

Speech: Social work and the Commonwealth

Good evening. Thank you, Ruth Allen and the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), for inviting me today. I am delighted to be here for two reasons. First, it is rare that I am able to speak to a group of like-minded people from across the Commonwealth. And second – and I make no apology for this – it's a great chance for me to talk about the great work we are doing here.

I'd like to speak around three themes – the importance of social work, working in partnership and sharing our experience of how our vision for social work reform is working – especially for those on the frontline.

I am delighted to recognise the contribution that social work practice makes in improving people's lives, both here in the UK and across the Commonwealth. Social work is a human rights based profession with the overriding aim of improving social justice and citizenship for those we are here to serve and work alongside. It brings a unique approach to working with people and communities as a whole.

Social workers develop relationships with people, starting with where they are and what matters to them, recognising their strengths, gifts and aspirations – and building on these to support the wellbeing of families and communities, and to ensure the care and support provided is just right.

In the UK, social workers have been involved in responding to emergency and disaster situations including the Grenfell fire tragedy and terrorist attacks, as well as severe snow storms and flooding.

Many social workers in Commonwealth nations are also involved in supporting and working with communities dealing with the impact of environmental disasters such as flooding and earthquakes and the impact of movements of people because of war or conflict. There is much we can learn from each other in developing and improving our social work practice to best help and support those we work with across our nations.

The Commonwealth is a remarkable international organisation, spanning every geographical region, religion and culture. With 53 independent countries, it is uniquely placed to support and encourage international co-operation between people all over the world; and after 60 years, it remains a major force for change in the world today.

In the UK, there have been significant improvements in the quality of social work education over the last decade, with social work now an established graduate profession with national professional standards.

I know there are now over 90,000 Commonwealth students here. And we have 17 Commonwealth Scholars currently studying social work – as well as two Rutherford Fellows who, as you'll know, are highly skilled researchers

conducting postdoctoral research here.

Our world-class universities attract this range of global talent. We are a world-leading destination for study and research, with four universities in the world's top 10 and 16 in the top 100 – second only to the USA. But this is not simply about our institutions providing an excellent education – it is the people who really make the difference in building relationships between our countries. International students bring greater diversity to campuses, an international dimension to the experience of all our students, and add to the UK's impressive research capacity.

In offering a warm welcome to international students, we create lasting positive relations with future leaders, influencers and decision-makers around the world and improve the prospect of strengthened cultural, business, political and research links between our countries.

International social workers also play a vital role in the provision of child and family social work here in the UK. Their contribution is truly important to helping to connect the profession with the people it works with, and for. So when I speak about working in partnership, I mean working in a partnership without borders. We are a global community, we face so many of the same challenges, we can – and should – share with each other. This evening I am going to speak about some of our great work. But I don't want it to stop here – you have great practice too – and we want to know about it.

Indeed next week, I welcome New Zealand's Children's Minister, the Honourable Tracey Martin, to the country before she visits a range of local authorities, settings and practitioners to help share best practice across the Commonwealth. I look forward to hearing about her experience in this sector.

Good social work training helps students to think about themselves as a member of a profession and make connections between theory and research. In recent years, we have worked to raise the status of social work education by raising the bar to entry, and improving the consistency of statutory placements.

We have set out clear statements about what all child and family social workers should know and be able to do. These knowledge and skills statements are also now post-qualifying standards for those on the frontline and a key plank of our world-leading reform agenda.

I'd like to now use the opportunity to talk to you about some of our most exciting reforms in this area.

The first of these being our Teaching Partnerships. These are a collaboration that aim to bring educators and employers closer together to make education more relevant to practice – and to raise standards of training and drive quality at multiple points in the system, including recruitment, training, induction and professional development. We have funded 15 Teaching Partnerships so far, which include 31 universities, 73 councils and a range of other public sector, private, voluntary and independent organisations – demonstrating the depth of interest from the sector.

