

Speech: Amanda Spielman speech to Annual Apprenticeships Conference

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today.

Introduction

This is a very important conference, at a critical time for the development of apprenticeship provision. It is gratifying to see apprenticeships on the news agenda regularly: whether as mentions in Prime Minister's speeches or the subject of thoughtful newspaper columns from journalists you wouldn't normally expect to care. Apprenticeships are, quite rightly, recognised as a vital component of our education and skills sector. Less gratifying, perhaps, is that too much of this recognition is about the system, not yet, working as it should.

That's why I am so pleased to be here today. I see it as essential that providers, policy makers and employers can have open and frank discussions about what works and what needs to be improved.

It is almost a year now since the introduction of the apprenticeship levy—one of the most significant changes to apprenticeship funding that we have ever seen. Alongside the slow but inexorable move from apprenticeship frameworks to apprenticeship standards, providers and employers are working to secure the training and support that businesses need to develop a well-trained and productive workforce.

And at Ofsted, we carry on supporting the reform programme. Indeed we're putting our money where our mouth is, with our own award-winning band of 29 business administration apprentices.

Challenges

We know that it has been a challenging year for providers. The levy has required a different relationship with employers. There have been challenges in applying for, and receiving, non-levy allocations. There have also been problems getting on the Register of apprenticeship training providers. And, in too many instances, in finding a replacement standard for a framework—particularly at levels two and three.

I suspect that the fall in apprenticeship starts is due to a combination of these factors. Nevertheless, any barriers that prevent employers taking on an apprentice, or standing in the way of good providers delivering high quality training, must concern us all.

The first quarter of 2017 to 2018 saw almost 50,000 fewer starts than the same quarter in 2016 to 2017. There is no denying, that the low number of starts continues to be a concern, which is why I was heartened to see Anne

Milton's recent confidence that numbers will pick up in the new academic year. We all have to hope that this is true.

It is not just about overall volumes though. We are also experiencing some unintended consequences from the emerging trend towards higher-level apprenticeships. Of course, I understand, indeed applaud, more apprenticeships at higher levels, especially when there is clear progression in an occupation, from level 2 through to degree level. However, around 40% of the standards approved or in-development are at higher and degree levels, while only 7% of apprentices work at these levels.

This shift may be good for the economy in the long run, but the reduced number of apprenticeships at levels two and three is another destabilising factor in the system. To put it more brutally, there is a risk that young people, fresh from school, get squeezed out of apprenticeship routes because employers prioritise higher level programmes. This makes it more difficult for young people looking for entry-level employment straight from GCSEs.

In this context, I am pleased to see that the Institute for Apprenticeships is upping the rate at which it develops and approves apprenticeship standards. Up till now, this process really has been too slow. I am also pleased that there is now more flexibility to include qualifications within apprenticeship standards. I see these positive developments as a sign that the institute is listening to the concerns expressed by employers and training providers. However, I would still like to see a greater focus on achieving a set of standards that really reflect the balance of training and development needs of the economy.

Ofsted's role

With all the change, and uncertainty in the system, I am sure you want reassurance about Ofsted's agility and ability to adapt inspection to fit the new reality.

We know the challenges you face. We are working hard with you to make sure that inspection takes account of the changing landscape. But, let me be absolutely clear, we will not be excusing poor performance. Regardless of the changes that we are all dealing with: apprentices deserve high quality training at, and away from, work.

Pilot inspection findings

We have already carried out a number of pilot inspections to make sure that we are looking at the right things in this new environment. And we found a need for inspectors to focus on the bottom line, not the money, but what knowledge, skills and behaviours apprentices actually develop and acquire.

Now I hope many of you will know that one of my big interests as Chief Inspector is looking at the substance of education. By this, I mean the entirety of what is actually learnt, whether at school, college or on an apprenticeship.

As I said at the launch of my first [Annual Report](#), our early research has shown that, all too often, the knowledge that we want young people to acquire is lost in the dash for grades and stickers.

These pilot inspections of apprenticeship providers have revealed that many of the concerns we have uncovered at a school level are also evident in apprenticeships.

We are seeing an over-emphasis on simply ticking the box to show that the next part of the qualification has been achieved. There is not enough focus on the actual skills, knowledge and behaviours learned.

