

Speech: Justine Greening: we should not accept Britain as it has been

Thank you so much for that warm introduction Peter [Sir Peter Lampl, Chairman of the Sutton Trust and Education Endowment Foundation.] I am truly delighted to be here to be part of this 20th anniversary celebration.

But also of course, in Sutton Trust fashion, at a summit looking at what we need to do in the next 20 years ahead of us. I really wish you all the best for the day that you have ahead of you, and the energy and the ideas that I know you will put into today.

I am honoured to be able to open up the agenda because last week I gave another speech about something I care deeply about. It was about skills and technical education, talking about all the things you just mentioned Peter, about how we need a skills revolution in our country. It was to the British Chamber of Commerce.

I talked about how I felt, with a skills revolution, we could finally plug the huge needs of British businesses with the talents of our young people.

And I said that the time for skills was now.

But behind that whole speech was an idea that I think was even more powerful and more transformational. And that was an idea of social mobility.

Because to me social mobility has always been an issue of profound importance. I believe now it is an issue of profound urgency for our country too.

It is a simple but powerful concept – that everybody should have the chance to be the best version of themselves that they can be.

And alongside that they need more. They should live in a country where not only they can be the best version of themselves through the education they get, but that there is a business community – a wealth of careers out there – that allows them to then fulfil that potential.

Social mobility is how we can unlock and enable potential. But, as Peter says, we have not been able to do that.

And in fact, for all the programmes on educational standards, on social mobility, it does feel like we move to a much slower timeline. And in some respects we have seen ourselves go backwards.

I don't think we can accept that as a country any more. In my view, Britain faces a social mobility emergency.

And if that's the case then we should all be worried. Even those of us who don't get this yet and are wrongly comfortable with the status quo.

So why are we here, though? Why haven't we as a country been able to improve our social mobility? Why should something that is so simple in concept, so powerful, so obviously for the common good of our country, be so difficult?

Well, I think that at the heart of that question is the fact that, though social mobility is a simple concept, it is a complex problem.

It is also a long-term problem. And I think if you put those two elements together, complexity and long-term, perhaps those are the features of the challenges that are hardest for any government to get right.

Yet, we now have to lead a path forward on tackling social mobility.

The good news is that we increasingly know what works, in no small part thanks to the Sutton Trust. I think your 20 years are 20 years to be truly proud of.

You have raised the debate on social mobility with your pioneering research into the education backgrounds of the UK's leaders. From doctors and lawyers, to chief executives. I am delighted to have helped out with your statistics on comprehensively educated Cabinet Ministers.

But crucially, as you said Peter, you are a 'do tank'. You have acted on problems you have shone a light on.

Your Summer Schools have helped tens of thousands of young people from poorer backgrounds to get into the most prestigious universities.

Your Pathways Programmes have helped thousands of young people from low-income households into the leading professions. From law, to medicine, to banking.

And you co-founded with us the Education Endowment Foundation, to identify what works in education to improve outcomes for our most disadvantaged pupils.

With its help, we are actually now starting to close the attainment gap.

Yet in so many ways, throughout these 20 years, in my mind the Sutton Trust has never been sufficiently recognised for the importance of its work to our country.

That now needs to change. It has to.

This is an issue about effort and reward. It is not just about our politics. It is about our country. It is about our economy. It is about our communities. It is about having a Britain that works with the grain of human nature.

I don't believe that we should accept Britain as it has been. But I think the good news is that we don't have to either.

We can decide that we want our country's future to be different from its

past.

And that's where the work that my department is engaged in is going to help lead us.

I am setting social mobility as the Department for Education's guiding mission. And we are shifting our culture to become mission-driven on social mobility like never before.

More broadly than that, I believe this must be a government that acts.

And of course my starting lens in the DfE is that this mission has to focus on the most entrenched forms of disadvantage. It has to target the problem of the highest urgency. And to my mind that is the challenge of region and place; the 'coldspots' that we have on social mobility.

