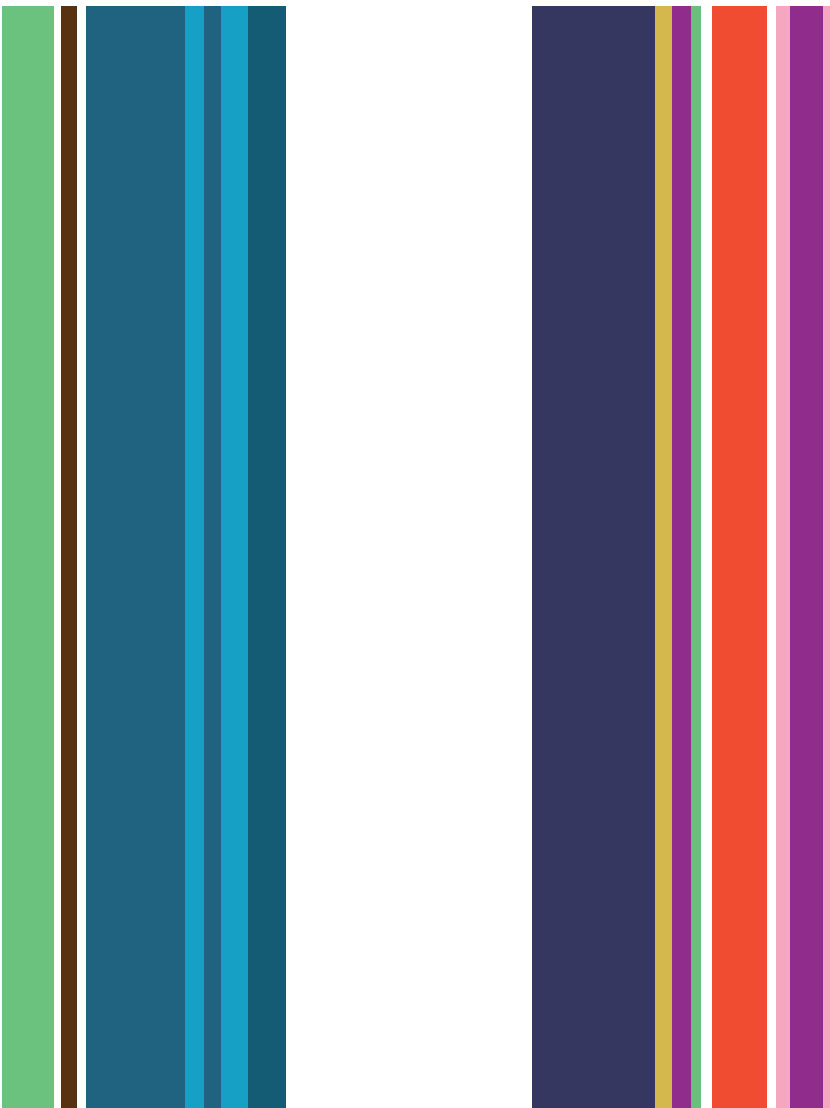
he argues, is justice. The overall purpose of politics is legitimacy. And the overall purpose of governance would be integrity. I wonder if you had any further thoughts on that.


Jane Davidson: I think he's nailed it. But I think it's one of those areas where I bet he's written thousands and thousands of words to come down to those six.

Jaco Marais: That's exactly what it's come down to. Just to expand on it a tiny bit, it's kind of like a what, who and how of how to achieve integrity in public life. The what is society. So what do we want to achieve? And he says that this is a very important question to ask first. And then to find people to act in accordance with that overall purpose is the sort of second step to integrity. And then the who is, are you legitimate? Have you been legitimately elected? So that's the political part of things. And then integrity is about how we do things.

Jane Davidson: Yeah, and I think if I bring that back to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act in Wales, because I hope it's an example of a system of integrity in early years in practice, the what is actually trying to achieve a set of goals that are actually about intergenerational fairness. And that's intergenerational fairness in the context of not just about future generations, although it's often interpreted that way, but fairness - intergenerational equity between current and future generations.