Indeed, most providers in our pilots found it difficult to demonstrate what actual progress their apprentices were really making. As providers, you need to consider how you make sure that apprentices are making progress. This isn't for inspectors, not for Ofsted, but for apprentices' and employers' benefit. It is also to inform the training and development programme that apprentices need to be following to pass end-point assessments.

The findings from our pilot inspections are informing changes to the inspection handbook. We will carry on iterating and adapting these as the systems develop.

Inspections of apprenticeships

More broadly, we are now developing our new education inspection framework for September 2019. How we inspect and report on apprenticeships are important considerations in our thinking and planning for this new framework. What we learn on inspections now, and what we learn from our work with organisations like AELP, the British Chambers of Commerce and the CBI, will inform our development. And of course, we will consult on our proposals.

But the changes in the system aren't just about new frameworks and new ways of inspecting. I know that many of you have concerns about the number of untested providers entering the market and the effect this could have on quality. Well, rest assured, we are not standing idly by and waiting for new providers to fail. We are doing all that we can to make sure that no apprentice's future opportunity is ruined by poor provision. It is essential that poor quality provision is spotted and tackled quickly, so that it doesn't damage an individual's prospects or the overall apprenticeship brand.

We have already begun a series of early monitoring visits to assess the quality of these new providers. Some of you will have heard about our first monitoring visits, which hit the headlines, at least in the trade press, last week. There is no hiding the fact that what we found at Key6 Group was worrying. And I'm very pleased that there has been a prompt reaction by ESFA [Education and Skills Funding Agency].

But, it is important that we don't over-interpret this one result as a judgement on all new providers coming on stream with the levy. We are doing more monitoring visits of this type. And I very much hope that positive results will significantly outnumber the disappointments.

Besides these monitoring visits to new providers, we have increased our inspection focus on subcontractors, many of whom are providing apprenticeship training. We are doing this in two ways. Firstly, as part of our standard inspections, where providers have a significant proportion of subcontracted provision, we are increasing our focus on this part. This will mean that teams can evaluate and report, in more detail, on the quality of education and training in individual subcontractors.

In addition, we are making monitoring visits to a number of directly-funded providers to look specifically at subcontracted provision. This way, we can make sure that apprentices are getting the best possible training. We expect the first of these to be published in the next couple of weeks.

Our message here is simple. As the direct contract holder, you are responsible for your learners. If you subcontract, for whatever reason, you are still responsible for making sure your apprentice gets high quality training. If you are sitting back and collecting the money, without taking proper responsibility for quality, you are failing your apprentices. We are determined to expose this in the system.

And, just in case, any of you were being kind enough to worry about us, and whether Ofsted has the resources to deliver this increased volume of inspection, please don't worry: we are being equally robust in our approach to government for funding. Indeed the DfE has already acknowledged that it needs to fund us properly for this work.

Standards

With the experience of Learndirect still prominent in all of our minds, I have no doubt that you are all acutely aware of the risks when large sums of money flow into a system.

It is sobering, in that respect, to look at recent inspection outcomes. Between September 2017 and February 2018, we made a judgement on the apprenticeship provision at 55 providers. We found three-fifths of them to be good or outstanding, with 16 requiring improvement. Six were inadequate. This means that 4 in 10 providers did not offer high quality training for apprentices. There is no way of dressing this up – it is not good enough.

But looking at it another way, the good and outstanding providers were generally the larger ones, so 33,000 apprentices were in good or outstanding provision – almost 80% of the overall places. And this is a lot higher than the provision looked at in the previous year. Then, only 60% of apprentices were being trained in providers of the same quality, we have excluded Learndirect from those figures. To be clear, it is not a perfect year-on-year comparison because inspection priorities and scheduling decisions affect which providers are selected for inspection. However, I do believe the figures are cause for optimism about quality in the sector.

So, while we rightly shine a light on concerns in the system, and I do have to talk about where things are going wrong. I also believe it is important to celebrate where things are going well. We see outstanding apprenticeship

providers like National Grid and Craven College and Fareham College. There we see leaders and managers who work very closely with local employers to make sure that apprenticeships meet the needs of the local economy. They expect the best of their apprentices who show exemplary skills, getting the qualifications and competencies they need.

