

[Home](#)

Speech

Justine Greening: education at the core of social mobility

From: [Department for Education](#) and [The Rt Hon Justine Greening MP](#)
First published: 19 January 2017
Delivered on: 18 January 2017

Education Secretary sets out the role of education in removing obstacles to social mobility and ensuring young people fulfil their potential.



It is a pleasure to be here today at PwC and supported by the Sutton Trust.

These both are organisations that, in different ways, are part of how we are opening up opportunity to young people in our country.

I was a child growing up in Rotherham in the 1980s - I wanted a level playing field of opportunity. I think opportunity is the glue that can hold our country together. The most precious resource that I was after as a young person.

I've said that social mobility characterised my own life, not just politically but personally. PwC played a role in my career and journey.

It has been reported that my first job was in Morrison's supermarket in Rotherham.

It was. But that was a Saturday job, whilst I was doing my A-levels.

After that, I went to university in Southampton.

But my first full-time job, the place where I began my career was here. At Pricewaterhouse...

....Turning up on day one, in an old (and what subsequently proved to be highly unreliable) Mini Metro, and wearing the one suit I owned at the time.

The learning curve here at PwC was very very steep - working and also studying for my exams. A bit like doing an apprenticeship.

But with help from PwC, I got through those exams and became a chartered accountant.

And the skills I learnt here, I use every single day of the week in government as a minister.

After my exams, I looked at going into the City. I remember a final interview with a long-established City bank. Sat in a wood-panelled office, being quizzed by one of their most senior managers at the firm.

He wasn't very impressed with my extra year of research post university, doing research that was funded by Ladbrokes, looking at gambling behaviour.

He looked me in the eye and said he felt I didn't have enough of the 'world experience' that they wanted, and pointed out that I hadn't had a gap year travelling. That was correct.

At the time I was too embarrassed to admit that I simply couldn't afford one.

Of course with hindsight, I probably could have said to him that I'd just spent a whole year after university doing research into a then obscure new branch of economics, focused on risk judgement and risk perception.

What would subsequently become known as 'behavioural economics'.

At any rate, I didn't get that job.

And then two things happened.

Firstly, I stayed at PwC and continued my career at pace but was able to get a secondment to work in Lausanne in Switzerland, where I was to spend the next 2 years.

I packed my car - I'd got rid of the Mini Metro by then and got an Austin Maestro - my whole world possessions level with the windows, and drove to Switzerland to begin the next stage of my life.

So I began working in Switzerland and was really enjoying it.

And then, about 4 months later, the second thing happened. Driving to work one morning, and turning on the radio, I heard that the long-established City bank I'd missed out on a job with had spectacularly collapsed.

It was called Barings.

Maybe that research into decision making and risk and gambling would have been more useful to them than a gap year after all.

I'm trying to say that we all have our journeys, into and through the world of work. PwC was part of mine. Thank you to them for the opportunities and experience they gave me.

Why social mobility matters

So I wanted to reflect on and say thank you for the fantastic opportunities this company gave me.

For all of Britain's success post-Brexit will come only with its people's success.

In fact, right at the core of this government's ambition is building what the Prime Minister called a shared

society, and that means driving social mobility for those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those just-managing families: breaking the link between a person's background and where they get to in life.

We know around 40% of the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers is already there by the age of 5.

And indeed even the highest-potential children from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to be overtaken at almost every stage in their life by peers from higher-earning families.

Our defining challenge in Britain is to level up opportunity; making sure that all young people get every chance to go as far as their talents will take them.

And that really is a prize well worth Britain pursuing.

A report by Boston Consulting Group and the Sutton Trust suggested that greater levels of social mobility - making the most of our country's talent - could boost our economy by a staggering £140 billion a year. About economy as much as anything else.

Of course, the challenge of unlocking social mobility is not a new one.

Governments here and all over the world have tried - with varying degrees of success - to tackle the obstacles to social mobility. I don't think any country has managed to crack the challenge of social mobility, but Britain should be the first.

Ultimately it is about delivering generational change - and that means looking right across people's lives, from early years through to adulthood.

It means understanding the ways in which poor social mobility can become concentrated and entrenched in some parts of our country and some communities, and understanding the challenges that creates for our education system.

It also means making sure that we have the right capacity in the system to allow less-advantaged young people, and those just about managing, to acquire the knowledge and the skills that will keep options open to them, making sure they have the right advice as they make decisions about their futures, and broader experiences to help them develop as people - giving them the best possible base to move into a career from.