The partnerships are helping to raise standards of entry into mainstream social work programmes, and they incorporate the Knowledge and Skills statements into teaching and practice curricula. The partnerships also ensure that there is a strong focus on good-quality statutory placements.

We are currently expanding the programme and more partnerships will be joining shortly.

Another set of reforms that I'm really excited about is our national assessment and accreditation system – which we are calling NAAS. I'm sure, we all believe that the quality of practice is the most important thing to improve the experiences of vulnerable children and families. Clear standards and a learning culture will help achieve a universally high quality of practice. This is what underpins the work we are leading on in assessment and accreditation. And it is truly ground-breaking.

We have recently established a national post-qualifying standard for child and family expertise – providing a nationally-consistent benchmark.

And starting in July, we will be offering assessment and accreditation against these standards through the rollout of NAAS.

This is pivotal in Government's clear vision in developing and supporting a fully confident and highly capable child and family social work profession that has been properly trained with the right knowledge and skills. And it is a vital part of how we are working to raise the skills and the confidence of child and family social workers.

This is also part of our journey towards enabling every child and family social worker to see a whole career pathway in front of them. Our post-qualifying standards will strengthen existing good practice as well as trigger continuous development and support for social workers.

We are working closely with all parts of the sector – including universities – to make sure we get the delivery NAAS right before we introduce it nationally. That is why we are beginning with 21 sites with around 5,000 social workers. As I speak, local authorities which are part of the first phases are really challenging themselves on how they can prepare social workers for this.

These authorities are committed to working alongside us to co-create many of the ways of working, the guidance and the materials needed to make the national assessment work effectively. We know that this is what social workers want and we have responded in a very practical way – by building in much more scope for joint work.

I can't stress enough how important I think it is that NAAS will be in driving even higher levels of excellent social work practice. I am confident that we will lead the world on this.

We have also recently announced that we will establish Social Work England, a new, specialist regulator for social workers in England. Its primary focus will be public protection and, as a single-profession regulator, Social Work England will be able to develop an in-depth understanding of the profession.

Establishing Social Work England is a key part of achieving Government's vision for the social work profession. Social workers need to benefit from the highest quality initial education, access to continuing professional development – and frontline practitioners need strong, supportive supervision and leadership.

Social Work England will promote public confidence and trust in the social work profession, bringing real benefits to the social workers up and down the country who work to support vulnerable children, adults and families. Where we are on Social Work England is testimony to the importance of working in partnership both with the academic sector as well as with end users and representatives from across social work. Our hosts today, BASW, have played a vital role.

I recently announced the appointment of Lord Patel of Bradford, as the Chair of Social Work England. He is steeped in social work – he is a former social worker, trainer, tutor, and lecturer in social work – and he is committed to ensuring that the views of the profession are at the heart of the development of Social Work England. And soon will be announcing a chief executive of for Social Work England too.

The final reform I want to touch on is our new What Works Centre. Understanding what works effectively for those in need of social work support is at the heart of our work to improve the quality of practice in child and family social work.

We are working with the sector to devise new and better ways of developing and using robust evidence. Collaborating with Nesta, the foundation for innovation, and Cardiff University, we are setting up a new What Works Centre for Children's Social Care to develop the evidence base and support practitioners and practice leaders to make better use of evidence.

The early research priorities for the centre include what works in reducing the need for children to enter care proceedings and what works in supervision. The What Works Centre will also be engaging with a small number of pioneer local authorities over the summer to co-develop and test a range of tools and services to make evidence more accessible and relevant, to help people use evidence well, and to help practice leaders create a culture in which the effective use of evidence is the norm.

Social work is an amazing calling. It is truly a vocation for people who want to work to protect vulnerable children and adults. Across all of our countries, I know that we share the same values about how we help those who are most vulnerable.

I was honoured to be invited to speak to you today. To repeat what I said earlier, for me working in partnership means working in a partnership without borders. I am passionate about the great work we are doing here. You have great practice too – and we would be delighted to hear about your work – we are always open to new ideas – and challenges too.