And whether it's TTE Training with 160 engineering apprentices on various pathways, Busy Bees Nurseries and its range of early years apprenticeships or CITB supporting 10,000 apprentices in the construction industry—these very different types of outstanding provider are similar in one thing: the determination to give their apprentices top-notch training and to set them on a path to a successful and fulfilling career.

Conclusion

So, to conclude, we cannot escape the fact that this is a testing time for apprenticeships, a period of significant change that has inevitably brought a level of uncertainty alongside great opportunity.

There is still a way to go before we can confidently declare the new approach a success, but it is possible to see it beginning to take shape.

My inspectors are seeing some excellent provision around the country, but not enough of it and we need to see more. The sector is adapting confidently to change, but we need to make sure that the pace doesn't slacken.

Ofsted's overarching goal, as set out in our corporate strategy, is to be a force for improvement in all the sectors we inspect and regulate. This is as relevant for apprenticeship provision as it is for schools or child protection. Through our work, we will provide the evidence of what is working and the early warning of where things are going wrong. For a system in the midst of change, this could not be more vital.

After all, success of this ambitious apprenticeship programme is essential, not only to the needs of our wider economy, but for the young people and adult learners so desperate for the right opportunity to prosper.

I know all of you in this room are working hard to ensure this success. I am delighted to be joining all the winners of the inaugural AAC apprenticeship awards at tonight's ceremony in recognition of that commitment.

Thank you.

[Press release: Statement on the](#)

sentencing of Ahed Tamimi

Minister for the Middle East, Alistair Burt MP said:

The conviction and sentencing of Ahed Tamimi is emblematic of how the unresolved conflict is blighting the lives of a new generation, who should be growing up together in peace, but continue to be divided.

The treatment of Palestinian children in Israeli military detention remains a human rights priority for the UK. We will continue to call upon Israel to improve its practices in line with international law and obligations.

We have offered to help the Israeli authorities through expert-to-expert talks with UK officials. The offer still stands and we hope Israel will take us up on it. While we recognise that Israel has made some improvements, it needs to do much more to safeguard vulnerable people in its care.

Further information

- Follow Minister Burt on Twitter [@AlistairBurtUK](#)
- Follow the Foreign Office on Twitter [@foreignoffice](#) and [Facebook](#)
- Follow the Foreign Office on [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#) and [LinkedIn](#)

Media enquiries

For journalists

Email
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Newsdesk
020 7008 3100

[News story: UK flu levels according to](#)

PHE statistics: 2017 to 2018

Updated: Added latest flu data.

Latest update

Seasonal flu levels remain elevated but have now peaked.

The latest Public Health England (PHE) [report published at 2pm today](#), Thursday 22 March 2018, shows that seasonal flu continues to circulate across the UK, although activity has now peaked.

The statistics show over the last week:

- a 8% decrease in the GP consultation rate with flu-like illness
- a 10% decrease in the flu hospitalisation rate
- a 10% reduction in the flu intensive care admission rate

The main strains circulating continue to be flu A (H3N2) and flu B.

Previous updates

Thursday 15 March 2018

Seasonal flu levels remain elevated but have now peaked.

The latest [Public Health England \(PHE\) report published at 2pm today](#), Thursday 15 March 2018, shows that seasonal flu continues to circulate across the UK, with signs that activity has peaked.

The statistics show over the last week:

- a stabilisation in the GP consultation rate with flu-like illness
- a 4% decrease in the flu hospitalisation rate
- a 21% reduction in the flu intensive care admission rate

The main strains circulating continue to be flu A (H3N2) and flu B.

The report also shows that from weeks 50, 2017 to week 5 of 2018, statistically significant excess mortality from all causes was observed in over-65s in England.

This is currently similar to the excess mortality observed last season and lower than seen in the 2014 to 2015 season. These excess deaths cannot with certainty be attributed to specific causes, but flu and the very cold weather that some areas have seen since Christmas are likely to be contributing factors.

Thursday 8 March 2018

The latest Public Health England (PHE) report published at 2pm today, Thursday 8 March 2018, shows that seasonal flu continues to circulate across the UK, with signs that activity has peaked.

The statistics show over the last week:

- a 37% decrease in the GP consultation rate with flu-like illness
- a 31% decrease in the flu hospitalisation rate
- a 26% reduction in the flu intensive care admission rate

The main strains circulating continue to be flu A (H3N2) and flu B.

