

Speech: Robert Halfon: BETT 2017

speech

On behalf of myself and the Secretary of State for Education, it's a real pleasure for me to welcome you all to the Bett Show 2017. And in doing so I also welcome the foreign ministers and delegations who are here for the closing of the Education World Forum.

Thank you all for coming to London to see the great range of companies and innovations on display here this week.

Many of you will have seen that on Monday our Prime Minister, Theresa May, launched a consultation on Britain's Industrial Strategy.

The UK government is determined that all people in this country should be able to obtain the skills they need to be successful in life. At the same time we recognise how important this is for our economy – particularly as we prepare to leave the European Union – so that we can make the most of our people capital.

In a modern, globalised economy that increasingly relies on technology, digital skills are key to staying competitive. They are fast becoming as important as numeracy and literacy.

So we have to make sure all our people have the opportunity to gain digital skills, whether that's at school, or accessing them later in order to catch up.

Technology can open up a world of opportunities so it's crucial we harness it properly to get the best educational outcomes possible for all people – so that, whatever their individual talents, they get the opportunity to reach their full potential.

I'm so impressed by the fantastic range of products on offer here today and how the ed tech sector has grown in recent years.

I don't want government's role to be to intervene in this space. However, I know that we need to be enabling all schools, colleges and other education providers to take advantage of the opportunities that technology presents.

I want my department to facilitate the education system in being able to impart the skills our people need and get the most out of the ed tech sector in order to raise educational outcomes.

Today I want to set out some of my thinking on how we do that.

Digital skills

So firstly, we need to focus on digital skills. We should be making sure that

our young people enter the jobs market with relevant skills and that's why we are introducing a number of actions in this area. We have to be mindful of where skills gaps exist for all young people, and those people who have left school and are already in the labour market.

The reality is that more than 10 million people in this country lack the basic digital skills required by modern jobs.

We have to take steps to address that gap.

We recently announced that we are reforming technical education to match the best international systems, and are introducing 15 new routes to skilled employment. One of these routes will be in 'digital' and it will be designed to meet the needs of relevant employers. All other routes will also contain some digital content, as it is crucial for all occupations in the modern workplace.

Last year I was fortunate enough to open [ADA, the National College for Digital Skills](#). This is just one example of where young people can join a cutting edge community of digital thinkers and leading tech companies to develop their digital skills.

But digital skills aren't just for the young. Where specified basic digital skills qualifications are made available by providers as part of the publicly-funded adult education offer, we will ensure that they are free of charge to adults who need them.

The [Digital Economy Bill](#), currently making its way through Parliament, will introduce a statutory duty to honour this commitment.

Broadband

Delivering all this on digital skills means we need to have the right, cutting-edge infrastructure in place. High-quality broadband connectivity is a crucial part of that – no modern digital economy can survive without it.

It supports business growth and job creation, particularly in rural areas. That's why the government has placed such an emphasis on making sure the provision of high-speed broadband is as widespread as possible.

Alongside our colleagues at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, we are looking at delivering a full-fibre broadband pilot, as part of the fibre rollout programme announced at the [autumn statement](#).

Our aim is to connect a small number of schools that currently only have poor quality broadband, to test how best to maximise coverage in local areas.

At the budget the Chancellor will set out further detail about the wider coverage plans, on which the Culture Secretary is currently seeking evidence.

Enabling schools to be better buyers

Secondly, schools tell us that they often lack the relationships and skills to be really savvy when it comes to buying valuable education technology – which can be a complex process – so we need to help.

That's why we are working with partner organisations to make sure proper procurement advice is available. But we want to go further and we're determined to support schools to maximise their budgets and specifically their investment in technology, with products that are really right for their students.

My department is going to roll out a [programme to buy tablets, laptops and desktop devices](#) – allowing schools to purchase them cheaper by going through my department.

We've already run 2 successful buying pilots, working with suppliers and 100 schools – which led to tens of thousands of pounds worth of savings.

The full rollout of the programme will allow schools to make the most of the technology on offer, whilst continuing to safe guard their financial resources.

Knowing what works in ed tech

Another challenge for schools and colleges is knowing what works in education technology.

Building the evidence base so that teachers can make informed decisions about technology is vitally important in this growing sector. There are so many exciting products and services out there now, but leaders in education have told us that they often find it difficult to navigate the market and decide what is best for their schools. I encourage all those building the evidence base around what works to continue with this so that educators can understand the impact of tech.

I know the sector is stepping up to this challenge.

Today I welcome the EDUCATE initiative led by UCL which will bring together educators, researchers and the ed tech industry in order to develop and use the best research informed ed tech.

EDUCATE will create a 'golden triangle' between teachers and learners, educational technology companies and educational technology researchers. This is centred around evidence and effectiveness to ensure that the UK produces the products and services that have the greatest impact on learning.

EDUCATE will translate research into new and better educational products, and will stimulate demand for new and improved ones. This type of initiative is hugely valuable in ensuring the ed tech sector can grow sustainably and respond in the way that education leaders want.

