

Speech: Amanda Spielman at the Muslim Teachers' Association

It's good to be back at the Institute of Education where I was lucky enough to study myself. I did my MA in comparative education in 2001.

And I am thrilled to be here with you today and to join you in celebrating 40 years of the Muslim Teachers' Association. And indeed to celebrate the contribution Muslim teachers make at every level of our school system.

It is well known that four of the top ten performing schools for progress 8 in the country – Tauheedul Islam Girls' High School, Bolton Muslim Girls School, Eden Girls' School Coventry, and Tauheedul Islam Boys' High School – are Muslim faith schools. But I know that the vast majority of you here today work in non-faith schools.

You are working hard for pupils and parents across the country every day, in local authority schools, academies and independent schools.

That is a point that I know Rukhsana always impresses upon people, and she is right to do so. And I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to her and to the work she has done as your President.

And there are some others that I would like to pay tribute to, as you mark 40 years of the Muslim Teachers' Association: real trailblazers like Nazar Mustafa, founder President of the MTA. He was the first Muslim Inspector for the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA).

Naz Bokhari is another man who broke new ground, becoming the first British Muslim to become the headmaster of a British secondary school. His daughter Hina is here today to speak about his legacy.

And there's Bushra Nasir, who became the first female Muslim headteacher of a state secondary school in the UK in 1993. Bushra is currently CEO of the Drapers' multi-academy Trust. And of course, Shahina Ahmed, Head of the successful Eden Girls' School in Waltham Forest.

While they represent some of the great success stories of Muslim teachers, it's also right to acknowledge some of the challenges that you face.

There is no doubt that while we have come a long way in creating a diverse and inclusive school workforce, we have much further to go. It remains the case that the senior leadership in many schools is far less diverse than the staff body, or indeed, the student intake.

It must sometimes feel as though promotion opportunities are harder to come by for Muslim teachers and indeed, teachers from minority ethnic backgrounds more generally. Ofsted has just advertised a [scheme in our London region to help develop a cadre of future education leaders specifically from minority ethnic backgrounds](#).

The short programme, which is still being developed, is aimed at teachers who have the potential to move into senior leadership roles in the next 3 years. It will give them insight into our new framework and into how we inspect, including a chance to shadow an inspection and attend workshops and focus groups. There is more information on the Ofsted GOV.UK website for anyone here who is interested.

While I would hope that education is generally a supportive environment for people of all backgrounds and all faiths, we know that discrimination is a persistent and insidious threat across our society and the wider world. We see it in the horrific terror attack in Christchurch, in the recent vandalism of mosques in Birmingham and Manchester, and in abuse inflicted both online and on the streets every day.

As teachers, you are in the vanguard of instilling tolerance and understanding in our children. The importance of that work cannot be overstated and I would like to thank you for it.

And we would like to begin what I hope will be a long and constructive dialogue with you. Based on our shared desire to do what is best for children and young people.

The importance of dialogue

I believe constructive, professional dialogue should be at the heart of everything we do at Ofsted.

I know there is an impression that Ofsted can be something of a blunt instrument. That we are too focused on data, facts and figures. That we can be something of an over-bearing 'big brother'. And that we are too quick to judge and pronounce, and too slow to empathise and understand.

But this isn't a picture I recognise, and it's not one I want for Ofsted.

Our purpose as an organisation is to help raise standards and improve lives.

And at the heart of this are our 3 core principles:

1. We always put children and students first, acting as their champions at all times.
2. We cherish our independence, which means we report our findings without fear or favour and only ever with the best interests of children and young people in mind.
3. We operate with transparency and accountability. That means that if you, or anyone else, disagrees with something we say or do then we don't run from that challenge. We embrace it, we talk about it, and we learn from it.

Effective dialogue is an essential part of this approach. We are open to that discussion. But we won't ever compromise on our core principles, including putting children first and foremost.