Press release: British High Commission hosts the Commonwealth Big Lunch in Dhaka

Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury MP, Honourable Speaker of the Bangladesh Parliament attended as Chief Guest and the event brought together 150 people including the High Commissioners of Malaysia, Brunei, Canada and Sri Lanka, and Acting High Commissioners of Australia and Pakistan, representatives from the university and education sector, NGOs and civil society, medicine, businesses, Bangladeshi Queen's Young Leaders and Points of Light award winner and the British Council's Active Citizens.

The lunch celebrated the diversity and achievement of the Commonwealth and this year's theme of 'towards a common future', with themed discussion of education, business and trade, women empowerment and girl's education, climate change, health and working children.

This lunch was one of a series held across the Commonwealth – launched by the Eden Project in partnership with the UK Government – between 12 March, Commonwealth Day, and 22 April to mark the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting when Government leaders and representatives and civil society representatives from 53 countries will gather in the UK to work together to address shared global challenges.

British High Commissioner Alison Blake CMG said:

“The idea behind the Big Lunch is a simple one: to bring together friends and partners to celebrate being part of the Commonwealth, to draw on our diversity, our strengths and our shared values and to enjoy a meal in each others' company. I was delighted that so many of our colleagues and friends and partners joined us. Bring together a group of talented high achievers, committed to working every day to build a safer, more prosperous and fairer world, and you start a series of the discussions and new connections that fire the imagination and turn a simple meal together into something very special.”

The previous day, 17 April, the British High Commissioner hosted an evening reception to celebrate the Birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, at which Khandker Mosharaf Hossain, MP, Hon'ble Minister for Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives, was the Chief Guest.

Further Information

About the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting

This week the UK is hosting the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting,

where leaders from across the Commonwealth are gathering in London and Windsor. With the theme of 'Towards a Common Future' they are working to create a more prosperous, secure, sustainable and fair future for the Commonwealth's 2.4 billion citizens, particularly its young people.

For more information please visit [Commonwealth Head of Government Meeting](#) or follow on Twitter [@commonwealth18](#) #OurCommonwealth.

The Eden Project

The Eden Project is an educational charity and social enterprise based in Cornwall, UK, that aims to connect people with one another and the natural world to explore a better future.

[The Eden Project Big Lunch](#) takes place this year on Sunday, 3 June.

For updates on the British High Commission and for more information on the Chevening Programme, please follow our social media channels.

[News story: UK and South Africa welcome progress on trade relationship](#)

The Minister of Trade and Industry (the DTI), Dr Rob Davies had a bilateral meeting with his United-Kingdom counterpart Dr Liam Fox in London on Tuesday 17 April 2018. In the margins of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting they discussed the trading relationship between the UK and South Africa. The ministers were pleased with the strength of the UK-South Africa trade and investment relationship.

As the UK is in the process of exiting the European Union (EU), South Africa welcomed the UK's intention to avoid any disruption to trade. In particular, both ministers welcomed the significant progress made so far in discussions with the Southern African Customs Union (SACU which includes Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, and Swaziland) and Mozambique. These are to ensure continuity of the EU-SADC Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) as the UK leaves the EU.

Both parties welcomed the agreement reached between the EU and UK at the March European Council that the UK is to be treated as a Member State for the purposes of international agreements during the EU-UK Implementation Period (1 April 2019 to 31 December 2020). This provides further certainty that there will not be disruption to the existing trading relationship during the implementation period.

International Trade Secretary Dr Liam Fox said:

Free trade has transformed developing economies across the world, and 44 of our 52 Commonwealth partners, including South Africa, benefit from development-focused preferential trade access to the UK market. That's why it's important to ensure continuity and certainty in our current trade arrangements as we leave the EU, and UK officials with their counterparts across Southern Africa have made excellent progress in this.

