

Speech: Justine Greening: We can challenge the impossible

I very much share the common mission that you have today, which is social mobility – and it's something that has very much shaped my own life.

You've just heard from the ComRes poll, and the problem is that poll is correct. Where people start still overwhelmingly does define how the rest of their life will play out, and today is all about tackling that head-on and saying that none of us should accept a country that works that way.

But also, I think you can challenge the impossible because I think we can change and we can shift the dial and I think we can, finally, make our country a country where there really is equality of opportunity for young people wherever they're growing up.

Of course, I started off my journey in Rotherham. I went to my local comprehensive and I had amazing teachers that really did help me to think that I could aim high, that I could possibly make something of the opportunities that were waiting for me in the rest of my life if I was able to study at school and work hard.

The thing that I have never forgotten, and that I passionately believe, is that talent in our country is spread evenly. There isn't this one community that is creating these amazing children that are going to go on and do brilliant things – those young people are all over, and we have to have an education system that allows them to make the best of themselves wherever they're growing up.

So I want to talk briefly today just about some of the things that we're doing, to be clear with you about how important social mobility is for me and for the Department for Education now, and perhaps to start off by saying I agree with the speaker that introduced Muzoon [Almellehan, UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador] – we do need to go for it. But I think part of the problem is that it's very hard to aim for an opportunity and to go for it if you don't really know what that opportunity is and what it looks like.

For me, growing up I never thought about becoming a lawyer or doing law at university because I'd literally never met a lawyer in my life. I'd heard about lawyers, but I'd no idea what that job entailed, what the career would be like. And I think this isn't just about education. It's about connections, aspirations and I think the session after me will help really get into how that is absolutely vital, alongside what we're doing in our education policy.

We know, as Russell [Hobby, Teach First] said, that for some communities poor social mobility has become entrenched. So people are growing up in parts of the country where actually they're likely to have worse outcomes and then they're likely to have worse career opportunities for them, even when they leave school.

There are some people for whom those opportunities are there, for whom that education is there, for whom those networks are there. For them, they're pushing at open doors. But for other young people, other children, they don't even know that the doors exist in the first place.

I think that teaching and the teaching profession is one of the biggest levers we've got to level up opportunity in our country. It's part, of course, of the solution. Not the whole solution, but it's a crucial one and it's probably why many of you are here today as people who went into the teaching profession and I remember, just after I got elected, being approached by Teach First to come into parliament and to talk to me about all the work that this still quite new charity was doing, even then. I remember being blown away by how fantastic it sounded.

I can also remember, I have to be honest, thinking that had it been there at the time when I was thinking about doing my career choices after going to university that actually it's something really would have appealed to me.

I think the early days, that first stage, of Teach First where you really ran towards some of the burning education issues of the time, which were often the plight of underperforming inner city comprehensives, many of them right here in London. And these were schools that, for those children in them, just weren't getting the start that would mean they could benefit from a better education and more than that, they were disproportionately young people coming from more disadvantage backgrounds. So this sense of an education system that was actually exacerbating people being able to get on, in some respects, rather than levelling up the opportunity.

But schools like Hackney Downs and the rise of new academies that Labour actually first brought in then, of course, championed and pushed forward by us in government, like Mossbourne. Those sorts of reforms really started, I think, a race to the top and were very much pushed forward by an amazing teaching profession.

You're going to hear from another amazing head, David Benson of Kensington Aldridge Academy – a school that has faced huge challenges over recent months but risen to them incredibly and is inspiring.

So, Teach First teachers are making a huge difference but they've gone beyond just teaching to setting up their own schools. I think alongside much of the work that has happened in cities like London, in particular, we've seen the real fruits of those benefits for levelling up opportunity. And now London and its education results probably give Singapore a run for its money because of the changes that have come in.

