Hello, I am David Grayson, I run the Doughty Centre for Corporate Responsibility in the Cranfield School of Management. At Cranfield we run a lot of executive education and I go to talk on a number of those different programmes and time after time, when I ask people about what are the obstacles in the way of really embedding corporate responsibility and sustainability inside your business, people say, well, it costs too much. And if I had any hair left by now, I would be pulling it all out because in fact it is not about corporate responsibility being a responsible business costing you; it is about how it can save you money and about how it can make you money – if done well.

And so we were particularly pleased when Business in the Community came to us and said shall we cooperate on updating the Arthur D Little study from 2003 about what are the business case arguments for why businesses should take responsible business more seriously.

We looked at academic articles from around the world that had been produced since 2003; we looked at management consultants reports over the same period and we also went into the Corporate Responsibility Index, and we looked at the index submissions from companies and what were the arguments that companies were using to explain why this now makes good business sense.

For me, as a recently minted academic, I was relieved to discover first of all was that what the academics said were the kind of business case arguments you could find were borne out by what in practice works. So it wasn’t a matter of here is the theory, just a pity about the practice; there was consistency.

Now critically, we found seven overarching key arguments, key benefits that businesses and the academic research suggests, businesses might find from taking a more systematic and strategic approach to managing their environmental and social impacts. We also found two emergent themes, which I believe will become more important in the future– but they were very much at this stage emergent.

Critical to all of this, of course, you cannot say because some things are claimed to be about being a responsible business that you will axiomatically get the business benefits that we have been researching. Unless there is coherence and consistency in the business’ approach, unless there is clear internal/external communication, unless it is a joined up model of embedding corporate responsibility and sustainability – without those things you won’t really see the business benefits or they will be marginal.
And perhaps the final message I would just like to leave you with as you start the exploration in this workshop of what is the business case for your organisation to take these issues more seriously and to have a more systemic approach is the fact that this really is a very subtle set of messages about how improving your environmental and social performance will contribute to the major drivers like innovation and cost of capital and employee engagement that leads to long term value creation. What we are talking about here is not a quick fix; we are talking about sustainable value creation. That is the key message.