The report also shows that from weeks 50, 2017 to week 4 of 2018, statistically significant excess mortality from all causes was observed in over-65s in England.

This is currently similar to the excess mortality observed last season and lower than in the 2014 to 2015 season. These excess deaths cannot with certainty be attributed to specific causes, but flu and the very cold weather that some areas have seen since Christmas are likely to be contributing factors.

Thursday 1 March 2018

The latest Public Health England (PHE) report published at 2pm today, Thursday 1 March 2018, shows that seasonal flu continues to circulate across the UK, with signs that activity has peaked.

The statistics show over the last week the GP consultation rate with flu-like illness remains the same, a 4% decrease in the flu hospitalisation rate and a 13% reduction in the flu intensive care admission rate. The main strains circulating continue to be flu A (H3N2) and flu B.

The report also shows that in weeks 50, 2017 to week 7 of 2018, statistically significant excess mortality from all causes continues to be observed in over-65s in England.

This is currently similar to the excess mortality observed last season and lower than in 2014 to 2015. These excess deaths cannot with certainty be attributed to specific causes, but flu and the very cold weather that some areas have seen since Christmas are likely to be contributing factors.

Dr Paul Cosford, Medical Director and Head of Health Protection at PHE, said:

While our latest data shows there are signs that flu rates have peaked, we are continuing to see a lot of flu circulating and this is placing a significant impact on NHS resources. I want to take this opportunity to recognise all of our healthcare staff whose hard work continues to deliver an excellent service.

We are still seeing a mix of flu types, including the A(H3N2) strain that circulated last winter in the UK and then in Australia and flu B.

Rates of vaccination across all those eligible for the vaccine have increased on last season with an additional 1.5 million people vaccinated this season.

In order to prevent the spread of flu, it is important to practice good respiratory and hand hygiene and to avoid close contact with others if you have flu symptoms.

Thursday 22 February 2018

The latest Public Health England (PHE) report published at 2pm today, Thursday 22 February 2018, shows that seasonal flu continues to circulate across the UK, with signs that activity has peaked.

The statistics show over the last week there has been a 17% reduction in the GP consultation rate with flu-like illness, a small increase in the flu hospitalisation rate and a 17% reduction in the flu intensive care admission rate. The main strains circulating continue to be flu A (H3N2) and flu B.

The report also shows that in weeks 50, 2017 to week 7 of 2018, statistically significant excess mortality from all causes continues to be observed in over-65s in England.

This is currently similar to the excess mortality observed last season and lower than in 2014 to 2015. These excess deaths cannot with certainty be attributed to specific causes, but flu and the very cold weather that some areas have seen since Christmas are likely to be contributing factors.

Dr Richard Pebody, Acting Head of Respiratory Disease Department at PHE, said:

We are continuing to see flu circulate, with signs that flu activity has peaked. Rates of vaccination across all those eligible for the vaccine have increased on last season and we have vaccinated an additional 1.5 million people. We are currently seeing a mix of flu types, including the A(H3N2) strain that circulated last winter in the UK and then in Australia and flu B. It is important to practice good respiratory and hand hygiene and to avoid close contact with others if you have flu symptoms.

Thursday 15 February 2018

Seasonal flu levels remain high but are continuing to stabilise across the UK.

The latest Public Health England (PHE) report published at 2pm today,

Thursday 15 February 2018, shows that seasonal flu continues to circulate across the UK and rates across most indicators remain stable. The statistics show over the last week there has been a 21% reduction in the GP consultation rate with flu-like illness, a 9% reduction in the flu hospitalisation rate and a 7% reduction in the flu intensive care admission rate. The main strains circulating continue to be flu A(H3N2) and flu B.

The report also shows that in weeks 50, 2017 to week 6 of 2018, statistically significant excess mortality from all causes continues to be observed in over-65s in England. This is currently similar to the excess mortality observed last season and lower than in 2014 to 2015. These excess deaths cannot with certainty be attributed to specific causes, but flu and the very cold weather that some areas have seen since Christmas are likely to be contributing factors.

Thursday 8 February 2018

Seasonal flu levels remain high but are continuing to stabilise across the UK.