We all know that with dialogue sometimes comes disagreement. And it can even take us into uneasy territory, where it's easier not to talk about difficult issues. That is particularly true when for some people religious belief comes into conflict with elements of equalities law or the government's approach to British values.

The government sets out the duty of all schools in England, state and independent, to 'actively promote' the 4 British values of:

- democracy
- the rule of law
- individual liberty
- mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs

And I believe this is right. These values make sure that government works for all citizens; they provide for a multi-racial society, building on what is already held in common. They promote both trust and the willingness to contribute to the common good; and create a space in which different beliefs, lifestyles and cultures can exist freely and in harmony.

For us at Ofsted, making sure that the next generation understands, respects and is willing to adopt these values is an essential part of our work. It is about preparing children for life in modern Britain.

Because taken together, these shared values provide a simple message to our young people: in Britain, no matter what your background, you can fit in, you can succeed and you can belong. I know everyone will agree, that is a noble aspiration for our country..

But that doesn't mean that we can't talk about issues and tensions when they arise. I think, for example, of the recent events at Parkfield school in Birmingham where some parents objected to some of the topics that were being taught.

This is precisely where dialogue is essential.

I understand the strength of feeling in that community. But it serves no one well to intimidate teachers and start protesting outside the school gates. All that does is make a difficult situation worse, while setting a terrible example for the children. It is children's voices that always get lost when adults stop talking and start shouting.

It must be better to engage in calm discussions in order to find a sensible middle ground – one that means children are prepared for life in a diverse, modern, progressive country like ours, but it's done in a sensitive and careful manner that respects the concerns of age, religion or any other background or context.

In such circumstances dialogue can be our ally. It is through dialogue that we advance understanding and find common solutions.

The search for substance

Our [draft inspection framework](#) has this concept of 'dialogue' at its core.

It shifts Ofsted's focus away from the interrogation of performance data, towards what I call the 'substance' of education: What are pupils being taught? How well are they being taught it? And how is it setting them up to succeed at the next stage?

It is my view that in recent years the curriculum, the 'what is taught and why', has taken too much of a backseat in inspection. And this has contributed to a gradual erosion of curriculum thinking in early years, in schools and in post-16 education.

But in reality the curriculum should be one of the main considerations that Ofsted inspectors keep in mind, which is why the draft framework contains a new 'quality of education' judgement that looks at how schools are deciding what to teach and why, how well they are doing it and whether it is leading to strong outcomes for young people.

And to deliver this quality of education judgement, we will be exploring 3 core elements of education.

First, what is the framework for setting out the aims of a programme of education, including the knowledge and skills to be gained at each stage? This is the curriculum intent.

Secondly, how is that framework translated into practice, and does the teaching make the intended curriculum a reality? This is the implementation element.

And thirdly, how is the knowledge and skills that students have gained evaluated against expectations and what destinations can students go on to next? This is all about the impact.

This approach will deliver a much more rounded assessment of a school – looking not just at 'what' it is achieving in performance table terms, but 'how' it is achieving it. I think this is both a better – and a fairer – approach. It puts the curriculum back at the heart of inspections and in doing so it helps defuse the pressure to 'game' the system by focusing on performance data alone.

And this is where that concept of 'dialogue' is essential. Because the only way to assess this, and to make the new 'quality of education' judgement a reality is to foster a professional dialogue between inspectors and a provider.

This is not in any way to suggest that performance data is unimportant. Of course not. We continue to need clear and authoritative accountability measures to help us come to our judgements.

But we must increasingly recognise that these only paint a partial picture.

They tell us what has been achieved, not how. And we know that this can lead to some perverse practices, where digging for the right data trumps the search for substance.

So a key principle of the new framework is to put inspection back into its proper place, where it complements published performance data, rather than intensifying the pressure on you to deliver higher numbers each year. And because no data measure can ever fully capture the quality of the education it reflects, we have to put professional dialogue back at the heart of our approach.