Throughout my life I have been passionate about driving social mobility and I talked about it a lot when I was at DfID.

Now I've got the best job you could have to actually be able to do something about driving social mobility here in Britain.

The key to success is realising that we all have a role to play in bending the arc of opportunity upwards, not just those of us in education, such as teachers, but especially business, in developing our young people throughout their education and once they get into their careers.

And today (18 January 2017), I want to set out my 3 priorities for driving social mobility through education: tackling geographic disadvantage, investing in long-term capacity in our system and making sure our education system as a whole really prepares young people and adults for career success.

Place and opportunity areas

Our school-led system is driving improvement across England - nearly 1.8 million more children are now in good or outstanding schools than in 2010.

However, there are still 1 million of our children in schools that Ofsted has rated as not good enough and for them that's the education they are getting. They are disproportionately located in areas of disadvantage. Too often a child's life chances are shaped by where in the country they went to school and where they're growing up, and we shouldn't accept that.

So the system isn't working everywhere and that means, in some areas, young people and adults still aren't getting the opportunities they need to thrive.

Tackling regional disadvantage means drilling down into the local factors which have concentrated poor educational outcomes and lack of capacity to improve in certain parts of the country.

It's why in our [schools that work for everyone consultation](#) we have set out proposals to create more choice, with more good school places, for more parents, in more parts of the country, by lifting the ban that stops communities choosing new selective school places, and harnessing the resources and expertise of universities, faith schools and independent schools. We have to leave no stone unturned if we are to shift up a gear in social mobility in our country.

And it's why we're prioritising resources where they are needed most. Because different areas face different challenges.

We're introducing the [National Funding Formula for schools](#), which will finally rectify the historic and unfair postcode lottery in how school funding is distributed in England.

But we need to go further to enable local areas to overcome barriers to opportunity.

In October last year I announced the [first 6 opportunity areas](#) - aimed at driving social mobility in a diverse set of areas which all face their own unique challenges - some more rural and some more urban - and we want to work right through from the early years to young people entering successful careers.

And through that, I want us to identify new approaches and innovation in different settings - and actively spread this to other similar places that can benefit.

Our intention is that opportunity areas will help local children get the best start in life, no matter what their background. Ensuring all children can access high-quality education at every stage is critical. We will focus not just on what we can do to help inside schools, but also create the opportunities outside school that will raise sights and broaden horizons for young people.

I have learnt a lot from my visits to opportunity areas. On a visit in Norwich, I saw first-hand the fantastic early years support being offered to disadvantaged children and their families. But we know that in Norwich - and elsewhere - there is still far too big a gap between early years outcomes for disadvantaged children compared to their better-starting peers. Opportunity areas will be at the vanguard of our work to try out new approaches in the early years to address this issue.

I visited a teaching school in Oldham where teaching is outstanding - a school that has been able to turn around with fantastic leadership. Pupils make rapid progress and are flourishing. Yet in Oldham 5 of the 13 Ofsted rated secondary schools are currently inadequate or require improvement. So in opportunity areas we are working with local partners to turn around the lowest-performing schools and also learn from the

best practice nationally and in the area.

I went to Blackpool with Carolyn Fairburn of the CBI and Claudia Harris of the Careers and Enterprise Company to see the great links that Blackpool and the Flyde College are making with employers - over a thousand of them. We saw how that work that they are doing to fuse together an FE college and the world of work is expanding young people's opportunities and horizons, alongside helping them to access high-quality apprenticeships and work experience.

I want young people in opportunity areas to have the same chances as any child from any other part of the country. Knowing about an opportunity is the first step to being able to get an opportunity. Why did I never consider becoming a lawyer or doing law at university? Because I never met one until I was an adult. It is impossible to aim for an opportunity if you don't know it exists.

So in every opportunity area, every secondary school will have an enterprise adviser so that young people will have access to at least 4 different sorts of experiences of the world of work and get a sense of the opportunities out there for them.

I want to call for businesses to now come forward and tell me what they can do to support opportunity areas. It's great to be able to say that PwC have agreed that our opportunity areas will be a priority within its outreach work with schools and its recruitment practices.

And I am also delighted that KPMG have also pledged to support the government on opportunity areas to help us make sure that geography does not dictate access to opportunity

I want to see more companies stepping up - large and small - to become opportunity area partners.