The latest Public Health England (PHE) report published at 2pm today, Thursday 8 February 2018, shows that seasonal flu continues to circulate across the UK and rates across most indicators remain stable. The statistics show over the last week there has been a 17% reduction in the GP consultation rate with flu-like illness, a 14% reduction in the flu hospitalisation rate, and a 10% reduction in the flu intensive care admission rate. The main strains circulating continue to be flu A(H3N2) and flu B.

The report also shows that in weeks 50, 2017 to week 5 of 2018, statistically significant excess mortality from all causes continues to be observed in over-65s in England, this is currently similar to the excess mortality observed last season and lower than in 2014 to 2015. These excess deaths cannot with certainty be attributed to specific causes, but flu and the very cold weather that some areas have seen since Christmas are likely to be contributing factors.

Richard Pebody, Acting Head of the Respiratory Diseases Department at PHE said:

We are continuing to see flu circulate, with signs that flu activity is stabilising.

Rates of vaccination across all those eligible for the vaccine have increased on last season and we have vaccinated an additional one and a half million people. We are currently seeing a mix of flu types, including the A(H3N2) strain that circulated last winter in the UK and then in Australia and flu B.

It is important to practice good respiratory and hand hygiene and to get the vaccine if you are newly eligible, although we are now coming to the end of the vaccine season.

Thursday 1 February 2018

Seasonal flu levels remain high but are stabilising in the last week across the UK.

The latest Public Health England (PHE) report published at 2pm today, Thursday 1 February 2018, shows that seasonal flu continues to circulate across the UK, with rates across most indicators remaining stable. The statistics show over the last week there has been a stabilisation in the GP consultation rate with flu-like illness, a 7% reduction in the flu hospitalisation rate, and a 26% reduction in the flu intensive care admission rate. The main strains circulating continue to be flu A(H3N2), A(H1N1) and Flu B.

The report also shows that in weeks 50, 2017 to week 4 of 2018, statistically significant excess mortality from all causes continues to be observed in over-65s in England, although this currently remains lower than the excess mortality observed last season and in 2014 to 2015. These excess deaths cannot with certainty be attributed to specific causes, but flu and the very cold weather that some areas have seen since Christmas are likely to be contributing factors.

The 'Catch It, Bin It, Kill It' campaign continues to run across digital, radio and press advertising platforms to inform the public about the steps they can take to protect themselves and reduce spread of the virus by practising good respiratory hand hygiene.

Richard Pebody, Acting Head of the Respiratory Diseases Department at Public Health England said:

We are continuing to see flu circulate, with signs that flu activity is stabilising.

Rates of vaccination across all those eligible for the vaccine have increased on last season and we have vaccinated an additional one and a half million people. We are currently seeing a mix of flu types, including the A(H3N2) strain that circulated last winter in the UK and then in Australia and flu B.

The best form of protection against flu is to get the vaccine if you are eligible and to practice good respiratory and hand hygiene, although we are now coming to the end of the vaccine season.

Whilst this is the most significant flu season since 2010 to 2011 in terms of GP activity, the ICU indicators taken overall suggest that it is less severe at this stage than 2010 to 2011. And in terms of the impact on excess mortality, we have not reached yet the levels seen in 2014 to 2015 and 2016 to 2017.

The flu virus can live for many hours on hard surfaces and therefore practising good hand hygiene can limit the spread of germs and transmission

of flu. People are advised to catch coughs and sneezes in a tissue, bin it, and then wash their hands afterwards to kill the germs. Practising good hand hygiene and giving eligible people the flu vaccine is the best defence against the virus.

People suffering with flu-like symptoms should catch coughs or sneezes in tissues and bin them immediately, wash their hands regularly with soap and warm water and frequently clean regularly used surfaces to stop the spread of flu. Avoid having unnecessary contact with other people if you or they have symptoms of flu.

Seasonal flu usually circulates for several weeks each year. The intensity of circulation depends upon the underlying population immunity, the circulating viruses and external factors such as the weather. It is an unpredictable virus and it is not possible to anticipate how flu levels will progress.

Amongst other diseases like norovirus that normally increase during winter, seasonal flu puts extra pressure on the NHS every year.

The latest data is available online. Currently 72.4% of adults over 65, 48.7% of adults with a long-term health condition, 47.1% of pregnant women, 44% of 3-year-olds, 42.6% of 2-year-olds and 63.9% of healthcare workers have received the vaccine.

