

Speech: Robert Halfon: careers speech at Westminster Academy

I am delighted to have the opportunity today to talk to you about lifelong careers, which will play a significant part in this government's industrial strategy.

The Industrial Strategy Green Paper sets out the government's proposals for delivering a high-skilled, competitive economy that benefits people throughout the country. Developing people's skills is one of the 10 pillars of the strategy, and high-quality careers advice will play a key part in realising this ambition.

I see careers advice as the first rung on a ladder of opportunity, a ladder that people will continue to climb throughout their lifetime. However, we know that this ladder does not come to us pre-assembled. It is something that needs to be built, grafted over and shaped to reflect our modern requirements. Government's job is to be there to hold the ladder and help people to climb up.

I strongly believe that the conditions are right to not only transform the nature of careers guidance, but of technical education and apprenticeships, to give everyone the necessary skills and training to open up opportunities and jobs for their futures.

I am excited to have oversight of all of these areas and the chance to bring a greater coherence to them. In particular, locating in one department responsibility for both young people and adults is an exciting opportunity that can bring about a coherent approach to lifelong careers. It allows us to look across the age range – from primary schools right through to retirement.

I also want to root our approach to careers provision firmly at the heart of the government's focus on social justice, and our desire to make sure that everyone, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to progress in life.

Our starting point in creating a careers system that works for everyone is to build on what works. I have seen some excellent examples around the country, including the fantastic work here at Westminster Academy. I was also lucky enough to visit Gateshead College last week, where careers learning is weaved into all aspects of students' learning.

But these are isolated examples and we need to spread good practice more widely. We have begun to do this by adopting a clear, evidence-based approach to what works, and to ensure support is getting to where it is most needed. The Careers & Enterprise Company has been at the forefront of this approach. £90 million is being invested in careers over this Parliament, which includes further funding to the company. And their work is beginning to have an impact. There are now 80 enterprise coordinators and over 1,300 enterprise

advisers working with a third of all secondary schools and colleges across the country. Our goal is for 25,000 young people a year to be benefiting from business mentoring by 2020.

As its network of enterprise advisers and coordinators grows, so will its ability to support schools and colleges in delivering real and lasting change in high-quality careers and enterprise strategies, influenced by strong relationships with employers.

For adults too, the National Careers Service continues to offer free and impartial information, advice and guidance on careers, skills and the labour market, with high rates of satisfaction.

So taking this as our starting point, where do I think we need to go next on careers?

1. Improving the prestige of careers

It is clear to me that, although there is good work underway, more needs to be done.

We will consider the perception of careers provision, which for too long has not been seen as a vital part of our education system. For many schools, colleges or employers, high quality careers provision is a priority, but not for all. Tracey Brabin set this out clearly in her powerful speech in Parliament earlier this month, where she highlighted a college that had asked its unqualified receptionist to provide careers guidance to students.

The first step in this journey will be for us to set out our ambitions and plans for careers provision, and, as announced in the Industrial Strategy Green Paper last week, I am delighted to confirm that we will publish a comprehensive careers strategy for all ages later this year.

2. Expand the quantity and quality of careers provision

I believe that there is a need to address the quality and consistency of careers provision across the country, ensuring that we can have confidence that, whatever stage of your life you are at, and wherever you live, the advice and support you are receiving is of the highest calibre. It is for many, but for many, it is not.

But why is that? Why can some schools and colleges provide high-quality advice and support, and others not? What are the drivers for doing so? These are the questions I will be considering. I do not believe that this is just a question of funding, but how a school chooses to spend its funding: schools that provide high-quality careers advice, like Westminster Academy, do not do so because they have a greater share of the pot, but because they see providing high-quality careers advice as being vitally important to the future of their pupils.

Destination measures are emerging as a compelling way of encouraging schools to focus on their role in preparing young people for the next stage of their

education, training or employment. The inclusion of destination data in school performance tables is an important step. We will look at ways of making this information as clear and as comparable as possible.

Let me be clear: I want to reach a position where all schools and colleges are offering exceptional careers advice and guidance, through their own comprehensive and tailored strategy.

