

# Speech: Robert Goodwill: speech to Nursery World Business Summit

I'd like to thank Liz Roberts for the invitation to speak to you all here today. Conferences like this are incredibly important, because they bring together a community of experts – all of whom are committed to making a difference to early years education, childcare and social mobility.

That's why I want to use this opportunity today to speak to you about this Conservative Government's vision for the early years, and what it means for the quality and outcomes for all children. Equally important, I want to thank the sector for all that you've done so far.

We all know that the first five years of a child's life are critically important. They're the foundation years that shape a child's development, determine their readiness to learn at school, and they have an indelible influence on a child's future.

Evidence shows that high-quality early years provision has a positive and lasting effect on children's outcomes, future learning and life chances – regardless of the economic circumstances of their parents. Speech and language gaps appear by the age of two and early difficulties with language can affect pupils' performance throughout primary school.

This Government is determined to close this gap, improve social mobility and extend opportunity for all. We also want to ensure that the cost of childcare is not a barrier to parents working, through our introduction of 30 hours free childcare for working parents. That's why we will spend a record £6bn per year on childcare support by 2019/20 – more than ever before.

Furthermore, evidence shows that a high quality workforce has a major impact on children's outcomes. We recognise that a well-qualified workforce with the appropriate knowledge, skills and experience is crucial to deliver high quality early education and childcare.

Indeed, we've already taken steps towards improving outcomes, and making childcare accessible and affordable to families across the country. I want to take a little time to talk about some of the things that we've achieved together.

We want every child to reach their full potential, and early language and literacy skills, as well as a child's wider development, are critical to this. Good attainment in the early years puts children in the best position to start school.

Already, the [latest results](#) from the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile assessment tell us that children's development is improving. The number of children achieving a good level of development continues to increase year on year – 71 per cent in 2017, up from 69 per cent in 2016; and from 52 per cent

in 2013, when we introduced the revised Profile.

Thanks to phonics reforms, this year, over 154,000 more pupils are on track to be fluent readers than in 2012.

These improvements are a reflection of the hard work of early years and childcare providers. Now, 93 per cent of all providers – not just those delivering the free entitlements – are rated Good or Outstanding – the highest proportion ever. I am sure you'll all agree with me that these are fantastic achievements.

However, not all children start on an even playing field. We're committed to improving quality and outcomes for all children – regardless of background.

That's why, over the course of 5 years, we'll be spending over £2.5bn on the 15 hours free childcare entitlement for disadvantaged 2 year olds, and investing in the early years pupil premium, worth £300 per year per eligible child, to support better outcomes for disadvantaged 3 and 4 year-olds.

I'm proud of what we've achieved so far, but I know there's more to do. This Government will continue to focus relentlessly on raising standards and supporting the critical work of teachers and early years providers across the country to ensure that the gap continues to close – as quickly as possible.

Turning specifically to the subject of accessible and affordable childcare: for those families who want to go back to work or increase their hours, but the cost of childcare just doesn't make it viable, we've delivered on our promise to double the amount of free childcare for working parents of three and four year olds.

Some parents still spend over a third of their take-home pay on childcare. I recently met a father in Wolverhampton who works as a science technician in a school. He told me his wife was able to work part time and go back to study at university as a result of 30 hours, and that he could not overemphasise how much it was helping them financially and personally.

30 hours is empowering low-income families. A lone parent earning around £6,500 a year can qualify, giving these families a real helping hand. And of course, low-income families on Universal Credit can receive up to 85 per cent of childcare costs covered, and Tax-Free Childcare is worth up to £2,000 per child per year and up to £4,000 for disabled children.

The personal testimonies of how 30 hours has been a force for good in families' lives are backed up by the [evaluation](#) of the 30 hours pilot areas, and showed that 78 per cent of parents reported greater flexibility in their working life as a result of 30 hours; whilst nearly a quarter of mothers and one in 10 fathers reported they had been able to increase their working hours.

As a key part of delivering 30 hours we want to make sure that children with special educational needs and disabilities are able to get the best from it, and our evaluation of early delivery showed that local areas which put support in place were able to successfully deliver 30 hours places for

children with SEND.

We've put in place measures to support local areas – for example, our new Disability Access Fund, worth £615 per year per eligible child, and a requirement that local authorities establish a special educational needs Inclusion Fund.

