

Speech: UK government continues to support Zambia's education sector

It is an honour to be here this morning on behalf of the British High Commission.

When I was asked to attend the certificate giving for the Cambridge and Edexcel exams I'll be honest, I got rather nervous. I was nervous because I knew that last year we had over 3,000 Zambians taking the exams, which meant I was going to have to get my cheek muscles working overtime for the amount of smiling I was going to have to do when presenting the certificates. I'm delighted that we've got a representative group rather than the whole lot here today!

The 3,000 is part of a bigger group of nearly 22,000 exams provided by UK exams boards, undertaken by students in Zambia in the past 12 months. I'm delighted that schools and education institutions in Zambia still recognise the UK education sector as the best in the world. Cambridge and Edexcel exams in particular have given opportunities to thousands of Zambians to continue their secondary education and prepare them for university. I hope that many of you will choose the UK as your destination of choice for your higher learning.

Now is the perfect time to go; the latest Higher Education global rankings recently recognised two British Universities, Oxford and Cambridge, as the world's best. Of course, I'm biased, but having two children who've recently completed their university studies I can promise you that not only will the academic course fully meet your expectations, the exceptional diversity and cultural opportunities that you'll benefit from will help you realise your full potential. Last year we had over half a million international students from 200 countries study in the UK. So it not only offers exposure to the UK's rich history and culture, but a networking opportunity that's truly global.

The UK has always been an outward looking country, keen to export our skills and products for use by others. Whether that's our expertise in financial services (as with the Lord Mayor of London's visit to Zambia last week), the Premier League (which seems to be gaining ever more followers from abroad) or our cutting-edge educational programmes, the UK has, and always will, remain keen to share. I am pleased that the UK Government, specifically in Zambia the British Council, has continued to support efforts of the government of Zambia in providing quality education. UK qualifications are globally recognised which ensures candidates have opportunities to work not just in Zambia but anywhere in the world.

As parents, teachers and those responsible for the pastoral care of students, we all want what is best for our children. Often this will involve making sacrifices to allow our children the opportunities that we may not have had. I hope, seeing your children succeed and do so well in these examinations

will show that your efforts were worthwhile.

Of course, there is always more that we can do. The British Council is working with 10 partner institutions in Lusaka, including the University of Zambia, providing them with examination services, quality assurance and supporting professional development of their tutors. I'm delighted we're now looking further afield and have partnered with the Copperbelt University to offer the first IELTS exams session outside of Lusaka and we look forward to developing that relationship further. It is right that, for Zambia to develop all of its children to their fullest potential, we look to take our expertise out of the capital.

Once again, I'm thrilled to have been invited here today to participate in this ceremony, and congratulations to all those who are receiving their certificates.

Thank you.