I've mentioned already that what is also unique about the legislation in Wales is the how, the behaviour in terms of reaching those areas. So I think that notion of having a what, and having a how is absolutely critical in the context of how you move forward. But the what and the





how have to be delivered in the context of what the purpose is anyway.

So the purpose of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act is effectively to do unto future generations what you would have had past generations do unto you. The purpose, often expressed as mission statements, or manifesto commitments, or ideology of political parties or whatever, the purpose is often clear when it's initially described, and often, over time, morphs into something else. Sometimes I think we have to go back to purpose.

So government, for me, keeps its people safe by doing the kinds of things we've seen through COVID, by ensuring that free school meals are available to all in Wales and Scotland, but not yet in England, and taking decisions that actively - particularly in the context of young people in future generations - will generate a positive world future for us all.

Jaco Marais: When designing a system with integrity, should it first be the what and the how, before we choose the who?

Andrew Corbett-Nolan: Always. It's a good principle of governance, isn't it, that form follows function. Often people come to GGI and say, 'oh, we're going to do something, and before we go anywhere, we're going to appoint the leaders, and we're going to work out the governance.' I think that those aren't such serious conversations, because what they're doing is sorting out the power rather than the purpose.

So I would always say you need to work out what is it you're trying to do, what's the purpose, how do you need to do it, and then you say,

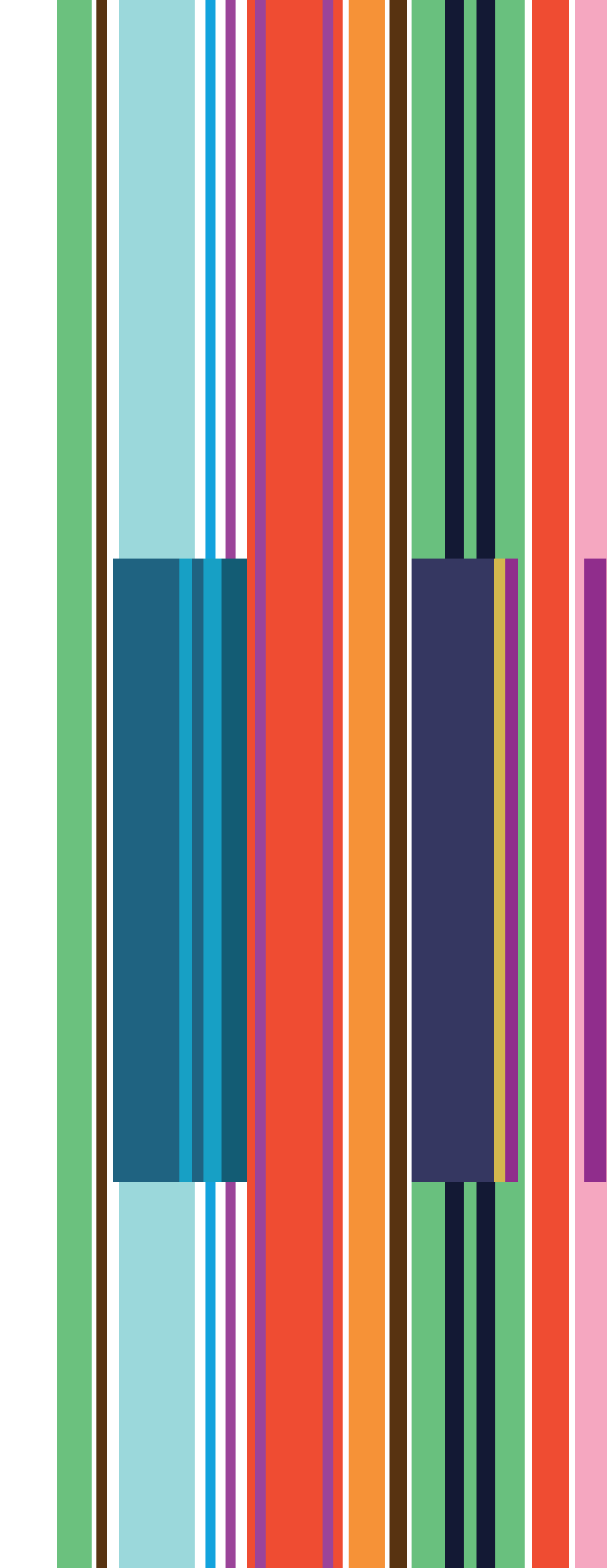
'well, okay, what skills and experience do we need in the leaders who are going to run this, and how are we going to govern this so that governance actually supports for the purpose rather than isn't a crucial part of the equation with all that good governance could bring. So yes, I'd say always.