Why should living in one area, growing up in one area, disadvantage you, when compared to another? It shouldn't, but in this country it still does.

The cities that we have, our towns, our villages – every single one of them is different. They are all unique in their own way.

But in some of them, in some of our communities, there is an entrenched disadvantage. And more than that, actually it is a generational cycle that reinforces this.

In some places it is a cycle that has spiralled down. And poor results in education lead to lower skills. Ill-equipped companies look to move out to go to places where there are skills, which then means fewer jobs, less opportunity, less innovation. A less attractive environment for any new business to think about coming in to.

And indeed for teachers, a less-attractive place for them to come in and teach. Because great teachers love teaching in great schools, for the most part.

So nothing changes.

We have to recognise that this is about a systemic failure. That the system gets trapped. Without the capacity to improve, schools don't get better and the next generation growing up there get trapped too.

But the good news is we know the spiral can reverse. It can go up. We can change this so that we end up with better educational outcomes, better knowledge and skills, leading to better performing businesses in local areas.

It is about more jobs, more investment, more growth. Creating a place where people think it is a great place to be, to be able to live, work, teach. And so it becomes a virtuous circle.

The good news is some parts of our country have been creating this virtuous circle and I think we should celebrate and support that.

Of course, we are stood in an area where education outcomes have significantly improved in recent years, here in London. But I point to places like Bristol, as well. They themselves have been transforming outcomes for young people there.

But we still can't accept that we have a country where millions of young people are still being left behind, living in poor performing areas. I don't believe that we can leave them to simply spiral down into being a generation that fails to have the opportunities that are in so many other parts of our country.

So we need to lift up these places. It means more help. More targeted support. And we need the tools to be able to do that.

I think at the Sutton Trust, one of the things you readily understood is that places are complicated. That education is complicated. And, as so often politicians like to pretend, there isn't generally one key policy that can overcome entrenched disadvantage.

Because every single place is different. The challenges in a place like Scarborough are not the same as the challenges in Norfolk. They are not the same as the challenges in Somerset.

So we have to recognise that our approach has to be tailored to what will actually work in these very different parts of our country, in these very different communities that face different challenges.

It is going to take a combination of people and policies to properly lift these areas. It is not enough to just target one part of the education system or skills.

If you concentrate, for example, just on students taking their GCSEs, then that might be too late. They might have already fallen behind before they got to that point.

Similarly, if you only have a push on early years then you risk failing to tackle the inequality that can build up beyond that, even if our children are getting the best possible early start.

It needs to be a concerted effort across education, across businesses, and across communities.

That is why I am focussing the wider work of my department on tackling that challenge of how we have successful, place-based education strategy. It is why I'm gearing my programmes and policies to lift up those parts of the country that can most benefit from improved education.

This challenge is particularly acute in our schools. There are parts of the country where schools are not delivering the results for our young people. These areas, moreover, do not necessarily have the capacity to improve all on their own yet.

This is a clear set of local authority districts. It is the bottom third of

our country. But if you look at that bottom third as a whole, they contain more than half of the schools in England rated requires improvement or inadequate.

That, for those children, is an injustice. Because, as we all know, you only get one shot at education.

So I am setting an explicit goal in the DfE: to improve the performance of the young people in these areas. To lift them up.

To achieve this we will have to see a wider shift to support and enable our school system to deliver where it needs to. This will require a co-ordinated approach. To build capacity. To extend the reach of the high performing arms of our system that we do have: Multi Academy Trusts; Teaching School Alliances; the National Leaders of Education; Local Authorities; our Regional Schools Commissioners; and Ofsted.

Together, we need those bits of our system to, once and for all, work to address the areas where young people end up being held back.

To do so, we do need to move away from a perception of a reliance on a pure, punitive, intervention approach. We need to move towards a culture of having the right support, in the right places, at the right time.