Data sharing for the benefit of everyone

How we drive standards in schools and colleges relies heavily on access to quality data. If we can easily input, collect and share data throughout someone's education, this will inform policy, encourage early intervention where required and allow the continued development of ed tech.

But we know that, whilst we have some of the best data sets in the world, how we input, collect, store and make accessible that data must first radically improve. Data collection is currently seen as a burden rather than being embraced for providing the wealth of information to drive education standards.

We announced last year that we will be prototyping new systems for data collection through our Data Exchange programme. Teams have been working with the education sector and I am pleased that considerable progress is being made to address these issues.

Whilst the sector is making huge leaps in taking on the policy challenges of the day, there are plenty of opportunities for tech designers and developers to create impactful tools for teachers, leaders, students, and their families.

We know that the way we use technology will be one of the determining factors in our future success as a nation – so we need to get it right.

The Secretary of State and I are really excited about the impact technology can have on education in this country and how it can allow us to get the very best out of our people capital – both for their sake and for UK plc. But we need to give it the proper emphasis if it's really going to make a difference.

That means we need to make sure we:

- equip young people – and those already in the workplace – with the digital skills they need to get ahead in the labour market, while at the same time making sure our economy gets the skills it needs too
- build the evidence base on what works in education technology and support schools and colleges to harness it properly, while at the same time making sure they can access technology at good value for money

I'm also incredibly excited about education technology as a British export – you only need to look around this hall to see the depth of innovation on offer and the amount of enthusiasm for what it can achieve.

I fully intend to support the sector as it continues to go from strength to strength both here and abroad.

Press release: UKEF appoints Oliver Peterken as Non-Executive Director

From:

First published:

1 February 2017

Part of:

UK Export Finance (UKEF), the UK's export credit agency, has announced that Oliver Peterken has joined its board as a Non-Executive Director.

Oliver comes from a long career in the insurance sector, with significant non-executive experience. He will provide guidance and oversight of UKEF's risk management and underwriting activities as a member of the board's Audit and Risk Committee, and act as the board's credit risk specialist.

Oliver brings significant risk management experience to the post, having served as Chief Risk Officer for Bupa and Aspen Insurance and held a number of senior positions with Willis Group and Prudential. His non-executive board roles include MS Amlin and UIA Insurance.

He is also Deputy Chairman and chairs the Finance and Audit Committee of the board of the Willow Foundation, a charity that works with seriously ill young adults.

Oliver joins UKEF's board following the appointments of Noel Harwerth as Chair and Laurence Weiss last year.

Oliver Peterken said:

I am very pleased to be joining UKEF's board as a specialist Non-Executive Director. UKEF is there to provide the UK's export community with certainty of support in all economic weathers. I look forward to working with colleagues in the department to help it achieve its ambitious mission, that no viable UK export should fail for lack of finance or insurance.

Louis Taylor, CEO of UK Export Finance, welcomed Oliver to the Department, saying:

Oliver's impressive career in risk management will be a major asset to UKEF and our ability to manage credit risk, helping us to ensure that we provide UK exporters with the most comprehensive package of support available while continuing to operate at no net cost to the

taxpayer. I look forward to working with him.

Notes for Editors

1. [UK Export Finance](#) is the UK's export credit agency and a government department, working alongside the Department for International Trade as an integral part of its strategy and operations. It exists to ensure that no viable UK export should fail for want of finance or insurance from the private market. It provides finance and insurance to help exporters win, fulfil and ensure they get paid for export contracts.
2. You can find more information on the UK Export Finance Board and governance [on our website](#)
3. Sectors in which UKEF has supported exports include: aerospace, construction, oil and gas, mining and metals, petrochemicals, telecommunications, and transport.
4. UKEF has a [regional network of 24 export finance advisers](#) supporting export businesses.
5. UKEF supports exporters with a range of products that include:
 - Bond insurance policy
 - Bond support scheme
 - Buyer & supplier credit financing facility
 - Direct lending facility
 - Export insurance policy
 - Export refinancing facility
 - Export working capital scheme
 - Letter of credit guarantee scheme
6. Find latest information on UKEF's [country cover positions](#)

[Press release: South West Water prosecuted for crude sewage spill in Truro River](#)

South West Water will pay £54,000 in fines and costs for allowing untreated sewage to escape from a pumping station near Truro in Cornwall.

The case was brought by the Environment Agency.

On 16 March 2015 approximately 400,000 litres (88,000 gallons) of sewage was discharged from the Calenick Pumping Station into the Truro River via Calenick Creek.

Located south of Truro at the head of an estuary, the site receives sewage from surrounding villages and pumps it to Truro (Newham) Sewage Treatment Works for full treatment, including disinfection.

An investigation by the Environment Agency revealed two factors contributed to the illegal discharge. In 2015 a contractor working on electrical panels at the pumping station forgot to restart the pumps. This meant sewage arriving in the wet well, a storage area within the site, wasn't pumped out.