There's no doubt that delivering 30 hours, coupled with the implementation of funding reforms this year, has been both ambitious and – I know – challenging. I want to put on record my thanks to the sector who've stepped up to the plate, and worked constructively with their local authorities and our delivery partner Childcare Works to help deliver this lifeline for working families.

Moving on from 30 hours, I want to talk about what we're doing to strengthen our workforce. It is crucial that employers are at the centre of the process for designing and delivering apprenticeships, training and qualifications. That's why I'm very grateful to those of you who are working with the department, for example, to develop criteria for more robust level 2 and SEND qualifications for early years practitioners. We'll be consulting on the level 2 criteria shortly.

I'm pleased to say that the level 3 apprenticeship standard, designed to support the effective development of early years staff, is nearing completion. It is also fantastic news that a task and finish group of early years stakeholders is about to begin to consider gender diversity in the sector in more depth. We believe a diverse early years workforce, which better reflects wider society, will help to enhance children's experiences, and I look forward to discussing this with the panel.

More generally, I want to thank all employers, training providers and sector organisations who are working together – and with us – to further develop this fantastic workforce.

Looking ahead, there are some important steps that we now want to take, working with you.

Research shows that five-year-old children who struggle with language are six times less likely to reach the expected standard in English at age eleven than children who have had good language skills at five, and ten times less likely to achieve the expected level in maths. These are astonishing findings. At the Conservative Party Conference in September, we announced new actions to close the word gap further.

We will provide more funding to help schools strengthen the development of language and literacy in the early years, with a particular focus on reception. As a part of this, we'll establish a £12m network of English Hubs in the Northern Powerhouse to spread effective teaching practice, with a core focus on early language and literacy as their first priority. We have also opened up the £140m Strategic School Improvement Fund to bids focused on evidence-based ways to improve literacy, language and numeracy during the critical Reception year.

As you know, parents have a vital role to play in their child's development. Evidence again suggests that aside from maternal education, the home learning environment is the single biggest influence on a child's vocabulary at age three. That is why we will use £5 million to trial evidence-based home learning environment support programmes in the North of England, focusing on early language and literacy.

We firmly believe that these new actions are decisive steps towards equipping children to reach their potential.

On 14 September, the Department for Education published the Government's [response](#) to the public consultation on primary assessment in England.

The consultation asked how we could make the Early Learning Goals better as a measure of child development and school readiness. It showed that we need to improve the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, for example by revising the Early Learning Goals to make them clearer and more closely aligned with teaching in Key Stage 1.

Thank you to those of you responded to our consultation. Our response as a whole confirms our intention to establish a settled, trusted primary assessment system for the long term.

We'll be working closely with schools and early years experts as we implement changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile.

This will take time – to ensure that we get it right – and we expect any changes to be rolled out nationally in the 2020 to 2021 academic year.

The Government response also set out plans for a new baseline to be developed as a statutory assessment, ready for introduction in reception by autumn 2020. The prime focus of the assessment will be on skills which can be reliably assessed and which correlate with attainment in English and mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2, and we'll continue to discuss the detail of the assessment with a wide range of stakeholders as we develop the assessment.

Finally, I'd like to mention maintained nursery schools. They support some of the most disadvantaged children as well as often providing system leadership – leading on sharing of expertise and developing quality. That's why, soon after I took on this role, I visited the exemplary Alice Model Nursery School in Tower Hamlets and saw the fantastic work that they're doing, offering high quality early years education and care.

We're committed to supporting maintained nursery schools, and have provided local authorities with supplementary funding of around £60 million a year to enable them to maintain their current levels of funding until 2019-20.

This will give them stability while we work closely with the sector and others, including the All Party Parliamentary Group on Nursery Schools and Nursery Classes, to develop our plans for the long term. I'm determined to address our shared interests and find the best way forward for maintained nursery schools.

To conclude, I am very clear that the early years is a critical time that influences outcomes for both children and their families. We have achieved a huge amount, but there is still a lot more to do, particularly to close that attainment gap. And we can't do it without you – without the expertise and experience assembled in this room and in nurseries, childminders' homes, schools, local authorities and parents throughout the country.

I want to thank you for your help in delivering the changes we have made in recent years, and for your support for the changes to come. Together we can continue to improve the early years system to make sure that every child improves their life chances and has real opportunities to realise their potential. Thank you very much indeed.