

Government response: UK concerned over State of Emergency in Ethiopia

The UK has been following closely the past week's events in Ethiopia. We share outgoing Prime Minister Hailemariam's view that this is a concerning time for a country that is our friend and our partner. We welcome the commitment to an orderly process of political change in line with the constitution, as well as his repeated support for a continued reform process.

Against that backdrop we are, however, concerned and disappointed by the decision to impose a new State of Emergency. It sends a discouraging signal to the international community and foreign investors. We strongly hope that the announcement does not signal a reversal in Ethiopia's recent moves towards reform, and that it will be in place for as short a time as possible. In implementing the State of Emergency, we urge the Government of Ethiopia to ensure that human rights and the constitution are respected. Widespread use of detention powers and internet blockages should be avoided.

We call on the Government to ensure a rapid, peaceful, transparent and constitutional transition to a new leadership that continues and accelerates the reform process. The UK is a long-term friend of Ethiopia and we continue to stand ready to support a purposeful and progressive reform agenda.

News story: UK and US launch innovation fund for ideas to save millions of lives in conflict zones

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt and USAID Administrator Mark Green

The UK and US have joined forces to find the next technological breakthrough to save and transform millions of lives in the world's most dangerous conflict zones.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt and USAID Administrator Mark Green announced the new Humanitarian Grand Challenge at an event held at the Overseas Development Institute today (Monday 19 February).

The Challenge fund will provide grants to help get innovative technology projects off the ground, and will provide further support to expand projects that prove the most successful.

This new fund is the latest of the Grand Challenges, which are a tried and tested way of leveraging the power of businesses, and it is expected to attract tens of millions of pounds in private sector funding.

It aims to drive innovation in the aid sector, with a call for projects to focus on developing new ways to deliver water, sanitation, energy, health assistance and life-saving information in hard to reach conflict zones.

In a departure from traditional forms of aid, this will see new low-cost technology being produced for the most remote places and extreme conditions.

The 'Saving Lives at Birth' Grand Challenge – which was backed by DFID, USAID and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation – attracted more than £60million in private sector investment and has already helped save 10,000 lives.

Successful projects backed by previous Grand Challenges have produced an electronic nose to smell tuberculosis from patients' breath, a maternal and child health app for people in Burma to give birth safely and give their children the best start in life, and low-cost microchips to diagnose diarrhoeal diseases.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

If we are to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals and help all those who need humanitarian support then we need to do things differently, and we need to lever all hands to that cause.

Our new Humanitarian Grand Challenge will create cutting-edge technology and leverage the power of the private sector to help respond to conflicts which will save lives, improve conditions for the most vulnerable and make humanitarian responses by the UK and US more effective.

The Challenge fund will give grants of up to £150,000 for innovative technology projects to get started and a further £600,000 so that successful projects can grow even bigger.

The £11million fund will be administered by Grand Challenges Canada and is equally funded by DFID and USAID, with each organisation providing £5.5million.

The event followed a strategic dialogue between Ms Mordaunt and Mr Green where they discussed how to work together to tackle sexual exploitation and abuse in the global aid sector and the action the UK has already taken; how best to boost economic development and help the poorest countries stand on their own two feet, and how to boost security at home and abroad.

[News story: Nigel Halkes Reappointed as Deputy Chair of VisitEngland](#)

Prior to his appointment as Deputy Chair of the VisitEngland Advisory Board, Nigel has served a four year term as a Board Member of VisitEngland during a time of major change for the organisation. Nigel has made a significant contribution to VisitEngland, including the establishment of the Discover England Fund and the outsourcing of the Quality Assurance Schemes to the AA. He has also served on the Audit Committee of the British Tourism Authority.

Nigel is an experienced Non-Executive Director with a portfolio spanning the public, private and charitable sectors. He sits on two PLC board and is a Trustee of the EY Foundation and the Polka Theatre for Children. Nigel was formerly the Managing Partner Markets for EY in the UK & Ireland, responsible for major clients, including hospitality and leisure businesses.

The role is not remunerated. This appointment has been made in accordance with the Cabinet Office's Governance Code on Public Appointments. The appointments process is regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Under the Code, any significant political activity undertaken by an appointee in the last five years must be declared. This is defined as including holding office, public speaking, making a recordable donation, or candidature for election. Nigel has declared no such political activity.

[Speech: Chef Moha shows the way](#)

Last Wednesday, I was in Asni, a small village in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains at one of the Education for All dormitories. Those of you who have read my blogs before will know about EFA, but for those who have not, a quick explanation.