As we leave the EU and create a new independent UK trade policy, we will build further on our £9 billion of annual trade with South Africa, our biggest trading partner in Africa, and champion free trade to help developing countries combat poverty and grow their economies.

Minister Davies, said that the UK remains an important strategic partner for South Africa globally. South Africa and the UK have enjoyed mutually beneficial preferential trade since entry into force of the first reciprocal trade agreement between South Africa and the EU in January 2000.

Minister for Trade and Industry, Dr Rob Davies said:

The UK is South Africa's second largest trading partner in the EU Region. Our goods exports to the UK in 2014 were R37.6 billion and increased to R46.3 billion in 2017.

Noteworthy is the positive trade balance that South Africa continues to enjoy in its trade with the UK, which earns the country foreign currency and contributes to reducing the country's current account deficit. The key priority for South Africa is to change the structure of our trade to more value added products.

Minister Davies also welcomed the progress made by experts towards finalisation of the rollover of the EPA arrangement between SACU + Mozambique and the UK. "This is critical to ensure continuity post-Brexit", added Davies.

Both parties agreed to assess options for bilateral technical cooperation in the areas of trade and investment promotion. In addition, the parties agreed to work together to promote investments in priority sectors to advance sustainable economic development.

[News story: Find out what's new about](#)

the National Apprenticeship Awards 2018 – now open for entries

One of the new categories is the recruitment excellence award – and will recognise employers who have attracted a diverse and high-quality apprenticeship workforce through new and innovative approaches to recruitment. The National Apprenticeship Service will identify one individual winner to receive a recognition award, rewarding someone who has made a special contribution to the promotion and delivery of apprenticeships.

For the first time, a rising star award will showcase apprentices who have made impressive progress in their career to date and who show the potential, through their apprenticeship, to take a career path to the very top of their chosen profession. Nominated by their employers, at the national stage of the awards the public will be invited to vote on the overall winner for this category.

Apprentice employers and apprentices from all sectors and industries are invited to enter the awards. Judged by a team of experts, entrants have the opportunity to be crowned a regional winner at nine awards ceremonies set to take place across the country. From the regional champions, a national judging panel will select the overall National Apprenticeship Award winners, to be celebrated at a national ceremony on 28 November 2018.

The awards are the largest and most prestigious celebration of apprentices and apprentice employers across the country. Previous winners have experienced a diverse range of benefits following their success. Here, 2 award winners from last year share the benefits that their victory has had for them so far.

Charlotte Hughes, GSK employee and winner of the Higher or Degree Apprentice of the Year 2017, said:

“I am extremely proud to have been a winner at the National Apprenticeship Awards. It’s provided a huge boost to my confidence and has helped raise my profile within and outside my organisation. Everyone is really proud of my achievement and many opportunities have opened up due to winning. The whole process has made me realise what I’m truly capable of. I would encourage anyone that is eligible to apply.”

Tim Brown, managing director of Superior, a Dorset-based manufacturing firm, crowned medium Employer of the Year 2017, said:

“The whole experience of entering the awards, winning at regional stage and then being crowned a winner at the National Apprenticeship Awards has been unforgettable. It has motivated us to do more and continue raising the profile of apprenticeships.

“Everyone at Superior is incredibly proud of this fantastic achievement, it

has helped us gain positive recognition as an employer that is committed to offering quality apprenticeships and careers to people of all ages and backgrounds – it has also helped us attract the best talent. If you're thinking of applying for the National Apprenticeship Awards, you should absolutely do it – getting that gold award is unbeatable.”