And today I can announce 6 more opportunity areas – Bradford, Doncaster, Fenland & East Cambridgeshire, Hastings, Ipswich, and Stoke.

These are areas identified as social mobility 'cold spots' by the Social Mobility Commission when they published their research last year. They will benefit from a £72 million fund for programmes to improve social mobility as well as being prioritised alongside existing DfE programmes.

I am also more than delighted to announce that the Education Endowment Foundation will support the opportunity areas programme, with the establishment of an EEF research school for each area.

This will be a joint £3.5 million programme with £2 million from the EEF and £1.5 million from the Department for Education.

These 'what works' schools will act as local excellence hubs for evidence-based practice, creating and delivering training and resources, and importantly building other local schools' capacity to use evidence in their decision-making. So will have work by EEF and work and research done by research schools.

I want all schools to work together to share best practice - just like the pioneering headteachers from Shrewsbury I met recently. They were involved in school-to-school collaboration, which will be the key to spreading a 'what works' approach throughout our system.

Capacity

Secondly, we can only crack social mobility if we look at it as a long-term, generational mission for our country and that means prioritising long-term capacity building which can deliver lasting benefits.

That means investing in infrastructure, schools, but most of all the people who work in our schools: teachers and leaders.

We know that the single biggest educational factor that impacts social mobility is the quality of the teachers and other professionals working with our young people.

In fact, disadvantaged pupils can gain as much as an extra year's worth of learning under very effective, great teachers in comparison with those students learning from poorly performing teachers.

One of the things I learned at PWC is the importance of being part of a profession - a body of experts with a shared commitment to ever-improving standards and best practice.

That is why I am so pleased that teaching will, at last, have its own Chartered College of Teaching, led by the outstanding Dame Alison Peacock.

This is a historic day for teaching because the college is opening for membership today.

My hope is that teachers get as much support from membership of their profession as I do from mine, with clear career pathways and the expectation of high-quality career development and professional development right throughout their career.

I will be talking more about my commitment to supporting this when I speak at the first national conference of the College of Teaching next month.

And while the profession has a role to play in self-development, there is also a role for government too.

That's why we are supporting the recruitment, training and development of the very best leaders, teachers, early years professionals and college lecturers with the £75 million teaching and leadership innovation fund that will nurture the top-quality leaders and teachers working in our most challenging schools.

And I want to continue looking at new ways we can encourage our very best professionals to teach in our most challenging areas. Key to making a change on the ground for young people.

We are also investing in identifying and spreading evidence-based practice to build capacity and drive better outcomes, especially for the less advantaged.

This will include the £140 million strategic school improvement fund, complemented by an additional £20 million committed by the Education Endowment Foundation to scale up the results of that work and disseminate what works to raise standards in schools. I'm embedding research across the Department for Education.

Career outcomes

And thirdly, social mobility for me must mean more than raising educational attainment.

Ultimately, real intergenerational mobility comes down to whether you can use your education to enter and succeed in a great career, and whether your earning and opportunities are not constrained by the job or earnings of your parents.

We should judge our success not just on how young people do in school, university or college, but how well their education prepares them for work, and how adults in the workforce have opportunities to

progress.

Technical education reform

Lots of our education system is already preparing people fantastically well for great careers.

We have some of the best universities in the world, and getting a good degree has long been a route to getting a top job. I know that from my own experience.

We are going further than ever to open up our world-leading higher education system to students from all backgrounds who can benefit from it.

That is in large part what the [Higher Education and Research Bill](#) currently going through Parliament is about.

But university isn't the only route into a great career. Yes, we need to get more disadvantaged children going to university - particularly the very top ones. And we are - participation rates are higher than ever. A bigger number than ever before.

But for the more than half of all young people who don't choose to do A-levels or go to university, we also have to make sure there is an equally high-quality alternative that prepares them for future success - no matter their background.

This lies at the heart of how this government will improve social mobility. Better technical education is vital in Brexit Britain. We make a success of our country when we help our people make a success of themselves.

This is why we have set our commitment for 3 million apprenticeships by 2020, and comprehensive reforms to create employer-designed standards that make sure apprentices have the skills, knowledge and the behaviours that British business needs.

It's why we are also promoting traineeships which help young people prepare for an apprenticeship and work.

But as a country, we need to ask more of further education and training, so that every person has the opportunity to develop the skills they need for their future and our economy.