In many rural communities, girls stop going to school at the age of 12, as secondary schools frequently have 'gaps' in their daily timetable (so a pupil may have classes from – for example – 0830 – 1000, but then no classes until 1300). Whilst it may be OK for a boy to roam the streets whilst they are not in classes during those 'gaps' it is less socially acceptable for a girl to do so. This results in many girls not going to school. EFA is tackling this problem by building dormitories for the girls near to their schools. The dormitories are run by house mothers who make sure that the girls get well-fed, schooled and looked after.

But life is hard for the girls. When the first EFA dormitory was established 10 years ago, it was hard to persuade families to allow their girls to go. Now demand far exceeds supply as the benefits of education all the way up to the age of 18 become increasingly clear (83% of EFA girls go on to university – a strikingly high figure!) so EFA have had to apply very strict criteria to their intakes. Only the girls from the poorest families in the poorest villages are admitted to the dormitories.

Two months ago, I was sitting in Chef Moha's restaurant in Marrakesh chatting to him about another project, when it occurred to me that if he were to offer a cooking Master Class for the girls, it would be a ray of light in their lives. Chef Moha did not even hesitate. "Yes. When?" was his immediate reply.

Fast forward to last Wednesday.

I stayed in the Kasbah Toubkal on the Tuesday evening, a fabulous hotel which is beautiful at the best of times. But in the snow, it takes on a magical aura. You feel as if you are cut off from the rest of the world, perched on an outcrop at the end of the valley. To the right, higher up into the Atlas, the shoulders of Toubkal himself jut up into the sky, white-clothed and robed in snow, he is a wonderful mountain – I look forward to climbing him soon. To the left, the valley has a wonderful Spartan feeling – like something out of Ten Years in Tibet. The air is pure and clean and the night skies something else. If you haven't yet been: go!

On the Wednesday morning, we drove down to Asni, arriving before the lorry bringing the provisions, tables, cookers and plates. Chef Moha rang to say he was en route. Though the dormitory was sleepy, you could sense the anticipation rising. The lorry arrived and the girls, Embassy team and Dar Moha employees formed a line, like ants scurrying back and forth from the entrance to the kitchen. Soon the kitchen was full to overflowing and still the provisions rolled in.

A cheer went up: Chef Moha had arrived. The Dormitory filled like the tide coming in – imperceptibly until you looked and the room was full to bursting. The tables were laid out – 10 girls had been chosen as the Master Class pupils. I was chef Moha's sous-chef. The girls were so excited, it was absolutely wonderful.

I was very nervous. Although I bake bread and croissants and enjoy cooking, I would not call myself a chef. Cooking with such a luminary was very scary!

But Chef Moha made light of it all. Barking out instructions. Laughing and joking with the girls. Twirling ingredients and dropping dollops of magic onto the food. Before I had a chance to really take it all in, the food was cooked and ready.

Food for 150 girls and a dozen or more hangers-on appeared. Tables were laid. Plates and glasses brought. Food was served. It was all so slick and beautifully done, that I didn't really even notice how it was done. The girls and guests sat down to the most wonderful food.

But it was not the food that I will take away – delicious though it was. There were two other things which had a bigger impact on me. Chef Moha gave us a lesson in much more than cookery. He is a mega-star in Morocco. Everyone I speak to has heard of him. Yet never, not for one second, did he exude any of the prima-donna type behaviour we have come to expect from mega-stars. He was modest, down-to-earth. Humble. He took selfies with the girls. Put up with my mindless banter with great good humour. He laughed, joked and set the whole dormitory on fire with happiness. That is real leadership. He is a true Ambassador for Morocco. A person to be proud to know and be humbled by his selfless generosity.

And the other thing was the happiness of the girls. I have never seen 150 people look so utterly blissed-out happy for such an extended period of time. They loved it. When they burst into a spontaneous song of thanks to the Chef, it brought tears to my eyes – literally. It was such a simple thing to do, but it brought so much pleasure and enjoyment to so many people who don't have many joys in their lives: they brushed shoulders with a mega-star and he embraced them with his warmth. It was glorious and it reminded me of how much in our daily lives we take for granted.

And that brings me back to EFA. Many of us take universal education for granted: we should not. We should remember how lucky we are.

What could possibly be more important than ensuring that girls get a decent education up to the age of 18? Giving them that enables them to realise their own potential. Failing to do so risks locking them into a cycle of poverty, early marriage and lost potential, potentially robbing a country of the economic potential of 50% of its population.

EFA offers girls a route out of that cycle. The lives of the girls at EFA have been and will be transformed by the power of education. EFA offers them and their communities an exciting, new and different future, releasing their potential for the benefit of Morocco. That is why I am proud to support EFA and why I was so happy to have been able to bring a little bit of joy and happiness into the hard lives of 150 young people yesterday.