Fostering dialogue during inspections

In the same vein, our proposals for a 2-day section 8 inspection are designed to make more time to develop an understanding between inspectors and staff. There will be more time for conversation about the strengths of a school, about how weaknesses will be addressed. And more time for staff at all levels to talk to inspectors about what is happening in lessons and in children's work.

Again, this is about giving school leaders and staff time to provide that all important context, without which inspection can be a discouraging experience. The pilots we have conducted of this new approach show that it does make space for constructive professional dialogue between inspectors, leaders and teachers.

School leaders need to be able to provide some human input to this process. As one said to me recently: "If there's a conversation going on about my school, I'd rather be part of it, so that I can put things in context."

At the end of the day, it's about allowing more time for inspection to be done with you rather than to you.

And dialogue is about listening too. We know that teachers are under pressure; we know that levels of stress among teachers are among the highest for any profession and we know that thousands of teachers leave the profession each year.

The reasons behind this are many and complex, but we want to do what we can to reduce the pressure on teachers. That's one of the reasons why we're moving away from using internal performance data in our inspections. We really want to curb any practices that are essentially done for Ofsted's benefit. That defeats the point of inspection and it just creates more work for hard-pressed professionals like you.

We will continue to run pilots through the summer term – more than 200 in total, giving every one of Her Majesty's Inspectors the opportunity to participate in at least one. And we will use these to tweak the model to make sure we get it right.

Greater professional dialogue

To cement this important concept of dialogue and collaboration, we are already doing more to fully integrate Ofsted into the school system. We have been opening ourselves up as an organisation, sharing experiences and best practice with more people across the system, and encouraging more discussion at every level.

As you perhaps know, many of our current inspectors are serving school leaders. That is important because it provides a sense of perspective and shared understanding. But we want to encourage more people to get involved, so we have developed a secondment programme to bring more middle leaders into Ofsted, so that we widen the pool of experience and expertise.

This programme will see more middle leaders coming into Ofsted for a year at a time. They will get access to our training and development, and through inspection they will gain insight into many different schools. We will get their expertise and up to date experience of running a school. And after 12 months they will go back to their school, hopefully having gained hugely from the experience, and benefiting the school in turn.

This approach will be piloted with our current cadre of Ofsted Inspectors so that we can see how well it works. In time, we hope these secondments will be open to any school leader who has had some whole school responsibility. We see this as forming part of the development journey of talented school leaders who are on a trajectory to headship or beyond.

But dialogue doesn't stop at inspection – nor indeed does it stop with teachers.

It's really important to me that Ofsted is not defined solely by what we do, but also by what we know. The work we do also gives us considerable insight into the wider issues that circle education and children's social care. And we want to use that insight to contribute to some important ongoing debates.

Some of you may have seen [our recent research report into the issue of knife crime](#). We did the fieldwork in London and I know many of you here work in London schools.

We found that schools are often quite isolated from wider partnership efforts to tackle the issue. Consequently, the way schools respond can be inconsistent. The need for better partnership working may sound obvious, but unfortunately it's not happening nearly enough – and we hope our voice will help encourage some progress.

It's that theme of dialogue again, and this time it's about having dialogue beyond schools and colleges – and being part of the broader coalition that is needed to tackle the tragedy of knife crime among young people.

Conclusion

So we have a plan to put educational substance and professional dialogue at the heart of Ofsted's work in the years ahead.

And I have to say the dialogue around our new framework is vibrant and popular. We have already received around 8,000 responses to the consultation since it began 11 weeks ago – and I would urge all of you here to have your say before it closes in 5 days' time.

Because your voice matters. Because dialogue matters. Because none of us has all the answers – but together we can always find a way.

That's why I am grateful to be here and to be able to join you in this celebration today.

And that's why I hope this will not be the end of our conversation, but just the start of it.

I wish you all a productive conference, a great day, and here's to the next 40 years of the Muslim Teachers' Association.

Thank you.

[Press release: Making Tax Digital becomes law](#)

From today (1 April 2019), the government's major Making Tax Digital programme becomes law for over one million VAT-registered businesses earning more than £85,000.

