

Press release: PM to give speech on education to mark launch of post-18 education and funding review

- PM to warn against “outdated attitude” that favours academic over technical qualifications
- new education review will break down “false boundaries” to look at whole post-18 system
- review to identify ways to help young people make more effective choices when they leave school
- PM will acknowledge concerns with the current funding system and pledge to make it fairer
- speech will set out PM’s vision for an education system that truly serves the needs of every child

Theresa May will urge people to “throw away” the “outdated attitude” that university is the only desirable route for young people and that going into vocational training “is something for other people’s children”.

In a speech in Derbyshire to launch a wide-ranging review into post-18 education, the Prime Minister will call for a parity of esteem between academic and technical options so we can “create a system of tertiary education that works for all our young people”.

She will say that “means equality of access to an academic university education which is not dependent on your background, and it means a much greater focus on the technical alternatives too.”

The government-led review – supported by an independent, external chair and panel – will identify ways to help people make more effective choices between the different options available after 18.

This could include giving young people better guidance about the earning potential of different jobs and what different qualifications are needed to get them, so they can make more informed decisions about their futures.

For those who retrain during their career, the review will also look at how to support flexible life-long learning, including part-time and distance learning.

The PM will pledge to use the review to look at “the whole post-18 education sector in the round, breaking down false boundaries between further and higher education, so we can create a system which is truly joined up.”

She is expected to warn that while significant progress in education reform over recent years has succeeded in driving up school standards and improving the choice and quality of technical education, the current post-18 system is not working as well as it could be – for young people or for the country.

The Prime Minister will continue: "For those young people who do not go on to academic study, the routes into further technical and vocational training today are hard to navigate, the standards across the sector are too varied and the funding available to support them is patchy.

So now is the time to take action to create a system that is flexible enough to ensure that everyone gets the education that suits them.

There are now record numbers of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds going to university, and the government is determined to build on this progress.

The Prime Minister will say today: "One of the great social achievements of the last half-century has been the transformation of an academic university education from something enjoyed almost-exclusively by a social elite into something which is open to everyone."

She will set out her commitment to continuing to ensure "that people from all backgrounds share the benefit of university study."

On the question of student finance, the Prime Minister will acknowledge that many young people, their parents and grandparents, have serious concerns – which she shares – about aspects of the current system.

She will confirm that the review will examine the whole system of student funding – including how it provides value for money, both for students and taxpayers, and how students and graduates contribute to the cost of their studies.

She will say: "The competitive market between universities which the system of variable tuition fees envisaged has simply not emerged. All but a handful of universities charge the maximum possible fees for undergraduate courses. Three-year courses remain the norm. And the level of fees charged do not relate to the cost or quality of the course. We now have one of the most expensive systems of university tuition in the world."

She will also note that the goal of making university truly accessible to young people from every background "is not made easier by a funding system which leaves students from the lowest-income households bearing the highest levels of debt, with many graduates left questioning the return they get for their investment."

And she will say that the review "will examine how we can give people from disadvantaged backgrounds an equal chance to succeed. That includes how disadvantaged students and learners receive maintenance support, both from government and universities and colleges."

Recalling her maiden speech in Parliament in 1997, in which she set out her belief that the aim of education policy should be to "provide the right education for every child", the Prime Minister will use today's speech to

restate her long-held view that “education is the key to opening up opportunity for everyone.”

And she will say that, by building an education system which unlocks everyone’s talents, “we can build a country that truly does work for everyone.

She will add: “A country where your background does not define your future, and class distinctions are a thing of the past. Where a boy from a working-class home can become a High Court judge, thanks to a great state education. And where a girl from a private school can start a software business, thanks to a first-class technical education.

That is my vision for a fairer society and how we will deliver it. A society where good, rewarding work is available for everyone. An economy with the skills it needs to succeed.

Britain as the Great Meritocracy, a country that respects hard work, rewards effort and industry, where a happy and fulfilled life is within everyone’s grasp.

The panel’s report will be published at an interim stage and the review will conclude in early 2019.