The British Embassy is proud of its ongoing association with EFA. We will be entering a team into the Marrakesh Atlas Etape on 22 April which is raising funds for EFA. More details are at: <https://www.marrakech-atlas-etape.com/>. We look forward to seeing you on the course!

More generally, helping girls to continue their education is essential for Morocco's economic development, so if you have ideas about how we can help, please get in touch and let us know!

Speech: PM: The right education for everyone

I took my very first steps into elected politics as a local councillor, in south London.

For two years I was the chairman of the education authority in Merton.

It was an experience I will never forget.

I saw how vital good schools and colleges are to a community. How the hopes and aspirations which parents have for their children and which young people have for their futures are bound-up with the quality of education on offer.

And here in this fantastic setting, in a building from Derby's proud past, which today is helping to define a fantastic future for this city and county as part of Derby College the immense value of great local institutions, providing people with an education that truly works for them, is clear.

I drew on my experiences in south London when I first became an MP, and made my maiden speech in Parliament on the subject of education in 1997.

I said then that the aim of education policy should be to 'provide the right education for every child'. That 'for some children that will be an education that is firmly based in learning practical and vocational skills. For others, it will be an education based on academic excellence.'

A lot has changed in the last 20 years, but that core principle that the needs of every child and every young person deserve to be met still drives my vision of the education system our country needs.

And the need for such a system has never been greater.

First, because the new technologies which are shaping the economy of the future will transform the world of work and demand new knowledge and skills in the decades ahead.

Technologies like artificial intelligence, biotech and new advances in data science have the potential to drive up living standards and open new possibilities for human achievement and personal fulfilment. But if we are to seize those opportunities, if we are to make Britain a great engine room of this technological revolution in the twenty-first century we need to make the most of all of our talents.

The sixth form students I met at Featherstone High School in Southall this morning, and the young people studying here at Derby College, will be starting their careers in the new economy of the 2020s and 2030s. To give them the skills they need to succeed, we need an education and training system which is more flexible and more diverse than it is today.

One which enriches their lives with knowledge, gives each of them a great start in life, and is there for them when they need it.

And there is another reason why we must act now to deliver that education system that truly works for everyone. Because the Britain of the 2020s will be a Britain outside of the European Union, pursuing a new course in the world.

I want the Britain which those young people will be living in to be a self-confident, outward-looking Britain.

The best friend and ally of our EU partners.

But also a Britain which is out in the world, forming even closer ties with friends and allies right across the globe. We will learn together, collaborating in research which makes new scientific breakthroughs and improves our understanding of the world.

We will trade together, spreading opportunity and prosperity ever more widely.

And we will stand together in support of the shared values which unite Britain with so many other like minded countries – in Europe yes, but across the world too.

To become that Britain where a thriving economy drives up living standards and creates greater security and opportunity for everyone and where the prosperity which economic growth generates is more fairly shared in our society we need education to be the key that unlocks the door to a better future.

Through education, we can become a country where everyone, from every background, gains the skills they need to get a good job and live a happy and fulfilled life.

To achieve that, we must have an education system at all levels which serves the needs of every child.

And if we consider the experience which many young people have of our system as it is, it is clear that we do not have such a system today.

Challenges we face

Imagine two children currently in secondary school and thinking about their futures.

One is a working class boy from here in Derby.

He aspires to a career as a lawyer, but he doesn't have a social network to draw on with any links to the profession, and he doesn't know if someone like him can make it.

The road he will have to take to achieve his dream is much more challenging

than the one his counterpart who is privately educated will face.

Almost a quarter of the students at our research-intensive universities come from the 7% of the population who go to private school.

And the professions which draw their recruits primarily from these institutions remain unrepresentative of the country as a whole, skewed in favour of a particular social class. For the boy from a working class home here in Derby, the odds are stacked against him and as a country, we all lose out when we do not make the most of everyone's talents and ability.

And now imagine a second child.

She is a girl from a middle class background, who is privately educated.

Her dream is to be a software developer, and she wishes she could go straight into the industry.

But she faces another set of pressures, which tell her that studying academic A-levels and making a UCAS application to a Russell group university is what the world expects of her.

The idea that there might be another path just as promising and better suited to her individual hopes and dreams simply doesn't occur. In each case, the system is not working for the individual or for our country.

Paul Johnson of the IFS recently wrote about the experiences his two sons had of leaving school. One, a natural fit at university, found the application process simple and straight forward.

