

# Speech: Secretary of State opens Education World Forum 2019

Dear Ministers, colleagues, your Royal Highness and ladies and gentlemen. It's a great pleasure to welcome you all here to London and to this 16th Education World Forum.

I know a huge amount of work has gone on behind the scenes to prepare for a day like this – and I'd like to start by thanking the very dedicated team who, year after year, make these forums such a success.

As I look around the room today, of course, we hail from all corners of the world, we have different cultures, different languages, different weather. Our experiences, our perspectives will be very different.

But some things are the same the world over – the fundamental importance of education, investing in training and shaping the next generation – this is something that every country represented in this room shares.

This is partly plain economics. As Benjamin Franklin once said: "An investment in knowledge pays the best interest."

But it's also about business economics and about national economics. If you want to build a more productive, effective economy – then you will need a highly skilled workforce.

And today of course, new technologies and industries are reshaping our world at lightning speed. But even in a world of thinking machines, of artificial intelligence, of robots and autonomous vehicles, it's people that are imagining and building this high-tech future.

Any country that wants to prosper in tomorrow's world will need to invest in their future workforce.

Because countries need, the global economy needs, more technicians, more managers, more innovators and more creators. We need engineers, coders, welders.

For the sake of our nations' health we need more doctors, more nurses, more radiologists. And, of course, all of us need teachers.

And is it good enough to train up a few, or even a third or half the population? No – the most successful countries are drawing on all their talent, all their human resources.

But of course people aren't just resources. They are individuals, individuals with a moral right to realise that spark of potential that exists in us all. And we realise that potential, in large part, through what we are here to talk about today, our education.

It's not only that a good education helps you find skilled, rewarding work. It's that everyone should have a chance to discover the joy that comes through learning. When we grow up with a thirst for knowledge, a curiosity about the world, an understanding of our and other cultures – we are happier, more fulfilled. We learn to be ourselves as we should and can be.

And of course we know that access to education is empowering. It empowers girls and women, it empowers the poorest, it empowers the downtrodden.

An education gives people the skills and the knowledge to pull themselves up. It can mean leaving a narrow existence behind to discover a whole world of opportunities.

And your education stays with you. It defines your future path, whatever start you may have got in life. Wherever you go in the world – this is a universal truth.

You can visit a refugee camp or a disaster zone, somewhere people are battling for survival – needing food, water, a roof over their head.

And yet, if you talk to the parents – one of their first priorities is getting their kids back to school, reading textbooks, learning. Because education is always key to a better future.

That's why as a global community, as a world, we made it our shared mission to bring education to all, as set out in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in 2015.

But this is not just the right thing to do. It's crucial for global stability, prosperity and peace.

When we co-hosted the Syria conference here in London three years ago, alongside humanitarian relief, we committed to educating Syria's children, preventing a lost generation. A generation that could grow up alienated, despairing, in some cases vulnerable to toxic messages from extremists.

Great education can promote cultural and religious understanding, by teaching tolerance, by encouraging empathy and understanding for different points of view. Education means asking questions, coming out of our own narrow parameters...

Remember what Malala told the UN after being shot in the head for going to school: "The terrorists are afraid of books and pens. The power of education frightens them."

The power of education. All of us here share in that immense privilege, the awesome responsibility, of sharing in the shaping of the next generation by providing them with a good education.

And we come here to this Education World Forum not so much as competing nations, but in the spirit of cooperation...

Civilisation arguably began when we found ways to record knowledge and pass

on to next generation. When I spoke here a year ago, I said most of what is good in the world – great inventions, everyday conveniences – most of it exists only because we share knowledge or the fruits of knowledge.

So while our countries may seek to race ahead when it comes to creating more prosperous economies, exploiting new technologies, training more skilled workers – the pursuit of knowledge can, and does, transcend this competition.

Here at this Forum, we share our experiences, we share our expertise, we look at our innovations. We'll be hearing from Education Ministers from Vietnam, Kenya, Albania to name a few, as well as organisations like the World Bank and Microsoft.

I know that Andreas Schleicher of the OECD spoke earlier, discussing their latest report which poses questions about the role education can play in lifting individuals out of poverty, promoting economic growth and creating responsible citizens.

The work of the OECD is also hugely valuable, precisely because it helps countries to work together, to learn from each other, to help each other.

There is also, of course, a commercial marketplace for education innovation. Indeed, there are few better examples of that marketplace than the BETT fair starting immediately after this forum.

As ever, this will be an amazing showcase of educational technology. Edtech that has been created to solve some of our most critical challenges – be it better training for teachers or helping children with disabilities to communicate in the classroom.

And for some countries, we offer direct aid to children who would otherwise miss out on an education.

I mentioned the UN's global goal of education for all. Of course that is an enormous challenge. In the next decade, a billion more young people around the world will enter the jobs market, yet more than half of the world's primary children are on track to leave primary school unable to read or write.

I'm proud of the work the UK is doing here. In the last three years alone supporting more than 11 million children in some of the poorest and most fragile places in the world, to access quality education, starting with the basics of literacy and numeracy.

I believe this is one of the best uses of international development spending. Because of the way education can put individuals on a different path, and, ultimately, put their countries on the path to development and independence. And yes we need more countries, in fact all countries, to honour their commitments to maximise this opportunity.

But beyond development – my country is committed to sharing and learning from you all.

As Education Secretary – and I’ve been in the job for exactly a year now – I believe our education system has enormous strengths – but that we also have much more work to do.

During my time in this job, one thing I’ve noticed is how frequently the same things up in conversations. I speak to my counterparts around the world and certain things come up time and again:

- Teacher recruitment and retention;
- Reaching the most marginalised families and communities; and
- Creating parity of esteem between academic learning and technical and vocational training.

