

Speech: Justine Greening: Speech at DfE Skills Summit

Speaking on Thursday 30 November 2017 at the Department for Education's inaugural Skills Summit, Secretary of State for Education Justine Greening said:

I'm delighted to welcome you all to this inaugural Skills Summit here at the Department for Education.

It's fantastic to see businesses of all sizes and sectors, from up and down the country, representing all kinds of industries here today. As well as some key players from across the education sector.

I'd like to thank the CBI for their support in organising this event, and particularly to Carolyn Fairbairn for her leadership on the skills agenda.

On Monday, we launched an Industrial Strategy aimed at making a Britain that's really fit for the future for our country and our economy, competing on the global stage, and thriving in the 21st Century.

This strategy recognises that while we must invest in machinery, in buildings, in roads and in technology...this will count for nothing unless we also invest in our biggest asset and that the investment works – for our own people, our home-grown talent that we have in this country.

Because, of course, in the end it's the people who get in the cars on those new roads, who log on to the 5G network, who operate that high-tech machinery and it is their wherewithal that will make the difference to this infrastructure and as to whether the investment really counts or not.

It's no secret that this country needs more skilled workers. And if you look at digital skills alone, businesses will need an estimated 1.2 million new workers by 2022. Whether that's experts on cyber security, mobile and cloud computing or big data.

And, if we're honest, this country's historic failure to address these skills shortages has meant that too often we've imported talent and people – instead of building up our own.

And that has to change.

Because we're not just talking about a skills shortage for the economy it's more than that – it's millions of opportunities missed for people.

And the real tragedy here is all those people who could have been that engineer, that doctor, that computer programmer...who, perhaps, could have been another James Dyson or Tim Berners-Lee. They're not – not because they didn't have that potential – they absolutely did, but because we didn't have a country that connected them up with that opportunity.

The human story of what might have been is why the skills gap also matters hugely for the left-behind communities in this country, where young talent so often languishes or leaves.

Britain has talent and it's spread evenly across the country – the problem is that opportunity isn't.

Where you are born, live, go to school and work still directly affects where you get to in life and how well you do.

Like for many people, when I was growing up in Rotherham. My parents lived where their parents lived...I grew up with them being round the corner. But I always knew it would be difficult for me to stay in the same place to get the opportunity I wanted. But people shouldn't have to move miles away from their families. That's how it was for me, and worst of all that's still how it is today. Again, that has to change. Opportunities have to be on people's doorstep.

And if we're going to make the most of ourselves as a country, and make Brexit a success then we have to make sure every person and every place is fulfilling its potential. It's a social imperative as well as an economic one.

Social mobility. Equality of opportunity. This is my and my department's guiding mission and we will soon be launching an overarching plan setting out the concrete, practical actions we will take on key areas.

I'm clear that, ultimately, we tackle the skills deficit when we tackle the opportunity deficit. This is how we build a Britain that is fit for the future and a Britain that works for everyone.

So we need to make a new offer to our young people – a universal offer on opportunity, so that everyone can reach their potential, regardless of their background or where they live.

And I feel the opportunity deficit is at its biggest on skills. Here in this room, I believe there is both the power and the intent to help deliver a much needed skills revolution for Britain...a revolution that could transform the social landscape of this country, by bringing opportunity to every doorstep and finally, at the same time, delivering the skills British business needs.

Of course, this is not something government can do alone... and we need business and education to form a new alliance – a deep, strategic, mutually beneficial partnership between business and education, educators and employers: this will be one team for skills.

This government is investing in education and skills, and in fact today there are new stats out that showed now 1.9million more children are in good or outstanding Primary or Secondary schools in England. Crucially, we have committed to building a first class technical education system for the first time in the history of Britain...

We kicked this off already with our major overhaul of the apprenticeship

system. And in fact, even since May 2015, we've had 1.1million people starting on apprenticeships. They go right up the ladder.

We've introduced new degree-level apprenticeships where you earn while studying for a degree.

Through the levy we are also giving employers greater control over the training an apprentice gets, and we want employers to become demanding customers in the training market to develop quality candidates better and faster.

I want this government to continue to work closely with you to help you make the most of the opportunities the levy can bring for you and your workforces – but also to make sure that the levy works effectively and flexibly for industry, as we set out in the budget.

In the greatest shake-up of further education in 70 years we are introducing new T Levels for 16 to 19 year olds, an alternative to A Levels focused on practical, technical skills which will include a mandatory three month work placement.

Indeed, today we are also publishing a full consultation on the detailed design and implementation of these T Levels, and we're also announcing the full list of our T Level panels, for the first 6 T Level routes.

Today we're also announcing the launch of Institutes of Technology, with a funding pot of £170million pounds to draw on.