And I think for too long, our strategy has not had that breadth to it and, perhaps that clarity around it.

My approach is to target and support to lift up those areas. It is about having a clear plan to improve the schools in these areas. A plan that everyone can buy into at the national and local level.

Of course, this plan should have teachers at the heart of it. Great teachers.

Because, as you have shown us in your report [What Makes Great Teaching](#), it is improving the quality of teaching that can have the biggest impact on improving social mobility in our schools.

Indeed, one of the pieces of research you are publishing today said that when people were asked what they felt would be the biggest driver in improving social mobility, they quite rightly said: improving great teaching in their schools.

That is why, earlier this year, I announced a £75 million [Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund](#), which was all about investing in high-quality professional development for teachers and leaders working in these challenging areas.

£20 million of this can now be allocated to make a difference. The first round has now been completed and it will go to programmes helping to make a change on the ground from September this year.

We are also setting aside £10 million of that fund for teachers and leaders in those most challenging schools, to take part in the newly reformed, gold

standard National Professional Qualifications to help make sure that these schools are led by the very best teachers.

Because I believe that investing in the home-grown talent that is already in these areas, with teachers who are already there, is possibly one of the most quick and effective ways we can make a difference on the ground.

This approach will begin to have an impact in these regions, and I think it will begin to really lift up the parts of the school system that are struggling to kick start their own improvement.

We also know there are some areas in need of even more intensive support. The ones that face the multiplicity of challenges – not just a few but a lot.

That is why one of the first things I introduced as Secretary of State was to establish [Opportunity Areas](#).

There are now twelve of these areas where we can work closely with our partners on the ground to develop more innovative solutions to poor performance to lift up education outcome. To actually test what works best on the ground and then use that knowledge and insight to spread best practice to the rest of our schools across the country.

The Sutton Trust has been with us on that from the very beginning.

The Education Endowment Foundation is establishing a Research School for every single one of these Opportunity Areas, to help really spread evidence-based practice where we know it can make a huge difference.

Schools like Hungerhill in Doncaster, which already leads high quality training programmes with dozens of schools. Or the Blue School in Wells in Somerset, with a track record in understanding evidence and supporting schools across the West Somerset region.

Intelligent use of evidence is going to be key to making a difference in all of these Opportunity Areas. So I am delighted that Sir Kevan Collins has agreed to be the Evidence Champion across our Opportunity Areas.

Sir Kevan heads up the EEF and has a wealth of knowledge to make sure every single pound of investment we make, every intervention at a local level, is one we know will make a difference.

But beyond that there is much more to do. In doing all this work, I wanted us to create an even broader alliance for change.

Because as well as good schools, our young people need an early immersion and experience in the workplace to help them understand how they can be set up for success in their future lives.

The Careers and Enterprise Company really has been at the forefront of this work in the Opportunity Areas, bringing together some great companies – big and small, actually – to provide mentoring and expertise that we know makes a difference in transforming the life chances of young people.

These are the 'cornerstone companies', as we call them, that are now working with us day in, day out, in Opportunity Areas.

Companies like Rolls Royce and Toyota in Derby. Adeco in Blackpool. NatWest in West Somerset. Aviva in Norwich. PWC in Bradford – a company that gave me my first big opportunity.

So, lots of partners are getting on board. I am delighted with the support that we have had from the CBI and Federation of Small Businesses in helping us get as far as we have, as fast as we have.

But we do need more. I want to see more companies becoming 'cornerstone companies' in Opportunity Areas and stepping up to help us really help these young people understand not just what the world of work is all about, but more than that: what the wealth of careers are ahead of them that they can aim for through their education.

I am also announcing the chairs of some of our first Partnership Boards in Opportunity Areas. It is fantastic that we are going to have excellent experienced people with the credibility and the clout that we need to be able to chair these partnership boards.

