

Lord Agnew Schools North East speech

Good morning and thank you for your kind invitation to speak at one of the biggest education events in your region.

It's great to be at the Schools North East summit. Twelve years after a group of head teachers first got together to create what is still, unbelievably, the only UK regional network of schools.

I'm no-one's idea of a die-hard football fan, but St James' Park is one of the oldest grounds in the world. It's part of our national heritage.

My local team is actually Norwich City, and it just so happens that the last time we played Newcastle, back in August, the heroic Canaries won 3-1. Sadly not a performance they've managed to maintain – I was at the Aston Villa game on Saturday where they were thrashed 5-1.

Today I want to talk about a project that many of us in this room have been working on for the past twelve months. One year ago, almost to the day, the Department for Education launched Opportunity North East – a £24 million programme to improve education and employment outcomes for the young people of the region.

When we launched the programme, we knew the North East faced some unique challenges.

Of all the regions, the North East has consistently had the lowest proportion of young people in good and outstanding secondary schools. Fewer 18-year-olds from the North East attend the country's top universities when compared to any other region. It lags behind others in terms of securing a sustained destination, like education or employment, after GCSE age.

There are too many education measures on which the North East is listed ninth in the list of nine English regions. Of course, everyone in this room will know the real picture isn't so black and white. In fact, the North East has some of the best performing primary schools in the country. Children in the region can expect a great start.

But when they move from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, something seems to change—something that leaves many, particularly the most disadvantaged, struggling to keep up with their peers elsewhere. It seems the gulf between the primary and secondary curricula is too wide for some young pupils.

Whatever the source of the problem, Opportunity North East was launched in part to tackle this very issue. That was challenge number one, which I'll return to later. But there are others.

After talking with key stakeholders in the region and analysing the data, we identified four more challenges that Opportunity North East aims to address.

We need to unlock the potential of young people in 30 of our secondary

schools. We need to boost teacher recruitment, retention and development. We want to help far more young people find a pathway to a good job. And finally, we want to see many more young people progress to high quality higher education.

A year on, how are we doing?

The first thing we did was put together a strategic board made up of regional stakeholders who are passionate about the aims of Opportunity North East. Partners from schools, local enterprise partnerships, local authorities, further education, universities, businesses and Schools North East – all are on the board, and are proof of the regional collaboration driving this project.

In March, we launched the ONE Vision Schools programme—a three-year investment involving 28 secondary schools across the North East. Each of these schools currently needs support and are committed to improving; our aim is to help them become good schools.

Those ONE Vision schools include Newcastle's own Kenton School. There's also Polam Hall School in Darlington, originally founded as a Quaker 'finishing school' for girls, and Durham's Tanfield School, where England women's football goalkeeper Carly Telford was educated.

Each school has been matched with a high-performing school leader who will work with the head teacher to help diagnose the most pressing priorities, and develop a bespoke improvement plan. This includes all our ONE Vision schools, to fund professional development for up to four governors from each school.

Finally, through our analysis of need, we've identified over £5 million of savings for those schools to work on. All of our ONE Vision schools have great potential. They just need help unlocking it.

Moving back to another core challenge, in the past year we've been talking to all the experts –head teachers, charities like the SHINE Trust and the Education Endowment Foundation, and to Schools North East – to find out why so many children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, find the jump from primary to secondary school such a struggle.

As part of that conversation, we invited the region's schools, trusts and local authorities to put forward their own proposals to better support pupils as they move from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. The purpose of this project was to fund those we think could have the greatest positive impact for children.

By July, we had received some 32 draft proposals from local schools, trusts and authorities. By early next year, we will begin funding a handful, monitoring pupils as they move through the first three years of secondary school. In the summer, we also hosted an information event where teachers, school leaders and local officials got together to hear examples of what was working outside the region.

The event was so popular, we couldn't fit everyone in the room and had to hold a second event a week later. Blackpool is a case in point. As part of

its own Opportunity Area programme, it has been trialling a special town-wide “transition week” involving all Blackpool primary and secondary schools.

Young pupils are offered taster lessons to calm those back-to-school nerves, while heads from both primary and secondary schools work together on curriculum planning. As a result, pupils in Blackpool are already showing improved progress in Year 7 and Year 8—the so-called “lost years” for too many disadvantaged pupils.

I also want to highlight a third and final piece of work. In the past year we’ve been working to help send more young people in the North East to the country’s most selective universities, based on an approach developed by the Elephant Group. Formed by a collection of London head teachers, the Elephant Group’s mission is to ensure that the top third of non-selective state school pupils get to attend the top third universities.

The Elephant Group is piloting a participation programme for sixth formers in parts of England—helping them with their university applications and prepping them for admissions tests. We’ve been working with local schools to bring the Elephant Group’s ongoing pilot to the North East, and will be holding an information session next month at Cardinal Hulme Catholic School to target help where it is most needed.

