

Speech: Justine Greening: Speech at the Business and Education Summit

Speaking on Thursday 6 July 2017 at the British Chambers of Commerce Business and Education conference, Secretary of State for Education Justine Greening said:

Thank you Adam for that warm introduction. I'm delighted to be here.

Education and business. I can't think of a more powerful combination. And I can't think of a more important time – to bring education and business together.

You in the British Chamber of Commerce recognise that. That partnership is what this summit is all about. It's why we're here today.

Most of my working life has been in business, until politics.

My first job was in Morrison's supermarket.

I worked at Murphy's Engineering in Rotherham in the summer as a student, processing invoices.

After that I became an accountant and spent 15 years in industry – before I was privileged enough to become an MP.

I know you heard from the leader of the opposition earlier today.

I don't know if he's ever done a day's work in industry or business. He can speak for himself. But I have.

I've been on a journey – and it taught me three things:

Firstly, how important my education has been.

Secondly, how much untapped potential and talent there is in our country.

And thirdly, how critical business is for enabling that talent – for unlocking it.

That's why this amazing job – Secretary of State for Education – is so important to me. Because as a state school kid, I can improve the system for children who follow me – the children in school right now.

But also, I have the chance to bring together our common aims.

Great companies need great people. And my Department has a mission to give our young people the very best start – to become those great people.

It's about social mobility. Something that's been part of my life – and I'm sure many of your lives.

It's about opportunity.

It's about reducing inequality.

It's about making the most of ourselves as a country.

And we can only succeed in that mission if we work together.

And that's what I want to talk about today.

How a skills partnership – between government and business – can create a skills revolution.

Because that's what we need. Never more than now. A skills revolution for Brexit Britain. That's the real strategy on migration.

It's time to set ourselves a collective challenge – to develop our home grown talent. Talent that I believe is spread evenly across our country.

What does that practically mean?

What do we need to do?

A skills revolution need a technical education revolution.

One that lifts up the quality and prestige of further education and technical education in our country.

One that delivers on opportunity – through work based apprenticeships.

One that strengthens college-based education – and the technical routes that young people can take.

And we need a cultural shift across our country. A mind-set change – to recognise that opportunity. To reassert that businesses have the ability to spread opportunity. And that this is a precious commodity.

Let me take these in turn.

I'll start with technical education and further education – because it's here I feel that we have the furthest to go.

It's clear to me that our further education sector needs more support. That mean smarter decision making on the ground – to raise standards – so that everyone who attends college receives quality provision.

That's why we'll continue to support colleges as they follow through on the Area Review recommendations – that will make significant steps towards placing our colleges on a firm financial footing.

But I want to put further support in place – to increase quality across the sector to the level of our best colleges.

So I am establishing a Strategic College Improvement Fund to help weaker

colleges to up their game – with focussed support. Pilots for this fund will begin in the Autumn Term – and I will set aside £15 million over the next two years.

Quality provision also means drawing on the talents of the sector's outstanding leaders – so I will ask the FE Commissioner – Richard Atkins – to take on an expanded role to support colleges in raising standards.

Richard has an exceptional record – including making Exeter College one of the best in the country.

And I want more of the sector's top talent to be able to contribute to the wider system.

So I will also establish a programme for National Leaders of Further Education – to badge the best principals and senior leaders across FE. These leaders will be empowered to spread their expert knowledge, as well as mentor and support weaker parts of the system.

But there is more long term support we can put in place. We need to do more for teachers in technical education – those career professionals who will lead the teaching of the new routes.

So over the next year I will bring forward a package of support for teachers in FE.

As set out in the government's manifesto, this will include a dedicated programme to help industry experts join the profession – building an ever close link between business and education.

And I will explore options for investing in further research into teaching methods – research that is beginning to reap dividends for our school teachers.

And I need your help. Because our young people in colleges need your expertise.

These measures will help every FE college to be ready for the next phase of our technical education reforms. For the next stage of our skills revolution.

The aim here is clear. To move beyond the current system – to a streamlined set of just 15 technical skills routes. Each route will be a pathway to skilled employment.

As part of these routes we will introduce a new certificate – the “T-Level” – which will be a gold standard for technical and professional excellence. Offered alongside apprenticeships, they will form the basis of our new technical education system.

And because we need to beat countries with the best technical education – countries like Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway – we need to invest in more hours of skills training, in better quality skills training, to rival their offers.

That's why the Chancellor announced additional funding for T-Levels as part of the March budget – rising to over half a billion pounds per year. The CBI called it a “breakthrough budget for skills”.

Delivering these reforms will be a challenge.

I am clear there is only one way to get this right – through a genuine partnership between business, government and education professionals.

This means we need a collective plan. One plan. One team for skills.

So in the Autumn I will bring together top leaders from the business community – to agree the overall shape of the reforms.