Professor Kathryn Mitchell, who is the Vice-Chancellor of Derby University chairing the Derby Opportunity Area board. Dr Fiona McMillan OBE in West Somerset and Sir Martin Narey, who will be chairing our partnership board in Scarborough.

I know alongside these people I am asking businesses to do more to work in partnership with us. Because I think it is absolutely critical and we need to realise that – in Brexit Britain – it requires a brand new partnership between government, businesses and communities if we are really going to shift the dial on social mobility.

I think the good news is companies and employers do want to help. And they don't just want to do that because they know it is what their business model needs. They want to do that because they understand it is the right thing to do.

I think government can do more too. For the system as a whole and looking beyond school education.

Because social mobility absolutely does not stop at the school gates. After students leave, as Peter said, there need to be high quality opportunities for our young people.

That is why things like the new Office for Students is going to put equality of opportunity at the heart of our higher education system, so that we can keep on increasing the proportion of disadvantaged young people who get the chance to be able to go to university.

It is why we are also reforming technical education with high quality apprenticeships, and there is a huge amount of work and progress being made in this area.

T-Levels that we want to enable technical education to be on a par with our academic routes. This is the skills revolution that I spoke about last week.

And to get there, young people will need the best possible advice on what career path to take. The one that will really work for them and make the most of them.

This Autumn I am launching a Careers Strategy which will have a clear focus on driving social mobility.

This government is determined to tackle disadvantage in every single part of the country. For every single young person.

The Prime Minister talked about building a country for everyone. She talked about that burning injustice that many people face across our country. For me, weak social mobility is a burning injustice we should not be prepared to accept.

We will bring together all of these different plans and elements of a social mobility strategy, for building a level playing field on opportunity. Looking across our education system to tackle disadvantage so that no young person is left behind. Far from that, so that every young person can have high ambition and high expectations of the life that is ahead of them in our country.

Where you are from or who you are should never determine how well you are able to do in this country.

This is a generational challenge. One that means I am impatient and patient, all at the same time.

I am impatient because I want change right now. Actually, I would have had change yesterday if that was possible.

I am patient because I am persistent. Just like the Sutton Trust, I am committed to working on this issue of social mobility for as long as it takes to make sure it is in place.

I think we need to tell the stories of social mobility through people much more. I think too often, we focus on the statistics, which are vital, but let's bring out the stories of the people who are making their way through our system.

I think we have to make a promise to ourselves, and to young people, that things can be different. We have got to recapture a belief that Britain can be a place where we have social mobility and where we have opportunity for all.

It is about a change of heart. A change of attitude for us as a nation. And it costs nothing.

Yet, it is a change of heart that can be priceless in the change it brings about. And it is absolutely in our hands to make that change.

I know there are times when the scale of the task ahead of us on social mobility feels absolutely daunting. I have to say, it is usually straight after a Social Mobility Commission report gets published by Alan Milburn, where he quite rightly sets out how far we have to go.

But we can, and we will, respond positively to that challenge.

I have a very personal commitment to this agenda. I want to make the path of today's generation of young people a much smoother one than the one I had when I was a young person.

I do think this is a cross-party agenda. But I will say this: first and foremost, above all, my party is nothing if it is not a party of aspiration. Of equality. Of opportunity. And of putting together a country where effort really does lead to reward.

I believe that we should be listening to the voices of a new generation of voters who joined our democracy last month.

My message to them would be: your values are our values, whatever you have been told.

I represent a very young community. I believe democracy is about choice and we are going to make sure young people get a real choice at the next election.

So this is not just a mission for government, or a mission just for the Sutton Trust. It is a generational mission for all of us.

We don't have to accept Britain as it has been in the past. Ours is a generation that can build something better.

It is a simple idea. It is a powerful idea. It is an urgent idea.

I believe now we absolutely need to fix social mobility, and make sure it happens. And make sure this is a country where there are no barriers to anybody becoming the best that they can be.

Thank you.