Jaco Marais: Knowing what we know now in 2022, how can we trust our leaders to have integrity?

Andrew Corbett-Nolan: It'd be interesting to expand out the discussion a little bit because we understand legitimacy as an output, one of the four meaningful outcomes of good governance. And I'd say that the legitimacy of an organisation is one of its assets. So if an organisation is trusted, trustworthy, dependable, that's an asset for it, and its goodwill, in a sort of old-fashioned accounting sense. Legitimacy comes from integrity. So if you do create agreements and then break them, if you do say things that are not true, if you do act in a way which can be very easily connected to individual personal gain at a loss to the corporation or to wider society, then again that erodes integrity and faith and therefore legitimacy.

Jane Davidson: When you look at the number of US politicians who are funded by the coal industry, and then you look in Australia, and you find how many are funded by the coal industry, or the oil industry, or the gas industry, it could be any of the fossil fuels... The fossil fuel industries have played an absolute blinder in two senses. They've blinded us all to the effect of what they've done, and they've played a blinder in buying so-called democracies.






So we're in this awful situation, we think about integrity of people who are pulled both in terms of the science and what they know needs to happen, but also pulled by their loyalty and the financial recompense they're getting from the very industries who are destroying the world that we would want to leave to our children and grandchildren.

When you go back to the Nolan Principles, you cannot think almost of a better example of the lack of integrity where holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. Every politician who has ever taken money, and particularly those who still take money from the fossil fuels industry has been inappropriately influenced and their integrity is compromised.

Andrew Corbett-Nolan: I think that's absolutely right and I'd build on it. There's some really interesting thinking coming up, which almost posits this as a threat to democracy itself. So where to start? There's some interesting talks by Tony Blair, for example, at Chatham House, about the future of liberal democracies and how, unless decisions can be taken effectively and legitimately and swiftly, we'll just be outmanoeuvred by dictatorships or - is dictatorships the right word? We'll be outmanoeuvred by countries that aren't so bothered with democratic process. The Nolan principles and integrity in particular are a real safeguard for democracy, because if the system of election enables people without integrity, who are prepared to themselves profit from their public position, who feel they owe special interest groups favour, then you have a flawed democracy, and it's quite easy to say, well, it's



not working, and so maybe it's not the best system, and then you get into this very dodgy line of argument where you say is a system where everybody in the country has one vote the best, because maybe the population can't be trusted to use their vote wisely, and maybe the politicians who are elected can't be trusted to use their office for the best of motives. And when you get into a really, really unsatisfactory state of affairs.

So the Nolan Principles aren't just there to signal virtue for the sake of it, they have a very practical use, and they're very important. They're very important if you believe that we're a society where all people should have an equal say in electing those who lead us and can set our laws.

Jane Davidson: I think one of the big changes that we've seen in the current government, and for me this is an incredibly negative change, has been the absence of scrutiny. And the fact that previously, if you were a politician who lied to the house, you would be held to account for lying to the house. You would have to make a public apology to the house. That, I always felt, was a really important way of reassuring people that politicians could be held to account for their behaviour in democratic settings.

Yet, there have been numerous occasions relatively recently of lying to the house, which has not been held to account because the person who has withheld the truth has been the prime minister, and the speaker

has obviously made a judicious decision not to call the prime minister to account over what has turned out to be an untruth.


Now, that is then a signal in the context of the whole system. So the other relevant Nolan Principle is leadership, in terms of how the principles must be exercised in leaders' own behaviour. So we have a situation whereby integrity might be one of seven principles, and I absolutely go with good governance to think that fairness would be a very good eighth principle to add in here as well. But actually, all these principles are linked in the context of the obligation you take on in public service. And when you take on that obligation, you should deliver it with as much integrity as you can - and be prepared to be held to account if you fall short. The principles were established on that basis.