The new rules, first announced in 2015, will mean most businesses above the VAT threshold will need to keep their records digitally and submit their VAT return using MTD-compatible software for VAT periods starting on or after 1 April.

MTD will make it easier for businesses to get their tax right first time. HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) has been urging businesses to get ready and has already written to every business affected with information on what they need to do.

Almost 100,000 businesses have already signed up to the new service. More than 4,000 businesses are now signing up to MTD every day to experience a more integrated approach to business and tax.

HMRC knows businesses will require time to become familiar with the new

requirements. During the first year of VAT mandation, HMRC will take a light touch approach to penalties by not issuing filing or record keeping penalties where businesses are doing their best to comply with MTD.

Mel Stride MP, Financial Secretary to the Treasury, said:

Delivering Making Tax Digital for VAT is the first step toward our ambition to create one of the most digitally advanced tax authorities in the world.

The rules that come in from today will give businesses more control over their finances, allowing them to spend their time focusing on innovation, growth and the creation of jobs.

Theresa Middleton, Director of the Making Tax Digital for Business Programme, said:

Tens of thousands of businesses joined our pilot over the last 6 months and have helped us to test and improve the live service ensuring we have the right support in place to help people transition.

Now is the time for those businesses affected by MTD who haven't done so already to begin preparing to switch over and start experiencing the benefits MTD has to offer. You don't necessarily need to sign up from day one, but you do need to make sure you're keeping your records digitally for your next VAT period which starts on or after 1 April.

Emma Jones, founder of small business support network Enterprise Nation, said:

Encouraging small firms to adopt more digital functionality offers real benefits. For example, having accurate and timely financial information to hand helps companies make better, more informed decisions and using digital tools more broadly, including time management, helps businesses increase productivity.

In the longer term we feel Making Tax Digital and the digitisation of tax records will present significant advantages to business.

What businesses need to do now

If you have not prepared, do not panic. 1 April is not a 'cliff edge' for sign-ups – the first returns under the new system for the majority of businesses, which file VAT quarterly, won't be due until August at the earliest.

Accountants or other tax representatives will already be aware of MTD and will advise businesses how and when they need to make changes to be ready for the new service.

Those already using software will simply need to ensure it is MTD-compatible then sign up to the new service and authorise their software for MTD.

For those who are not using an accountant or don't currently use software, it is quick and easy to sign up and there is lots of information available to help them prepare, including about what software is available.

You should:

- take steps to find out if your business is affected by the Making Tax Digital changes and what you need to do if it is. Most businesses above the VAT threshold have to start keeping their records digitally and sending their VAT return to HMRC direct from their software for VAT periods starting on or after 1 April
- talk to your accountant or agent – if you use one to manage your VAT affairs – about how they are making returns MTD-compliant
- speak to your software provider if you already use software to ensure it will be compatible

Those businesses that are either not represented by an accountant and/or do not already use software will need to select software to use and sign up to MTD, then authorise their new software for MTD. Our GOV.UK webpages provide information on a wide variety of products, from free software for businesses with more straightforward tax affairs, to increasingly sophisticated paid solutions. There are also products that can be used in conjunction with a spreadsheet for those businesses that don't want to change their underlying record keeping system.

For easy-to-use guides and advice for businesses, agents, see guidance on GOV.UK: [Making Tax Digital for VAT as a business: step-by-step](#).

You can also view [webinars and videos for Making Tax Digital](#).

You can also read [Making Tax Digital \(MTD\): Mythbusters](#).

Background

1. Making Tax Digital was first announced in 2015 as a key part of the government's plans to make it easier for individuals and businesses to get their tax right and keep on top of their affairs.
2. HMRC recognises that businesses will require time to become familiar with the new requirements of MTD. During the first year of mandation, we will not issue filing or record keeping penalties where businesses are doing their best to comply with MTD. However, sanctions will remain possible in cases of deliberate non-compliance, and in order to

safeguard VAT revenue.

