Congratulations! For 25 years the EFQM Excellence Model has served many businesses around the world to establish a multi-stakeholder, process-driven method for incrementally improving a company’s results. Many CSR activities have – through the application of the EFQM approach – helped companies to reduce their impacts and improve the responsibility of their operations.

However, we now see that to create a sustainable future we first have to be able to envision a future that is radically transformed from the world we know today. That means that the first step for any organisation wanting to ‘become sustainable’ is to have a vision of what their activities, products, or services would look like if they were, in fact, ‘sustainable’. Sustainable, not just in terms of the impacts and dependencies on the people and resources a company requires, but also with regard to the broader environmental and societal impacts of its activities.

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) is a CEO-led organisation of forward-thinking companies that galvanise the global business community to create a sustainable future for business, society and the environment. Vision 2050, published in 2010, collected many of WBCSD’s members’ visions of what a sustainable future would look like – a groundbreaking piece of work, it was the first time that global business stated that business as usual was no longer an option. Our combined vision is incredibly simple: that by 2050, 9 billion people will be able to live well, safely within planetary boundaries.

Vision 2050 outlines pathways that map a transformational change of existing systems to achieve this overarching goal. WBCSD’s current Action 2020 work concentrates on addressing nine, science-based priorities with business solutions that can result in measurable positive impact at scale.

The nine priority areas for action were selected ranging from climate change to ecosystems and land use, and from basic needs and rights to sustainable lifestyles.

These science-based actionable priorities, and the societal goals associated with them, form the core of WBCSD’s Action2020 work platform. With our members, we are working to develop business solutions that can have a measurable and significant impact towards achieving 2020 societal goals. They need to be scalable, replicable, beyond business as usual, and most importantly, able to overcome
barriers that will inevitably appear in their way.

Of course, business cannot do everything by itself. It is in a unique position – it can bring innovative products and services, management and technological capabilities, and financial resources. But to achieve ambitious and audacious societal goals, business will need the support of forward-looking policy, capital markets and education, and above all, a collective acceptance of the need for change at all levels of all global societies.

Part of this change will be redefining Value. We need to move away from a model where shareholder value is the only criteria for measuring business performance, to a model where financial, social and natural capital are measured and managed in an integrated way. The EFQM Model has laid the groundwork for this new approach that is now called ‘integrated thinking’.

Our members are leading companies that see that the combination of science-prioritised business solutions, combined with an integrated thinking-based management system, is the route to securing a sustainable future for their businesses, society and the environment.

Reaching the age of 25 in a human life is often considered as the point at which we are ready to start getting serious. I wish the EFQM a sustainable life; by taking all that it has learnt in its first 25 years, it will be able to help guide companies to a vision of a better and more sustainable future. We will face many environmental and societal challenges over the next 25 years. The world needs the integrated compass that the EFQM can provide.