But if we are to make this a reality, we must have a shared understanding of what good careers provision looks like. The Gatsby Foundation has published its series of benchmarks, which describe the components of excellent careers provision, and I will consider how schools can be encouraged to meet these benchmarks. For now, I encourage all schools to use the excellent Compass tool that allows them to review their progress against the benchmarks.

The Careers & Enterprise Company is a vital part of the support that we provide for schools, boosting the quality of schools' interactions with employers and the experience of different workplaces they are providing for young people. Indeed, a report published today by Education and Employers highlights the importance of employer engagement in schools in helping young people feel prepared for adult life, and that those from disadvantaged backgrounds recall having fewer employer engagement than their peers. This is something I am keen to address.

3. Meeting the needs of a skills economy

It is clear to me that if we are truly to meet the needs that our economy has for the full range of skilled workers, we need to drive improvements in productivity, and this relies heavily on a stronger and better system of careers advice and guidance.

The challenge facing us is clear: there is a very real gap between what employers are seeking and the skills that people currently have.

To address this challenge and ensure people of all ages are trained in the skills our country needs, we may need to change the way different career paths are viewed. Apprenticeships are delivering fantastic opportunities for many people, and I am incredibly proud of what the government has achieved in this area already. But we need to level the playing field between technical and academic education, so that more and more young people are aware of the benefits of technical education.

We need people of all ages, and those who advise them, to really understand what opportunities are on offer. I want those undertaking apprenticeships or courses in further education to get the same level of information and support to make confident and informed choices when selecting and applying for courses.

We want to ensure that those applying for further education have clear information and support through the process of searching for, choosing and then applying for a particular opportunity. In particular, we want to ensure that they are supported in the same way that higher education applicants are

supported through the straightforward and well-understood UCAS system.

In addition, for young people to demonstrate their enterprise and employability skills, The Careers & Enterprise Company are developing a 'careers passport' led by Lord Young, which will be a 'Passport for Life': a digital record for young people of their enterprise learning and work experience throughout their education to aid transition to employment.

To achieve this we will need to look again at the information that government provides, making sure we are providing resources in the clearest and simplest way, so it is easily accessible to everyone. We will review the linkages between the different organisations and services that are helping to get people into jobs, including the National Careers Service, The Careers & Enterprise Company and the National Apprenticeships Service. I want to encourage co-creation between these organisations that focus on delivering the right outcomes for students, adults and employers. I want greater clarity and coherence, and an increase in grassroots activity, expanding The Careers & Enterprise Company's fine work in this area already delivered through their enterprise advisor network.

4. Support for the most disadvantaged

We know just how important careers advice and guidance is for those young people who are from more disadvantaged backgrounds or have special educational needs: those who face different challenges or bigger hurdles to overcome when making choices about their future.

We need a careers system that nurtures the aspirations of those who are disadvantaged or have special educational needs, providing them with the additional and targeted support that they need to make those aspirations become a reality. This will mean different things for different people.

And this isn't just about our young people. This is about tailored support for people most in need, at whatever stage of life.

I will consider what more we can do to help organisations try out different approaches, and find new and innovative ways to make sure we reach those who need our help most. High quality careers advice and support must be for everyone.

5. Job security

In taking action in all of these areas, we mustn't lose sight of our primary aim and purpose, which is for careers advice and guidance to ultimately lead to meaningful employment. Careers advice is not there as a standalone thing in its own right – it's the engine room of our plans to drive improved productivity and social justice. The Education and Employers report I mentioned earlier supports this, showing school-mediated employer engagement can:

- reduce the incidence of young people not in education, employment or training by up to 86%

- result in earnings of up to 16.4% more than peers who did not take part in such activity.

So in conclusion, it is clear to me that careers is a vitally important part of my brief, which can make a fundamental contribution to this government's industrial strategy. To support this, we will publish a strategy that will do the following:

- consider the prestige attached to careers information, advice and guidance
- seek to raise the quality of careers provision for people of all ages
- ensure we are truly addressing the skills needs of our country
- support those who are most disadvantaged and use careers to improve social justice
- focus our efforts on securing the end goal of meaningful skilled employment, ensuring a country that works for everyone

I want to ensure that great careers guidance provides the first rung on the ladder of opportunity, helping everyone to achieve their full potential.