3. No business will be forced to go digital for their VAT returns if they are unable to. Anyone who is already exempt from online filing of VAT will remain so under MTD and there is further provision for those who cannot adapt to the new service due to age, disability, location or religion to apply for an exemption.
4. Businesses that are registered for VAT but are below the VAT threshold are also not required to use the MTD service, but can choose to do so.

News story: Independent Training Providers new intervention measures

Strengthened oversight, intervention and closer contract management, in our new intervention strategy, aims to eradicate low quality training provision, protect learners and public funds.

The majority of Independent Training Providers (ITP) we contract with provide good quality education and training. However, there is a small number where delivery falls short of our requirements, resulting in learners not getting the training they need and putting public funds at risk.

Currently, we only take action when an ITP has been judged inadequate by Ofsted, or has failed to meet minimum standards or financial health requirements.

In the aim of putting an end to poor training and learning provision, where data and analysis suggest a risk to learners or public funds, under our new intervention measures, we will be able to intervene early, (with the use of sanctions, such as suspension of recruitment or restricting growth) whilst assurance is being gained or remedial actions are undertaken.

In our contracts, we will provide clarity on the specific actions we will take to remedy breaches, setting defined timescales.

Additionally, to ensure learners and public funds are protected, in the event of provider failure, we will ensure that all ITP contracts (from 1 August 2019) have an exit plan setting out how the provider will assist us to transfer learners. This will ensure, should a provider cease trading, there is stability and clarity for learners and the sector and a reduced risk to public funds.

Chief Executive Eileen Milner said:

ITPs are vital to the further education infrastructure, supporting learners and employers through the delivery of apprenticeships, adult skills, education for young people and specialist provision.

Whilst the majority of training providers delivery meets our training standards, there will always be a small number who start to fall short of these standards.

We must continue to ensure that learners have a quality learning experience and every pound of the public purse is invested wisely. By introducing stronger early intervention measures and closer contract management arrangements it will minimise the disruption to learners and risk to public funds when provider failures start to become apparent.

Read the full [operational guidance](#) for more information.

[News story: The Industrial Strategy in action](#)

The government's modern Industrial Strategy is a long-term plan for boosting the productivity and earning power of people throughout the UK.

Our interactive map showcases some of the many innovative, cutting-edge small businesses and organisations employing thousands of people in high-quality jobs and driving innovation and growth across the country. This is our modern [Industrial Strategy](#) in action.

Click on the arrow or location pins to see a snapshot of the Industrial Strategy in sectors as diverse as:

- artificial intelligence
 - the green economy
 - future transport systems
 - supporting our ageing population
-

[News story: New 'Help to Claim'](#)

service provides extra Universal Credit support

Enhanced, free, confidential and impartial support to help people make a Universal Credit claim is available from today.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has invested £39 million into the 'Help to Claim' service, which will be delivered independently by Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland.

Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Amber Rudd said:

One of the best things about Universal Credit is its flexibility. It recognises that everyone is different and it's not a one-size-fits-all benefit.

So for anyone who needs that little bit of extra help to make their claim, new help is now here.

In addition to the support Jobcentre Plus staff already provide, Citizens Advice will now deliver high quality, independent advice through Help to Claim.

Help to Claim will provide free, confidential and impartial support to help people make a Universal Credit claim. People using the service can get advice on anything to do with applying for the benefit, including gathering the required evidence, filling in the application or preparing for their first jobcentre appointment.

Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland are committed to providing 'Help to Claim' across all areas of England, Wales and Scotland ensuring a consistent service across Great Britain. People will be able to access support online, over the phone and face-to-face through local Citizens Advice bureaux.

Anyone who requires support to make a new Universal Credit claim or is moving from a legacy benefit to Universal Credit following a change of circumstances can access [Help to Claim](#).

Accessing Help to Claim support is completely voluntary.

The service can be accessed any time until the first full correct payment of Universal Credit is in place.

Media enquiries for this press release – 020 3267 5141

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