We want successful bids to be a successful collaboration between employers and education, as well as local further and higher education providers

We are also launching the first of our Skills Advisory Panels in regions across the country, they'll be in Greater Manchester, West Midlands, Cornwall and the Scilly Isles, Greater Lincolnshire, Lancashire, Leeds and Thames Valley.

We are introducing a National Retraining Scheme and we have so far committed over £100million to career learning pilots and initiatives on digital and construction skills.

Today we're announcing £10 million for a set of pilots in areas including Leeds, Devon and Somerset, Lincolnshire, Stoke-on-Trent and the West Midlands, to test the best ways of incentivising adults to train in the skills that their local economy needs.

I think all of this is adding up to a fundamentally different offer to young people and to everyone in the workplace – to develop the skills they need and we need to play their part in Britain's high tech future.

I know that this isn't the first time a government has promised to solve Britain's perennial skills problem.

So why have these well-intentioned efforts always failed?

Well, maybe part of it's been too much chopping and changing on policy. But most of all, I think it's because previous efforts never fully got employers on board...and there were too many employers who were happy to let government try to fix the skills problem and didn't want to be part of the solution as well. That approach didn't work, and couldn't work.

And this didn't, couldn't, work.

So that's why we are putting you, the employers, at the heart of the reform.

To be frank, everything I've set out today and the discussion we have today lives or dies on the strength of your involvement and commitment, to work in partnership.

It's businesses – big and small – that can uniquely motivate and inspire people in our schools, its businesses that can show people the path into careers, like Mamuda set out, that never thought were for people like them. All are crucial for the skills revolution and our policies need to help the global multi-national and the one-man start up.

Today is your chance to help us do that. Our workshops will focus on: how we can make T Levels work for business, delivering the important T Level work placements, Further Education teaching we want you to look at how you can work with us and improve that quality and consistency, and of course we do what workshops on apprenticeship reforms and adult learning. This is your chance to challenge and offer ideas, as our Permanent Secretary just said, on how we can do better.

But in return I want you to make a commitment – to work with us, to sign up to a new skills partnership and to make a better offer to young people, whatever their background.

So far 36 leading companies have done this and I hope that more will follow and sign up to our statement of action. We recognise that partnership can't just be about words though, it has to be about actions. What I want to see is a race to the top, companies showing leadership on skills.

Actions like GF Tomlinson who give children in Derby insight into careers in construction through mock interviews, site visits and work experience.

Actions like Kier who have an army of more than 200 volunteers working with young people to help them decide what career path they want to follow.

This is about a culture change for business, a mindset shift. And if we really are to have a skills revolution it cannot be business as usual.

It's about providing high quality apprenticeship,

It's about providing high quality work placements. We talk to them and they are crying out for this. Many of you are the converted already, but we want to talk to you to have that discussion and debate. I want young people to see business as the solution to get the education and opportunities they want.

Employers always say practical work experience – but not enough businesses offer it. How can we work together to change that? Today is your chance to tell me and my team.

Later this year we will publish our new careers strategy to help young men and women get practical advice and experience of the widest possible jobs and workplaces so their choice of a career is really based on what they know and experiences, not some wrong preconceived notion of what they are and what they aren't capable of. I never thought I could be a lawyer or do a law degree, as I had never met a lawyer. You are the credible voices that can bring this to life for them.

This is how you can get the biggest and the brightest candidates. Take engineering – according to Engineering UK, just one in eight roles are filled by women – you won't plug the skills gap in this industry without tapping into the other half of the population. It's probably one of the easier way to get more people into that job where there is a shortage.

I'd also like to see more industry experts actually going into colleges and teaching. What more credible voice is there for a young person in a college than a person who is part of the industry they are interested in. That's what the skills training and T Levels is all about – bringing those things together.

Finally, we need every business to instil a culture of lifelong learning through their organisation, to invest in learning and development, from the people already at the top all the way down the organisation. We all know the changes the economy and technology will have. Which is why we must look at the national training scheme – and that starts with businesses. From people at the top right through the way down. It's a lot isn't it, what I've set out? And this is out of the comfort zone of many. I get that as much as anyone sat round the Cabinet table – and I know that has to change, and businesses have to step out of the comfort zone if we're really going to plug the skills gap for good.

In conclusion, I wanted to bring you here to Sanctuary Buildings today to send a direct message to employers –at DfE, our doors are open to you.

This government believes in business – we see you as the solution. Business has helped to make our 21st century lives longer, more connected, more convenient. We see you as the solution and we want more young people to see you as a solution.

So we're throwing down the gauntlet to you today: Come with us on this journey. Bring the innovation, the creativity, the commitment that has made British businesses the best in the world and help us develop apprenticeships, T Levels, careers advice schools and adult learning...

Join a skills partnership to create the workforce this country needs.

This is about people, it's about places – it's about all of us doing better and ending the opportunity deficit in this country.

We all have a part to play in that – and we all need to rise to the challenge.

Thank you.