We’re also looking at introducing “nudge” methods, such as undergraduates writing letters to sixth formers and other young people from similar backgrounds, sharing their university stories and inspiring them to join them. After all, Durham is already home to one of the best universities in the country.

Why shouldn’t young people who were born down the road from it go there—or to Cambridge or Oxford or Bath for that matter? That’s the story of Opportunity North East so far. But it’s part of a wider story—one that affects schools across the country.

Over the next three years £14 billion of additional funding is going into the school system. Plus a pension funding increase of £4.5 billion – by some measures the biggest one-off boost to education funding for 15 years. We are also rolling out T Levels, the new gold standard in technical education.

Some 50 providers across the country will deliver the first T Levels from 2020—including four from the North East: Durham Sixth Form Centre, Gateshead College, New College Durham and St Thomas Moore Catholic School.

We’re expanding the free schools programme with the aim of creating thousands of good school places across the country. And there are many successful ones in the area already. One example is Wynyard Church of England primary school in Stockton-On-Tees. The school, which opened in 2015, achieved an outstanding Ofsted Judgement in April 2018 whilst still in temporary accommodation.

Finally, we’re rolling out a fully-funded, two-year package of training and support for early career teachers, to help recruit and retain the best and

the brightest. In fact, as part of Opportunity North East, teachers here get access to this programme a year early. This gives them access to high-quality training, a trained mentor, and time off their teaching timetable to focus on their own personal development.

None of this would amount to anything, of course, without the hard work you all put in, day in, day out. I've been an education minister for two years and have worked closely with trusts for nearly nine years.

Throughout that time I've never failed to be impressed by the dedication and passion you all bring to our educational institutions, in the face of many and varied challenges.

The best way to overcome those challenges is to work together, which is why collaboration is at the heart of Opportunity North East. This is a unique region. It stretches from coastal towns to rural hamlets, with every kind of school dotting its landscape.

We need your local expertise—the hard-won knowledge of local authorities, enterprise partnerships, colleges, universities, businesses, schools—so that we make the changes that work for you, not for us.

This is part of the government's broader plan to fire up the Northern Powerhouse; to increase productivity across the region. by giving the North more control. At the heart of that goal is improving education right here, from the schools near St James' Park to every corner of the North East.

As you all know, achieving that aim isn't a question of talent—the region is full of it. It's a question of opportunity.

Thank you.

[Upholding peace in Colombia](#)

Thank you very much, Mr President. As it's the first time I'm speaking in the chamber, let me congratulate you on assuming the presidency and thank our Russian colleagues for the presidency in the month of September.

It's very good once more to have the Foreign Minister with us. You're very welcome, Foreign Minister. It's always good to have you here. And we appreciate the seriousness with which you take this Council's consideration of this important mission. And thank you also to the SRSB for the briefing.

I think we all know that we're meeting almost three years since the peace agreement was signed in November 2016 and significant progress has been made since then. Transitional justice institutions have gained more stable ground, illegal crop substitution programmes are underway and thousands of ex-

combatants are being re-incorporated into civilian life. And there have been other advances.

The progress, however significant, though, has been met with a number of significant challenges. The recent announcement by former FARC leaders that they were returning to armed activity was an obstacle. We have to admit that, but we should not let it overshadow positive steps forward. We condemn the dissidents' rejection of the peace accords, but at the same time, we also welcome the swift response by the Colombian government, the FARC political party and the transitional justice system, among other stakeholders. It remains clear – and this is welcome – that the majority of former FARC combatants remain committed to the peace process. Of course, we must guard against complacency and we must step up efforts to ensure that currently manageable threats like these do not escalate and worsen and spiral beyond our control. So rather than calling broadly for the implementation of the agreement, which is customary at this session, I'd like to particularly respond to the requests made by High Commissioner Archila, who is in the room today, on the council's recent trip to Colombia, for us to be more specific in our appeals.

Firstly, therefore, Mr President, we recognize the political and financial challenges that face the Colombian government. But we believe that sufficient funding for rural development in the 170 PDET municipalities is essential to deliver the accords. Adequate resources should also be made available to the transitional justice system and reincorporation process, as these are crucial for public and ex-combatant trust in the peace process and therefore to ex-combatants' continued participation in it. Increased state presence in rural areas will assist in addressing ongoing security issues, not least the killing of former FARC members, community leaders and human rights defenders, as we've discussed here before.

Secondly, Mr. President, I'd like to underscore the importance of the party's renewed high-level engagement with vital spaces for dialogue, including: the Commission for the Follow-Up, Promotion and Verification of the Final Agreement; the National Commission of Guarantees; and the National Reincorporation Council. These mechanisms have been less active recently, but they serve an important purpose in maintaining communication and coordination on the accords.

Looking ahead, Mr President, to emerging developments, on 27 October, Colombians will vote in regional and local elections, a milestone on the road to peace, especially given the strong regional focus of the peace agreement. The SG's report highlighted worrying statistics of candidates being threatened or killed. In this regard, we welcome the signature of the new National Pact for Political Culture and Non-Violence during the electoral campaign. We call on all stakeholders to adhere to this pact, to refrain from violence and intimidation and to ensure peaceful elections.

