

THS021 Richard Layard

Track 1 [38:55] [Session one: 31 July 2015] Richard Layard [RL], born 1934. 1965-67 MSc Econ. 1964- present Higher Education Research Unit, Centre for Labour Economics, Centre for Economic Performance. 1999 Emeritus Professor Economics. 2000 Honorary Fellow. 2003-present Director, Wellbeing Programme, Centre for Economic Performance. [00:31] RL first came to LSE as a part time graduate student in sociology. He had a history degree from Cambridge, had been teaching history in a comprehensive school and wanted to broaden his education so enrolled for an MSc in sociology. [00:55] He was taught by Donald MacRae and David Glass [01:05] and went to classes in survey methods given by Claus Moser. [01:11] At that time the Robbins Committee on higher education was being set up and Claus was appointed as statistical advisor. Either he or Anne Bohm asked RL to be the research officer. Without realising it, this was the point he abandoned a career in secondary school teaching and went into academia. RL worked for the committee for three years and produced five or six volumes of research. [02:00] Moser and Robbins decided to create a research unit on higher education at LSE, of which Claus would be director and RL deputy director. [02:11] RL didn't finish his MSc in Sociology but did an Msc in Economics while working with Claus Moser and doing work on educational development in India. [03:27] A couple of years later he joined the Economics department as a lecturer. Enjoyed teaching enormously and did more teaching than research. [03:52] Once Claus left LSE RL was in charge of the centre. In 1990 it became the Centre for Economic Performance, although centre had existed since 1964. [04:31] In 2003 RL handed the centre over to John Van Reenen. [04:38] RL has always had a base in a research centre. In the early period he did a lot of teaching and co-wrote a text book with Alan Walters. [04:55] Research really took off when unemployment went up in 1979. RL worked with colleagues Stephen Nickell and Richard Jackman for ten years on unemployment and the centre became the world's leading one for unemployment. Chris Pissarides was also there. They held a weekly seminar and five international conferences in the 1980s. [06:19] They produced the Layard-Nickell model which became a standard way for European economists to think about unemployment. [07:30] This became known as the welfare to work approach. They were very influenced by Scandinavia. The 1980s was one of the best periods for the centre. [08:03] They spent a lot of time in Russia and produced a monthly publication and press conference where RL spoke about what was going on in Russia and what the implications of different policies would be. [09:00] RL wanted to address the limited assumptions economists had about what makes people happy. Wrote an article in an economic journal in 1980 about it but there wasn't much empirical knowledge then. More work was done in the '90s and that has been the focus of RL's work since. [10:30] RL has found LSE a wonderful environment. Thinks it is important for institutions to be happy. [12:09] He decided to write a book on happiness and talks about the process of writing the book. He delivered a Lionel Robbins memorial lecture. The book was published in 2005 in 20 languages. Part of a worldwide wellbeing movement, judging state of society by how happy people are. RL note it was surprising for people to have an economist saying these things. [14:20] He set up a Wellbeing Programme within the CEP. Used birth cohort studies. [15:25] Mental health was a neglected area so proposed a new programme to the government

to include it in the national health service. Accepted in 2007. [16:53] RL is now trying to promote a better approach to global warming, with the Global Apollo Programme, which he describes. [18:12] In the mid-1980s formed the Employment Institute. [19:37] Formed Action for Happiness. [19:59] None of RL's work would have been possible without the School. RL believes it is amazing that you are allowed to follow your thoughts about what needs to be done to change the world without needing to change job. [21:44] Why students come to LSE? Some to go on to well paid jobs in the City. RL relays the story of when he went to an alumni dinner in New York and met John Williams, a former student who is now President of the Federal Reserve Board in San Francisco, who remembered being told by RL he should choose his MSc options based on what would help him improve the world. [24:28] One extraordinary thing about the School is the number of interesting people who come to speak. [25:00] RL talks about work as a convenor and in CEP. He did not get involved with LSE administration or politics. From the 1980s CEP was based with STICERD above the Library in the Lionel Robbins Building. [26:22] RL talks about LSE's position from a professional point of view, with access to Whitehall, the City and Law courts. [27:43] Future of research education at LSE. At the moment there is not a straightforward career path for interdisciplinary research. American universities are better. [30:17] RL describes collaborative working with colleagues and in his Centre [31:50] and the ways conducting research has changed, for example the use of computers. It was a breakthrough to have the University of London computer room in the mid-1970s. Access to information is instant now, however this doesn't mean work is better as people still need to think and structure questions. [35:22] There is always someone at LSE to answer questions about any aspect of society. [35:50] Discusses attracting and recruiting staff to and working at the Centre. [37:30] The School has been remarkable in embracing people from a whole range of political perspectives.