This is one of my key priorities as Education Secretary and something you will hear me, and this government, talking a lot about in the coming months.

We face chronic problems in basic skills for many adults and we have shortages of people with advanced technical skills at below degree level and STEM skills at all levels. In the most recent Employer Skills Survey, employers said that while around one-third of vacancies were difficult to fill, nearly 70% of these were due to applicants' lack of skills, qualifications or experience.

So we now need to build a proper, gold-standard technical education system to sit alongside the academic track - offering high-quality apprenticeships and college-based courses.

This needs to equip our young people with the skills which allow them to keep progressing into further training, into and upwards through good careers; it needs to give people the skills employers are looking for and prepare people to relearn and adapt to what employers will look for as the world of work continues to

change.

After the review on skills conducted by Lord Sainsbury we published the [Skills Plan](#) - a blueprint for a modern, well-functioning technical education system with a choice of 15 'routes' which, crucially, are designed by employers, with relevant training, and clear pathways through those routes to employment.

The industrial strategy the government is publishing shortly will further build on the direction of travel set out in the Skills Plan - we are determined to heed the lessons of the past and give our reforms a genuine chance to make a real impact.

This is a major programme and it will steadily transform technical education.

Improvement, accountability and evidence

But crucially, if we are to deliver on this vision we need to make sure that the FE sector which teaches over 3 million people per year can become genuinely world-class at teaching this technical track.

Making further education an attractive investment means showing that it gets results.

We know that some FE colleges are doing fantastic things, but there are too many FE colleges which - in the view of Ofsted - are neither good nor outstanding overall.

We have to address this.

We have already taken steps to put the FE sector on a more sustainable financial footing; now we need a sector that can become educationally excellent - genuinely self-improving, like our schools sector, and informed by evidence.

It is about lifting the FE teaching profession, it is about a strategy to see FE really able to deliver on the STEM needs of employers, to see FE able to deliver on the maths and English needs of those of its students who've found these subjects hard, as vital as they will be for their future success.

And it is about a real spirit of collaboration with our best colleges and leaders empowered to share and spread best practice with the rest of those colleges.

It is about accountability and students having a clearer sense of the right qualifications to take for their aspirations.

It's about not being afraid to have really high expectations for what colleges can do.

And whilst we have our young people in mind, we should never forget that FE will play a crucial role in delivering what I am determined will be an ambitious approach from this government on lifetime learning.

I don't want to claim that these are easy challenges to fix, and they will take sustained focus from colleges and from government to get right.

But from me this is a ringing endorsement of the FE sector's vital role in driving social mobility and helping plug the productivity gap we are facing. I want to back it and have relentlessly high expectations for what it can achieve.

Conclusion

I should finish by saying that I recognise that education alone will not be enough to transform social mobility. Nor will the actions of government alone.

To succeed, this has to be a national mission for our country - in which all of us play our part: from government to business to education to civil society. That's what the PM meant by the shared society

So I am determined to drive social mobility through all the work of my department; it is this commitment which will be at the heart of my time as Education Secretary.

I want to see the very best teachers in this country working in and transforming our most challenging areas.

I want all teachers and professionals working in our system to have the best training possible; I want them to be equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to really make a difference; and I want them to be armed with the evidence that will allow them to bring the best out of young people, so that they can help realise those young people's full potential.

I want to see more disadvantaged young people attending the very best universities, winning places on the best apprenticeships, entering the top professions, and progressing through the most rewarding careers - and I want employers doing more to draw out the potential and talents of the most important asset their organisation has - their staff.

As the Prime Minister has said, we are facing a moment of great change as a nation; with our departure from the European Union, we will need to define an ambitious new role for ourselves in the world - and that involves asking ourselves what kind of country we want to be.

We are very clear: for a global Britain to succeed we must be a country where everyone has a fair chance to go as far as their talent and their hard work can take them, where it is that talent and hard work that matter, not where you were born, who your parents are or what your accent sounds like.

To achieve this will take time.

In a world where every country and economy becomes ever more knowledge based it is vital for our prospects.

But it's more than that. We shouldn't accept a country where people have different ladders to climb.

This is why we need a call to arms, why the Prime Minister on the steps of Downing Street called for us together to deliver change and build a Britain that works for everyone.

This government is absolutely committed to making that happen.

Published:

19 January 2017

From:

Department for Education

The Rt Hon Justine Greening MP

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[Working, jobs and pensions](#)

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