But they've been changes that have been pushed forward and pulled through by amazing teachers and I think we're here today because this was almost phase one. But there's a much bigger phase that we now need to really get into because if the task before was around inner city comprehensives and looking at places like London, actually now it's about looking at the regional disparities that we have still in our education outcomes and the fact that if you're a child in London, the fact that you want to look at how many children

in London have got, say, three outstanding primary schools that are within three miles of their homes, in other words outstanding schools and great choice, that's actually 90 per cent of children growing up in our city here.

But if you go to Bradford, do you know what the percentage is? It's three. And I think that statistic, if nothing else, really shows how we now need to take all of the learnings – and all of your learnings in many respects – that we've seen over the years in education, particularly how we've changed things here, and make sure that we now lift up the results for children in many other different parts of the country.

I personally think that, as we go through Brexit, one of the things that we need to change in our country is that it needs to feel different in terms of opportunity and we need to make sure that we tackle the opportunity deficit that exists for far too many of our young people that are growing up around Britain today.

I think you know how hard this will be because actually if we could all fix it by talking and doing speeches it would have all been sorted a very long time ago. I think if it had just been about goodwill we'd have fixed it a very long time ago, but in the end my view is that you're not going to shift the dial on social mobility with some grand visions.

Actually fixing social mobility, delivering on equality of opportunity is something that's more complex, more gritty, quite local in many respects, very long-term. It requires a persistence that I think sometimes is hard to deliver in government and I think you need to build a strategy brick by brick – and that's precisely what we're determined to do.

We're going to start in early years. We're going to work with you in schools. We're going to make sure that young people post-16 for the first time really have outstanding choices, not just on academic routes but on technical, applied education routes too. And we're going to make sure that our young people going into university really know what the outcomes are after they invest in those courses.

I think underneath all of that needs to be two things. Firstly, a willingness to work in partnership together – which I'll come onto in a second – but secondly, something that I think Teach First is all about, which is innovation. When you look at what Teach Firsters have gone on to do, whether it's Frontline, Brilliant Club, The Access Project, Jamie's Farm, the Institute for Teaching, Right to Succeed. These are all programmes that are doing so much now to create opportunities for young people.

That innovation and willingness to challenge and change needs to come from government as well. I think when you look around our country there are so many areas where we know what works, not just in London, but outside too. And it's now time to capture to what works, to have an evidence-based approach on that, and really spread it to the areas that can benefit from in the most.

The Education Endowment Foundation, I think, is a lynchpin in enabling us to make sure that we catch that evidence – that we marry it up with things like

research schools and we really use it to drive policy and policy development over the coming years. But at the heart of all of this, for me, is teachers and an amazing teaching profession. It's teachers that changed my life for the better, like most people at school if you point to the people that shape you most in life, it will almost certainly be your parents and your teachers.

So what we're going to be doing is investing in home-grown talent in the parts of the country and the communities where we really want to lift up our teaching and lift up our schools, the teachers who are already there, who work in these challenging schools, who have already got the close connections with the communities. But I also think it's about attracting more great teachers into those areas as well. I think this is an instinct that many, many teachers already have.

Teaching is a vocation and I think that's why all of you have gone into it – you want to make a difference and I think we've got to make it easier for you to follow the grain of your human nature, to follow your gut instinct, to be able to go into those schools and really work as teams and lift them up. So, yes, we want to have a look at this in a much more systematic way because it requires a more systematic approach if we're really going to make things different.

I want to make sure that teachers know that when they go into more challenging schools that they will get the full credit for having done that rather than simply going to a school where they're brilliant but maybe it's with children who are already able to access great teaching. I think that means we've finally got to get a grip on managing workload, we've got to have an accountability regime that doesn't create barriers for teachers going to work in those schools where they're needed most.

The reason that it's so crucial to me to put this in place is that I want to carve out some space to really focus much, much more on teachers' professional development. I realise that until we crack the workload nut that's much, much harder.

Of course, the work that Amanda Spielman and Ofsted is doing in this area is also absolutely vital if we're going to shift the system so that you can do what you want to. Our number one goal, I think, is lifting teaching as a career and I think helping shout about the fact that actually it's probably one of the most rewarding careers anyone can go into.