The other, who wanted to pursue a technical course, found it much more difficult because, 'everything points to university as the default.' Roughly half of young people go to university and roughly half do not. But in the twenty years since we introduced tuition fees, public debate on tertiary education has been dominated by a discussion of how we fund and support those who go to university, and there has been nothing like the same attention paid to how we support the training and develop the skills of the young people who do not.

Most politicians, most journalists, most political commentators took the academic route themselves, and will expect their children to do the same. And there remains a perception that going to university is really the only desirable route, while going into training is something for other people's children.

If we are going to succeed in building a fairer society and a stronger economy, we need to throw away this outdated attitude for good and create a system of tertiary education that works for all our young people.

That means equality of access to an academic university education which is not dependent on your background, and it means a much greater focus on the technical alternatives too.

One of the great social achievements of the last half-century has been the transformation of an academic university education from something enjoyed almost-exclusively by a social elite into something which is open to everyone.

But making university truly accessible to young people from every background is not made easier by a funding system which leaves students from the lowest-income households bearing the highest levels of debt, with many graduates left questioning the return they get for their investment.

And for those young people who do not go on to academic study, the routes into further technical and vocational training today are hard to navigate, the standards across the sector are too varied and the funding available to support them is patchy.

The UK's participation rate in advanced technical education – teaching people skills which will be crucial for the future – is low by international standards. The latest annual figures show that fewer than 16,000 people completed higher qualifications through the further education system.

That is compared to almost 350,000 undergraduate degrees which were awarded last year.

This imbalance has an economic cost, with some businesses finding it hard to recruit the skilled workers they need.

But it also has a social cost in wasted human potential, which we too often ignore.

So now is the time to take action to create a system that is flexible enough to ensure that everyone gets the education that suits them.

That's what the review which I am launching today sets out to deliver.

And in doing so, it will build on the enormous progress we have already made in raising standards in our schools since 2010.

School standards

The success of every young person in whatever they go on to do in life, is shaped by the education they receive at school and the Conservatives have put restoring rigour and high standards in our primary and secondary schools at the heart of our education reforms.

We launched a major expansion of the academy programme, putting school teachers in charge of raising standards in their schools.

And we also went a step further, creating free schools – to give teachers, universities and charities the chance to bring greater innovation and specialism to the mix.

I have always believed in the great potential which Free Schools have to improve the lives of children.

That's why I put them in the Conservative election manifesto in 2001, as shadow education secretary. And now free schools score some of the very highest results at GCSE.

The range of reforms which we put in place are leading to improved outcomes for young people. 1.9 million more children are being taught in schools that are good or outstanding.

The attainment gap is shrinking at primary and secondary school.

And England is improving internationally. The job is not yet done, but we are making excellent progress, and enormous credit is due to the teachers whose hard work has driven these improved outcomes.

Tertiary Review

On top of the firm foundation of a great primary and secondary education, and the reforms we are putting in place to introduce high quality T-levels we now need to ensure that options open to young people as they move into adulthood are more diverse, that the routes into further education and training are clearer, and that all options are fully accessible to everyone.

That is why I am today launching a major and wide-ranging review into post-18 education.

The review will be supported by an expert panel.

And I am delighted that Philip Augar has agreed to chair that panel.

It will focus on four key questions. How we ensure that tertiary education is accessible to everyone, from every background.

How our funding system provides value for money, both for students and taxpayers.

How we incentivise choice and competition right across the sector.

And finally, how we deliver the skills that we need as a country.

This is a review which, for the first time, looks at the whole post-18 education sector in the round, breaking down false boundaries between further and higher education, so we can create a system which is truly joined-up.

Universities – many of which provide technical as well as academic courses – will be considered alongside colleges, Institutes of Technology and apprenticeship providers.

There are huge success stories to be found right across the sector, at every level, and by taking a broad view, Philip and his expert panel will be able to make recommendations which help the sector to be even better in the future.

Student finance

Our universities are world-leaders and jewels in Britain's crown.

16 British universities are in the world's top 100, and four are in the top ten.

I want to know how we can build on that success, and at the same time ensure that people from all backgrounds share the benefits of university study. So the review will examine how we can give people from disadvantaged backgrounds an equal chance to succeed.

That includes how disadvantaged students and learners receive maintenance support, both from Government and universities and colleges.

But the review will also look more widely, and examine our whole system of student funding.

There are many aspects of the current system which work well.

Universities in England are now better funded than they have been for a generation.

And sharing the cost of university between taxpayers as a whole and the graduates who directly benefit from university study is a fair principle.

It has enabled us to lift the cap on the number of places – which was in effect a cap on aspiration – so universities can expand and so broaden access.