Shortly before the spill, South West Water received three urgent alarms via telemetry warning that sewage had reached a high level in the sump, yet no pumps were running. The team responsible for sending a crew to the pumping station failed to telephone them with a 'high priority' request to attend the site. Instead, they messaged them electronically, forgetting the crew was at a meeting and wouldn't be able to get to Calenick for some time.

A short while later, further alarms were triggered warning the water company that sewage was now spilling from the pumping station outfall into Calenick Creek. The discharge continued for approximately four-and-a-half hours.

The pumping station lies within a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation close to commercial mussel and oyster beds at Grimes Bar and Malpas. Fortunately, the sewage spill occurred during the closed season for shellfish, although there was a risk of possible contamination of shellfish beds.

Mark Pilcher of the Environment Agency said:

It is vitally important water companies have robust procedures in place to ensure their sewage infrastructure assets perform appropriately.

Calenick Sewage Pumping Station is situated at the head of a very sensitive estuary containing important intertidal habitats and commercial shellfish beds. The unpermitted discharge of crude sewage to the estuary because the pump station was not switched on following a site inspection is unacceptable.

South West Water had earlier pleaded guilty to discharging crude sewage from Calenick Sewage Pumping Station contrary to Regulations 12(1)(a) and 38(2) of the Environmental Permitting Regulations 2010.

At a sentencing hearing at Truro Crown Court on 26 January 2017, South West Water was fined £50,000 and ordered to pay £4,000 costs.

[News story: UK and Egypt continue to tackle joint threats](#)

Chief of the Defence Staff Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach today welcomed his Egyptian counterpart to London to discuss shared challenges and threats, including that posed by Daesh.

Lieutenant General Mahmoud Hegazy was received by a ceremonial guard from the Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment, before holding discussions with Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon.

Discussion included shared security interests in Libya, planned Defence Engagement this year, including preparations for a future joint exercise involving counter-improvised explosive device (C-IED) training, and the UK's commitment to security in the region. Dates for the annual military staff talks were also confirmed, which aim to identify mutual training opportunities and areas where both nations can deepen their military relationship.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Stability abroad helps keep the streets of Britain safer and more secure.

With a strengthening relationship and as a key partner in defence and military matters, Britain is working with Egypt to combat threats, including from Daesh terrorism in Sinai and Libya.

Deepening our relationship with Egypt helps ensure stability in the Middle East and improves safety and security here in Britain.

The Defence Secretary [visited](#) Cairo in September, where he committed the UK to continue working alongside the Egyptian military, particularly through C-IED training.

Chief of the Defence Staff Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach today welcomed his Egyptian counterpart Lieutenant General Mahmoud Hegazy to London. Crown Copyright.

As part of joint Defence work last year, Royal Navy warships HMS Ocean and Bulwark visited Egypt and met with ENS Tahya Misr to practice manoeuvres and participate in an air defence exercise.

10 Egyptian officers from their Mistral class helicopter carriers were also hosted on board, and ahead of the exercise HMS Ocean, visited the port of Alexandria, the first Royal Navy ship to do so for eight years.

Chief of the Defence Staff Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach said:

I was pleased to welcome Lt Gen Hegazy to London, and following a positive exchange I have personally reaffirmed our important Defence ties. We will continue to develop this military bond.

While in the UK, Lt Gen Hegazy is also due to visit Northwood Headquarters, where he will meet Commander of Joint Forces Command General Sir Chris Deverell, among other senior personnel.

[Green Party to stand in Stoke by-election](#)



Green Party

1 February 2017

North Staffordshire Green Party has announced local activist Adam Colclough as its candidate for the Stoke by-election.

Colclough is from Stoke and understands the problems it faces. He wants to end austerity and tackle insecure employment, low pay and inadequate housing. His priorities are the NHS, social care and education.

Colclough works in logistics operations but also has roles in a mental health forum, NHS patients' forum and young offenders' rehabilitation organisations. He is studying part time for a sociology degree at Staffordshire University.

Colclough said:

"I'm absolutely committed to fighting for a better future for my city and its people. Politicians need to be honest about the real causes of the problems that blight Stoke on Trent and offer credible solutions that will work. Simply staying silent about austerity instead of offering realistic, alternative economic and industrial policies is not good enough.

"The people of Stoke have been taken for granted for far too long and the Green Party will be honest in addressing these issues to create a fair and

sustainable future. Many people in Stoke are disconnected from the three mainstream parties and seeking an alternative. We want to offer them one based on inclusion and hope, not division and prejudice.”

Jonathan Bartley, Green Party co-leader, said:

“Adam has lived in Stoke his whole life which means he truly understands the strengths and challenges of the local area. He would do whatever it takes to work with others of like mind to meet the needs of the local community, and defeat the forces that seek to separate us. I’m proud that Adam is offering a brighter, fairer future.”

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