We want to make sure that the best graduates think seriously about it as an option when they come out of university but that does mean, I think, improving the offer for existing teachers and that starts with strengthening QTS [Qualified Teacher Status]. For me it's about making sure that as our teachers leave Initial Teacher Training that, when they finally get into the schools that they're going to be teaching in, that actually that's the next stage of their development not just the end of it.

Focusing on CPD [Continued Professional Development] in the early stages of a young teacher's career is absolutely critical. That's why I want to strengthen QTS. We've had a fantastic group of people, many of them teachers,

all of them education experts, working with us at the DfE to pull together how we can do this best and we'll be launching a consultation shortly to what all of you think good looks like.

I really do want to see this move on and I want it to be a stronger, better, more powerful QTS that can really turbocharge teacher's development and beyond that, then making sure that the National Professional Qualifications and the reforms there. We've set aside £10 million to really incentivise those being taken up in the areas where we think we want to work hardest on improving leadership.

It's about steadily building a whole career path and there's much, much more of course to do on all of this but it's fantastic for me to see the role that Teach First is going to play in all of that and certainly you will be one of the first 42 providers of those new, reformed NPQs.

All of that work sits alongside the broader work that's underway on using an evidence base to really understand how we can help develop, professionally, teachers in our more challenging areas. Whether it's the Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund, including programmes from that – one of which is also led by a Teach First ambassador. Those programmes are launching in schools next year.

I'm keen to look at how we can strengthen the pipeline of teachers going into parts of our communities that would most benefit from great new teachers. That's why we've announced that we'll be piloting the teacher loan reimbursement scheme in more difficult parts of the country so that we can really improve not just retention, through a stronger career path, but critically recruitment as well.

That pilot scheme will focus on new science and modern foreign language teachers. We're going to launch it in 25 very different local authorities whether it's Derby, Oldham, Northumberland, Middlesbrough, Norfolk, and it will cover those early years of student loan payments.

Of course, Russell mentioned Opportunity Areas, and we'll continue all of the work that's well underway there. And I think what we were trying to achieve with the Opportunity Area strategy was to have, again, a more systematic look and recognise that many of the challenges that are faced inside schools, and faced by teachers trying to do their role inside schools, actually need solutions not just within the schools themselves but to work much more broadly with communities, with charities, with businesses outside schools too.

That's precisely what we're doing. And the second piece of this really, for me – I talked about innovation – is partnership. I think the knowledge that Teach First will be on that next stage of the journey with us, looking at how we can really shift the dial on tackling the regional disparities that are still there in our education system, I think is a huge prize for all of us to aim for.

Teach First was never called just Teach London, or Teach south-east, and for

me I think it's going to be fantastic for you to be so clearly on this next phase of our journey of raising education standards across our country.

Just to finish, I think absolutely everybody wants the same objective here. There are 4,000 people in this room but one objective, which is raising social mobility. Achieving a country where we have equality of opportunity, finally. I think we should recognise that Britain's never been a place where there has been equality of opportunity. We're not alone, that's pretty much the same for overwhelmingly pretty much every single country in the world.

But I think if you believe, as I do, that any country – whether it's Syria, or whether it's Britain – any country's greatest asset is people. Enabling those people, every single individual, to be able to flourish and reach their potential and thrive, surely is the biggest step we can take to making sure that our country's a successful one in the long-term – but also a happy one too where people can truly feel fulfilled.

We're looking across my department at how we can tilt our programmes, how we can focus our efforts, how we can make sure that across all of our policy areas and teams things are joined up. How we can make sure that all of those things are joined up with organisations, including Teach First, that are doing so much work every single day on exactly the same issue.

I believe that things can absolutely be different in our country in the future than how they've been in the past. I think it will take huge effort. I think it will take long-term effort. But I really do believe that if we work together we can achieve a first for Britain – and that's a Britain that really does have equality of opportunity for all. Thank you.