[News story: Royal Navy prepares for future UK fishery patrols](#)

HMS Forth is the first of five state-of-the-art Royal Navy vessels designed for fishery protection, as well as counter-piracy, anti-smuggling, border patrol, counter terrorism and maritime defence duties.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

The Royal Navy has a proud tradition of protecting the UK's coastline and keeping a close eye on our fishing waters. With these state-of-the-art, vastly capable ships we stand ready to protect our fisheries once Britain leaves the EU.

The River-class Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPV) 'production line' is moving apace with the £116 million ships emerging at around six month intervals. The Royal Navy Fishery Protection Squadron are expecting a further two ships – HMS Medway and Trent – to be handed over later this year, with the remaining two – HMS Tamar and Spey – expected to arrive in Portsmouth by 2020. Just last week HMS Trent was formally named at the Glasgow shipyard where was built.

They will become the Royal Navy's eyes and ears around the UK, helping to safeguard fishing stocks. They will also assist in reassuring and protecting the Falkland Islands and are capable of deploying to the Mediterranean and Caribbean to uphold UK interests around the world.

Last week the Treasury announced that the MOD will receive £12.7 million from the Government's Brexit preparation allocation to support work with DEFRA on maintaining the UK's fisheries. The MOD is working closely with other government departments like DEFRA to determine the optimum deployment of these extremely flexible vessels.

With a total crew of around 58, but designed to go to sea with 39, they can spend up to 320 days a year on operational taskings. The larger crew allows a rotation of personnel to ensure they get to spend time at home or on training.

The new OPVs are four knots faster than their predecessors at 24 knots, have an increased range of 5,500 nautical miles, have a 30mm automatic cannon as their main armament instead of a 20mm gun, two Miniguns, four machine-guns and are equipped with two Pacific 24 sea boats. Each ship has an extended flight deck to operate up to Merlin size helicopters and accommodation for up to 50 embarked Royal Marines for boarding and supporting operations ashore if required.

Press release: Dame Shirley Pearce DBE joins the Committee on Standards in Public Life

The Prime Minister has appointed Dame Shirley Pearce as a member of the Committee on Standards in Public Life following an open competition.

Shirley has held senior executive and non-executive roles in higher education, health and policing. She is currently Chair of Governors of the London School of Economics and Political Science, a member of the Higher Education Quality Assurance Panel for the Ministry of Education in Singapore and a Trustee for the Royal Anniversary Trust.

In 2013 Shirley was appointed by the Home Secretary as the inaugural Chair of the College of Policing (the first professional body for policing) where she oversaw the introduction of the first Code of Ethics for policing based on the Nolan Principles. She was also a Board member of the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the Healthcare Commission and Health Education England.

She was Vice Chancellor of Loughborough University from 2006 – 2012, where

she delivered a new strategy for the university which saw a significant increase in turnover, closer working with industry partners and research success in the Research Excellence Framework alongside a top rated student experience.

Earlier in her academic career she held appointments at University College London (UCL) and the University of East Anglia (UEA) where she established a new medical school with an innovative curriculum and a focus on primary care and inter-professional learning.

In 2005, Shirley was awarded a CBE for services to education in the National Health Service and in 2014 was appointed DBE for services to Higher Education.

The Committee on Standards in Public Life advises the Prime Minister on ethical standards across the whole of public life in the UK. It monitors and reports on issues relating to the standards of conduct of all public office holders.

Shirley takes up the post effective immediately for a five-year term. Her appointment was made after open competition in line with the Cabinet Office Governance Code regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

The Committee is currently conducting a [short review of MPs' outside interests](#) and an [inquiry into ethical standards in local government](#).

Notes to editors

1. Interview requests and media enquiries should go to Maggie O'Boyle on 07880 740627.
2. Dame Shirley Pearce replaces Sheila Drew Smith OBE, whose term ended on 16 February 2018.
3. The other members of the Committee are: Lord (Paul) Bew, Chairman, Rt Hon Dame Margaret Beckett DBE MP, Simon Hart MP, Dr Jane Martin CBE, Jane Ramsey, Monisha Shah, and Rt Hon Lord (Andrew) Stunell OBE.