Now, we have a situation whereby the level of trust of the public, in the integrity of their political leaders has never been lower. But of course, what that does as well, is it means the trust of the public in any of the institutions supported by their political leaders has also gone down in a way that we've not seen before.

We're not seeing the links either in the right place, so that although the decision that the Conservative Party took in increasing national insurance was against their manifesto, the reason that was announced at the time was actually to tackle the social care deficit that is the huge consequence of many things, one of which is Brexit, but another of which is the underfunded health service.

When you bring health and social care together, we have a situation whereby many





people cannot leave hospital settings because of the absence of social care, and the absence of social care is complex, but part of that is about the absence of people available with the skills and qualifications to deliver that social care.

And the commitment to have a substantial amount of money to come into the social care end to release the NHS has not even been discussed, at the same time, as the discussion about whether or not that penny on income tax will stay in place following the leadership of the next prime minister of the UK, elected by somewhere over 100,000 Conservative Party members.

That leaves elderly relatives of ours, our friends, people we know in our communities, without a resource and without a voice, often in their own homes, inadequately supported. So we need an honest debate, as you say, Andrew,

about what the big challenges are that face this country - which will be similar, but not the same as in other countries - and what role government should legitimately play, a government with integrity in contributing to keep its population safe and secure.

Andrew Corbett-Nolan: On the cup half full side, I do think that, thankfully, there are two levels of integrity going on. So it's very easy to point to the fact that recently, this political leadership we have at the moment has acted without integrity, and has not been telling the truth. It's very easy to prove that. But if the chairman of the local hospital had received a fixed penalty notice for drinking in the office, you cannot imagine that they would have been able to keep their job. And actually we have a set of public servants who are pretty exemplary still and who struggle within a career structure - because most people within the public service have always worked in the public service and always will work in the public service - they struggle with making integrity real. And they do live by high standards, and the accountabilities, the consequences for stepping outside that are very real and very significant. So we are still buttressed almost entirely by a public service which is pretty impeccable, and we should hold on to that.

Jane Davidson: I absolutely agree with you - provided that particular service is not dismantled. But yeah, I think if we stay with the principles of integrity and public office, it just seems to me such an extraordinarily good system to ask people to sign up and re-sign up to the Nolan Principles in terms of taking on public office.

Because I still remember how I felt on that



day when Lord Nolan addressed us about the seriousness of the role that we'd taken on in the context of delivering the best possible outcomes for the people of Wales without fear or favour.

Jaco Marais: At this point, I should probably say that Jane was the Minister of Education and then Minister of Environment in the Welsh Government in the years between 2000 and 2011. So she has a lot of experience in government and can give us some good insight.

Jane Davidson: I think that we do need to remind ourselves as public servants or public officials that these should be the values framework that guides what we do. And I'm always very persuaded by that wonderful quote from one of my absolute heroes, Nelson Mandela, that 'vision without strategy is just a dream, strategy without vision just passes the time, but with vision and strategy, you can change the world.'

Jaco Marais: And there you have it. We've got a lot of work to do. Thank you very much. I really appreciate you joining me today. We talked

about integrity, and I think we've gone a long way from personal integrity to organisational integrity as well as how to design a system with integrity. Thank you very much.

Jane Davidson: Thanks so much for the opportunity to take part in this. I just want to finish with a very simple proposition, which is that each of us lives so that when our children think of fairness, caring and integrity, they think of us. Thank you, diolch yn fawr.

Andrew Corbett-Nolan: Thanks, Jane.

Jaco Marais: Thank you for joining me in the Public Good podcast to discuss the Nolan Principle of integrity. I look forward to hearing the comments about today's discussion. But I think the discussion highlighted that integrity lies not just with the person but with the systems we all live and work in.

My name is Jaco Marais. If you have any questions or comments related to today's discussion, please don't hold back. We look forward to responding to you on Twitter, @goodgoverninst, and by email [advice@good-governance.org.uk](mailto:advice@good-governance.org.uk).