This summit is only the beginning. Because businesses and colleges will be in the room at every single point – so we drive the skills revolution together.

And one of the main areas of focus will be the high quality work placements – that are a component of every T-Level. These will help to prepare young people for skilled work. Our research shows they are beneficial to businesses, colleges and young people.

But I can't do that important piece of work without you. I need your help again. T-Levels will only work, only be successful, if we can deliver these work placements together.

We made a public commitment in the Spring Budget to fund work placements – and we will draw on the £50m we received – to start this work in April 2018.

Of course, our T-Level offer isn't remotely happening in isolation. T-Levels are college based technical routes, but they follow on from our reforms to apprenticeships.

These are moving in the right direction. The launch of the apprenticeship levy this year – together with wider apprenticeship funding reforms later this year – are important next steps.

I want to get the rollout of this new system right – particularly so that small and medium sized businesses are properly supported to provide apprenticeships.

None of this is easy. I know we've a tendency to focus on where we can do better. But let's not lose sight of how far we've already come.

We are on our way to 3 million apprenticeships – working in partnership with British business. This is a big achievement. And today I can announce that we have reached over one million starts since May 2015.

So for the first time, we now have the building blocks of a potentially world class technical education system. Coming on the heels of our apprenticeship reforms. Strong work based routes. Strong college based routes. Investment in colleges and their staff – to fulfil their potential – and unlock the talents of all our young people.

But there is more to do.

Finally, I said this means a collective mind-set shift. A cultural change. And it does. Now is the moment for skills.

All of us need to ask ourselves what more we can do to create opportunity for young people – to develop them.

Many of you are already doing that in spades. Thank you.

But we need to win the skills argument across the whole of British business – that developing British human capital is probably the single biggest lever of economic growth this country has.

The conversations we have, the encouragement we give, the extra challenge that speeds up career development.

It's ironic isn't it. That the heavy lifting of the skills revolution will happen out of sight. In a million little moments. The chat over the photocopier. The forwarded email. The word of advice. Each one makes a difference. Lifting someone up. Businesses up and down the country – lifting the nation's skills.

Many of you are the exemplars. Organisations like the Federation of Small Businesses. You're the ones that have already got this. I think I'm preaching to the converted.

But let's go out there and preach to the unconverted.

I want to create an army of skilled young people for British business. But I need your help. Government can't do it alone.

I know what it is like in business day to day. Making the P&L work, the numbers add up. Keeping investors happy. The next deal to shore up revenues. The next budget setting process.

I know that for many companies there are a million reasons to put off decisions on our skills. But pushing them down the road is pushing our country's future down the road.

That's what it is going to take.

It's how we'll shift the dial. Not just on skills, but also on social mobility.

I cannot tell you how important I believe this is for the future. It is important for our economy.

To boost our productivity – so we are right up there with the highest performing economies.

It is important for our society.

To lift up areas of the country with a strong tradition of technical

education and skills. To level the playing field – and provide skilled workers for companies who can't find them.

And it's important for our politics.

Because for too long we have been content to import the skills we need rather than develop them at home.

We know that migration has never been so high on the political agenda. So our response has to be a bold plan for tackling the skills needs of our country.

Because unlocking our home grown talent is the best way to keep migration down.

It's important for the wellbeing of our country as a whole.

So the skills revolution is about setting out what works. How it works. And why.

Getting companies that are happy to take great workers to realise that they must play a role in skilling them up further.

You know as well as anyone the potential of taking rough diamonds and polishing them up. And none of us want to waste that potential.

You're not. So others need to do their bit – in building the human capital of our country.

So I want every company to step forward to help. Offer an apprenticeship. A work placement. Or support the fantastic work of the Careers Enterprise Company. To add your knowledge and expertise to the skills revolution.

Because we need a lot more skilled workers – from catering to digital. More trained coders. More engineers. More modern construction experts. All the skills that Britain needs.

Britain as a country has been accelerating – generating jobs and growth. More people working than ever before. More women working than ever before.

But as an economy – as a country – we've got another gear in us. So we now need to shift up. To our top gear.

I am committed to working with the business community – a community I was part of for so long – on how to make this skills revolution happen. I want it changed in a generation.

It's our generation that will steer this country through Brexit and beyond.

We have no time to lose.

We need to be determined, resolute. Our skills revolution will be Britain's greatest challenge.

But it's a challenge we can and must rise to.

There will be those in our politics, in our society, who see business as part of the problem. But I know you're part of the solution.

It was business that gave me the opportunities that were so priceless.

There will be those who cannot see beyond the problems – the difficulties of today. And yes, let's deal with these difficulties.

But we also have to lift our sights from where we are today – and look to where we need to get to. What we are aiming for.

A skills revolution. A technical education revolution. That is how we meet those challenges – head on. It's how we build our future.

And it's how we put our country's destiny fully in our people's hands.