Mr President, the UK commends the Colombian government for the progress made so far amid challenging circumstances. We look forward to continuing this support along Colombia's road to sustainable peace.

Thank you.

[UKAEA welcomes Government announcement on Culham campus](#)

On Wednesday, the Government confirmed its backing for a project to develop new fusion facilities, infrastructure and apprenticeships at UKAEA's Culham site.

[It was included in a series of measures announced by Business & Energy Secretary Andrea Leadsom to support UK researchers and businesses.](#)

Professor Ian Chapman, CEO of UKAEA, commented: "We are delighted with recent Government investments in UKAEA and fusion research, notably in designing the UK's own fusion powerplant – STEP – and a major upgrade to the Culham campus."

[Northampton Gateway Rail Freight Interchange proposal granted development consent](#)

Development consent has been given for a Rail Freight Interchange (RFI) together with landscaping, access and other supporting infrastructure works. The proposed project consists of: An intermodal freight terminal including container storage and HGV parking, new road infrastructure and works to the existing road network, including provision of a new access and associated works to the A508, a new bypass to the village of Roade, and substantial improvements to Junction 15 of the M1.

The project is located at Land west of the A508, south west of M1 Junction 15 and east of Northampton Loop Line.

The application was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for consideration by Roxhill Developments Limited on the 21 May 2018 and accepted for examination on 15 June 2018. Following an examination during which the public, statutory consultees and interested parties were given the opportunity to give evidence to the Examining Authority, a recommendation was made to the Secretary of State on 09 July 2019.

The Planning Inspectorate's Chief Executive, Sarah Richards said:

"The Planning Inspectorate is committed to giving local communities the opportunity of being involved in the examination of projects that may affect them. Local people, the local authority and other interested parties were able to participate in the six month long examination. The Examining Authority listened and gave full consideration to those local views."

"The Planning Inspectorate has again demonstrated its ability to examine Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) within timescales laid down in the Planning Act 2008 which provides developers and investors with the confidence to build and improve the infrastructure this country needs to secure future economic growth."

The decision announced today supports the recommendation made by the Examining Authority. It is the 79th Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project to be examined and decided and brings the total of transport projects to 24.

The decision, the recommendation made by the Examining Authority to the Secretary of State and the evidence considered by the Examining Authority in reaching its recommendation is publicly available on the [National Infrastructure Planning website](#).

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Journalists wanting further information should contact the Planning

Inspectorate Press Office, on: 0303 444 5004 or 0303 444 5005 or email:

Press.office@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

Notes to editors:

The Planning Inspectorate, National Infrastructure Programme of Projects details the proposals which are anticipated to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate as applications in the coming months. It can be viewed at <https://infrastructure.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/>

[Monmouthshire testbed paving the way for 5G technology](#)

During a visit to the 5G Testbed in Monmouthshire, Welsh Secretary Alun Cairns heard how UK Government funding is being used to develop the latest 5G technology across the UK.

After receiving a share of £3.5 million of UK Government funding last year,

the testbed in Llanddewi Rhydderch has begun trialling innovative uses of 5G to generate stronger connections for residents, businesses, farmers and visitors.

As well as the Monmouthshire site, six other testbeds have been developed in Cumbria, Northumberland, North Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Invernesshire and Perthshire. The funding came as part of the UK Government's Digital Strategy which aims to develop a world-leading digital economy that works for everyone.

The Secretary of State for Wales Alun Cairns said:

It is great to see first-hand how UK Government funding is being used in Monmouthshire to transform connectivity in our rural communities.

There is potential to use 5G to increase food production in farming, improve healthcare in the home and develop apps for tourists – all of which will provide an important boost to our rural economy.

The UK Government is committed to delivering on our promise to create a UK fit for the future, with a thriving digital economy in every part of the country.

Barry Weaver, Operations Director Broadway Partners said:

We believe that Gigabit connectivity by 2025 is achievable through the right mix of technology, knowhow and some positive energy! The 5G pilot in Monmouthshire proved that Gigabit services can be delivered to communities at a very quick speed. We are in the process of replicating this all over the country. Let's get Gigabit done.

Taking another step towards a fully-connected country, the UK Government has also today announced the introduction of a new law which will ensure the nine million people in the UK living in blocks of flats can access gigabit speed broadband.

It will make it easier to install faster internet connections in blocks of flats where landlords repeatedly ignore requests for access from broadband firms and it is estimated that an extra 3,000 UK residential buildings a year will be connected as a result.

This follows the UK Government announcing £5 billion of new funding to bring gigabit-capable broadband to the hardest-to-reach parts of the UK earlier this month.

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Notes to editors:

The Monmouthshire project is funded by the 5G Testbeds & Trials Programme within the UK Government Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.