Apprentice employers and apprentices are invited to enter the award categories

Employer of the Year categories:

- SME of the Year: 1 – 249 employees
- Large Employer of the Year: 250 – 4,999 employees
- Macro Employer of the Year: 5,000+ employees
- The Recruitment Excellence Award: new for 2018, the winner will be selected from the Employer of the Year award entries

Apprentice of the Year categories:

- Intermediate Level (level 2)
- Advanced Level (level 3)
- Higher or Degree Level (level 4 or higher)

Special recognition categories:

- Rising Star Award: new for 2018, recognises apprentices that have made impressive progress in their career to date, and have the potential to go even further
- Recognition Award: new for 2018, awarded to an individual who has made a special contribution to the promotion and delivery of apprenticeships – to be selected by the National Apprenticeship Service
- Apprenticeship Champion of the Year: recognises individuals who go 'above and beyond' to champion apprenticeships

The application site is now open, entry is free and online at appawards.co.uk. To help with entries, this year the process has been simplified further and guidance documents for employers and apprentices are available to download.

The deadline for entries is the 25 May 2018.

Applying is easier than ever before. Start your awards entry today, visit: appawards.co.uk.

News story: Sports industry can be top of the league in reducing plastic pollution

Environment Secretary Michael Gove will today call on sports leaders from across the Commonwealth to join the fight against plastic pollution in the world's oceans.

As part of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting taking place in London this week, the Environment Secretary will host leaders from across the sports sector on board the HMS Belfast in London to drive forward innovation and agree actions to tackle the global scourge of plastic.

With mass sporting events often generating up to 750,000 plastic bottles and seven tonnes of waste, the Environment Secretary and representatives from Premier League football, swimming and ocean sailing will look at how the sector can use its influence to tackle this blight and bring about global change.

This will build on the work already underway by industry – with this year's Commonwealth Games banning the use of plastic balloons and rolling out water refills to reduce plastic, and Twickenham Stadium introducing a deposit return scheme for 'fan cups', where fans pay an extra £1 for their cup and get the money back when they return it to the bar. Tottenham Hotspur has also announced its commitment to phasing out single-use plastics across all Club operations.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Plastic pollution is one of the most pressing environmental challenges of our time and we all have a role to play to tackle the threats our oceans face.

There are few groups which have the global reach and power the sports sector does to inspire change and mobilise action. The industry is already making great strides, and I look forward to seeing how they can build on this progress to be true ambassadors for global change.

Bill Bush, Executive Director of the Premier League, will also attend the roundtable. He said:

The Premier League is well aware of the importance of taking action against plastic pollution, it affects us all and our fans expect us to do what we can to tackle this threat. We are here today to learn from others as we develop our plans to reduce plastic use

throughout our operations.

We also want to use our reach to fans here and across the world to spread the word that each and every one of us can make a difference by choosing to use less plastic.

Jointly co-hosted with United Nations Environment, attendees at the roundtable will also be encouraged to join the UN's '[Clean Seas](#)' campaign – a global initiative to reduce plastic pollution in the oceans.

Endurance swimmer Lewis Pugh will attend in his role as the UN's Patron of the Oceans. He said:

I've been swimming for 30 years and can be under no illusion life in our oceans is under threat like never before. Beaches across the world are littered with bags, bottles and straws, and plastic has made its way to some of the most remote corners of the ocean.

Single-use plastics have no place in the modern world and I will be urging sportsmen and women, especially those involved with ocean sports, to help us share this important message and be voices for the protection of our oceans.

This year's World Environment Day on June 5 will focus on the issue of plastic pollution – with UN Environment working with sports organisations across the world to take action to address their plastic footprint.

The roundtable comes as just this week the Prime Minister [announced](#) the UK and Vanuatu-led Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance – an agreement between member states to join forces in the fight against plastic.

Britain, together with joint chair Vanuatu, will call on other countries to pledge action on plastics, be this by a ban on microbeads, a commitment to cutting down on single use plastic bags, or other steps to eliminate avoidable plastic waste. New Zealand, Sri Lanka and Ghana have already joined.

To drive this forward, the Prime Minister also announced a £61.4 million package of funding to boost global research and help countries across the Commonwealth stop plastic waste from entering the oceans in the first place.