Speech: Engineering success vital to Zimbabwe's future: UK ambassador

I am delighted to be at this workshop, which showcases the great collaboration between Britain and countries in the region in developing better futures for ourselves – and for our children.

I'm delighted too that through the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Global Challenges Research Fund, these two great institutions of higher learning are working together: the National University of Science and Technology here in Bulawayo, which has an enviable reputation in Zimbabwe and beyond of producing well-rounded graduates in the science and technology fields, and the University of Strathclyde in Scotland – where, as many of you will know, the weather has been very different in the last couple of weeks to what we've been seeing in Zimbabwe! So – this is an exciting and innovative collaboration.

Year of Engineering

Some of you will know that the UK government has named 2018 – this year – as the Year of Engineering. That's because we want to boost engineering across the UK, making sure that everyone has the skills that are needed to thrive in a modern economy. One of our big concerns is to up the number of people studying engineering in the UK, including girls. But the UK isn't just looking inwards. Obviously we're delighted that the Royal Academy of Engineering is also working with partners to boost the capacity of engineering students and the faculties that teach them here in Zimbabwe – and in several other countries in southern Africa.

'What challenges can I solve?'

I'm going to quote the head of the Royal Academy – Dame Ann Dowling – who said this very recently: "Engineers look at the world around them and think 'how can I make it a better place? What challenges can I solve?

Engineering success is absolutely vital to the future of the UK, Zimbabwe and indeed all countries. We've seen how in the UK what a massive contribution engineering and engineering research makes to the UK economy and to the lives of UK citizens. Back in 2015 it was reported that engineering-related sectors had contributed around 280 billion POUNDS to the UK's Gross Value Added in 2011 – about 20 percent of the total.

Impact throughout the economy

UK engineering companies are having an impact throughout the economy and society: in transport, construction, energy and manufacturing, digital, communications and media.

I’ve been looking through some of the big names in UK engineering – names like Morgan Sindall, Balfour Beatty and Jaguar Land Rover. Some of these companies have a long and illustrious history, facing challenges head-on and innovating as the marketplace changed. I’ve also been interested to see the push to recognise and celebrate the contribution that young apprentices make to British engineering firms: Blue Engineering, a small firm based in Shoreditch, London, said just 10 days ago that hiring apprentices was “integral” to its growth strategy and “made sure the firm was always at the front of engineering innovation”.

Working with young talent

In the UK we’re clear that working with young talent is the way to go for engineering success – and we know that there will be similar success for Zimbabwe’s engineering industry.

Zimbabwe’s real wealth is in its people – in the innovation and creativity that so many Zimbabweans I interact with display.

I thank you.