Different countries, different systems – but strikingly similar challenges. That’s why we have been determined to learn from the world.

For example, to improve maths teaching, we turned to China. Some 12,000 of our teachers have the opportunity to watch demonstration lessons by top Shanghai teachers. Or when we set about creating a more rigorous curriculum for our schools, we drew on Singapore’s curriculum and textbooks.

And our efforts to put teachers and school leaders in the driving seat, have – in part – been inspired by our visits to US Charter schools, where they have the freedom to innovate.

It doesn’t stop there. One of my top priorities is putting our technical and vocational education on par with the world’s best.

And, to this end, I’ve been on fact-finding missions to Germany and the Netherlands. Visiting top-performing technical colleges, meeting leading employers.

You learn a lot on these visits. But one thing that particularly struck me was the level of business involvement in training up the future workforce, not just co-designing courses, providing placements but sharing the responsibility, the ownership, for human capital formation, alongside the other equivalent investments.

Now as we transform technical and vocational education in this country, we too are seeking to put businesses at the heart of training up the next generation.

Our employers are designing our new, higher quality apprenticeships, which are longer and include more off-the-job training.

They are also designing course content for our new T Level qualifications, a technical equivalent to academic A-levels that will focus on teaching students the practical skills needed to do a specific job.

And at the core of this course is an intensive, three month, industry placement – where students put into practice what they've learnt.

Of course, I'm pleased to say, there are also things we do extremely well here and people come to learn from us.

Every year, my Department receives in the region of 100 visits from overseas governments and organisations. Last year this included teachers from Hungary and Japan interested in our policy reforms to improve initial teacher training and continuing professional development.

Politicians and officials from Ghana, Belgium, Croatia and Singapore interested in how we are scaling up apprenticeships.

Ministers and senior officials from the USA, Denmark, Malaysia and more have come to see what we're doing on school autonomy, how we are putting more power in to the hands of head teachers and school leaders through our academies and free schools.

One area I'm particularly proud to showcase to the world, is our work narrowing the attainment gap between rich and poor students.

This is a global issue: the average gap in performance between disadvantaged and advantaged students internationally is worth three years of schooling.

Here, we've made narrowing that gap and targeting the most disadvantaged a top priority.

We are investing in more and better pre-school education, so more children can start school really ready to learn. We are currently piloting reforms to the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework which aim to free up teachers to spend more time on helping children develop the vocabulary, skills and behaviours they need to thrive at school and in later life.

As part of this we introduced 15 hours of free early education a week for the most disadvantaged two-year-olds in the country.

On top of the existing 15 hours free childcare offer for all three-and-four-year-olds, which we doubled to 30 hours for working families.

We've given schools the autonomy to work together and make their own improvements.

And we reformed our funding system for schools so that we now direct more funding the poorer, disadvantaged children than richer ones.

In particular, we introduced the Pupil Premium – an additional grant for schools that they can use to help those children who have more barriers to overcome, including children who are looked after by the state and children with disabilities. Two million pupils benefit from this grant every year.

And schools up and down the country have used the Pupil Premium to get better outcomes for pupils from the toughest backgrounds, pupils facing the biggest

barriers.

We're also spreading the best ideas on how to prioritise the most disadvantaged. We founded our Education Endowment Foundation to run trials in hundreds of schools to find and promote the most effective ways of working with disadvantaged children.

And last week I announced a new £2.5million fund to give disadvantaged children the chance to go on international exchanges and study trips abroad, to give them the chance to experience different cultures and improve their language skills.

And these reforms are working. We have narrowed the attainment gap between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their better off peers at every level of education – at pre-school, at primary school, at secondary school and on entry to university.

Perhaps the biggest change we've seen in the last two decades is schools right here in London. Twenty years ago London schools were some of the worst in the country – now they're among our very best.

But there's always more to do.

Now we must replicate the London effect elsewhere and spread opportunity across the country. Through initiatives like Opportunity North East, which I launched last year. My department will be working with the North East's schools, colleges, universities and critically employers to help more young people in this region reach their potential.

While rightly entire regions have needs, we are also more sharply focused now on the particular issues in smaller geographies – communities that have seen significant industrial change for example, sparse rural areas, or coastal towns.

We are rethinking, what I call, the 'face of disadvantage'.

While ethnic minorities still have labour market outcomes that are not good enough, one of our lowest-performing groups is in fact white working class boys.

Of course, there are areas where no country has all the full answers yet.

Take the Home Learning Environment – the home can feel like the last taboo in public policy. But we can't afford to ignore it, what happens at home is crucial to what happens at school and a child's development. So we have struck a partnership with public and private sector groups to see how best we can support parents in a child's early development in the digital age.

Then there's adult retraining – so relevant in our fast changing world, with AI, robotics and other technology likely to replace, create and change jobs. We are designing a new National Retraining Scheme.

And, finally, a big one for me is character. When it comes to forging a

successful path through life, clearly it's not just about the qualifications you pick up – it's also your strength of character and what's inside, your resilience, your confidence and your ability to bounce back from the knocks that life inevitably brings.

Fundamental issues – these are things I hope we'll be sharing our experiences and insights on this week, on the conference floor, in bilateral meetings, and in coffee breaks, again and again in the years ahead. Because there is no practical limit to what we can achieve here.

We all share this unique responsibility – the responsibility of shaping the next generation.

What happens in your nurseries, your schools, your colleges, your universities has an enormous and far-reaching impact all on our societies, on our world.

Ultimately, the EWF Forum is not actually an event. It is a group of people. It's about us, it is about you and me and the person sitting next to you. It is about us coming together to share and learn, to work together to deliver a world-class education for all our children.