But I know that other aspects of the system are a cause for serious concern – not just for students themselves, but parents and grandparents too.

This is a concern which I share. The competitive market between universities which the system of variable tuition fees envisaged has simply not emerged.

All but a handful of universities charge the maximum possible fees for undergraduate courses.

Three-year courses remain the norm.

And the level of fees charged do not relate to the cost or quality of the course. We now have one of the most expensive systems of university tuition in the world.

We have already begun to take action to address some of these concerns.

We scrapped the increase in fees that was due this year, and we have increased the amount graduates can earn before they start repaying their fees to £25,000.

The review will now look at the whole question of how students and graduates contribute to the cost of their studies including the level, terms and duration of their contribution.

Our goal is a funding system which provides value for money for graduates and taxpayers, so the principle that students as well as taxpayers should contribute to the cost of their studies is an important one.

I believe – as do most people, including students – that those who benefit directly from higher education should contribute directly towards the cost of it. That is only fair.

The alternative – shifting the whole burden of university tuition onto the shoulders of taxpayers as a whole – would have three consequences.

First, it would inevitably mean tax increases for the majority of people who did not go to university, and who on average earn less than those who did. Second, it would mean our universities competing with schools and hospitals for scarce resources, which in the past meant they lost out, putting their international pre-eminence at risk.

And third, it would mean the necessary re-introduction of a cap on numbers, with the Treasury regulating the number of places an institution could offer, and preventing the expansion which has driven wider access in recent years.

That is not my idea of a fair or progressive system.

Diversity and choice

And Philip and his colleagues will also look beyond universities, to examine choice and competition right across the sector and recommend practical solutions.

This will build on reforms which are already in train to increase the options which are available across further and higher education.

Over the last few years, reforms to technical education have improved every aspect of the offer available to young people. We now have higher standards for apprenticeships and vocational courses.

T-levels are on the way, which will provide a high-quality, technical alternative to A-levels.

A new network of Institutes of Technology will specialise in the advanced technical skills our economy needs.

This review will now identify how we can help young people make more effective choices between these different options. That could include giving young people better guidance about the earning potential of different jobs and what different qualifications are needed to get them, so they can make more informed decisions about their futures.

But this isn't just about young people.

Retraining throughout the course of your career, to change jobs or gain promotion, will only become more necessary as new technologies have an impact on our economy.

We need to support flexible life-long learning, including part-time and distance learning – something which the current funding system does not always make easy.

So by focusing on these four key priorities, making tertiary education accessible to all, promoting choice and competition in the sector, delivering the skills our economy needs, and getting value for money for students and taxpayers we can give every young person access to an education that suits their skills and aspirations.

One which opens up possibilities for their future and helps them into a rewarding career.

Conclusion

Almost thirty years ago, when I was in charge of that local education authority, an incoming Conservative Prime Minister, who like me went to a state school said that the great task of the coming decade should be to 'make the whole of this country a genuinely classless society'.

Eighteen months ago, when I became Prime Minister, I spoke of my desire to make Britain a Great Meritocracy. Today, our ambition for the Britain we will build outside the EU must be just as great.

And it must be matched with a determination to turn that ambition into reality.

Because by voting to leave the EU in 2016, millions of people across this country were not just choosing to leave the European Union they were sending a clear message about how our society and our economy works – or rather doesn't work – in too many communities.

If we are truly to make good on the instruction of the referendum, we need to reconnect everyone in our society to a sense of fairness and opportunity.

We need to make Britain a country where everyone can go as far as their talents will take them and no one is held back by their background or class.

Where education is the key to opening up opportunity for everyone. The vision I have for the Britain we will build is of a country which is fit for the future, delivered through bold social and economic reform.

That is why we are building an education system which unlocks everyone's talents, and gives them the skills they need to go as far as their hard work will take them.

It's why we support the market economy and back entrepreneurs and wealth creators – but step in when businesses don't play by the rules.

And it is why we are making the UK the very best place in the world to start and grow a high-tech business – while also making sure that new technologies work for everyone in society.

If we get it right, we can build a country that truly works for everyone.

A country where your background does not define your future, and class distinctions are a thing of the past. Where a boy from a working class home can become a High Court judge, thanks to a great state education.

And where a girl from a private school can start a software business, thanks to a first-class technical education.

That is my vision for a fairer society and how we will deliver it.

A society where good, rewarding work is available for everyone. An economy with the skills it needs to succeed. Britain as the Great Meritocracy, a country that respects hard work, rewards effort and industry, where a happy and fulfilled life is within everyone's grasp.