

Attorney General speech at the Cambridge International Symposium on Economic Crime

Good morning everyone.

I would like to start by thanking Professor Rider and his team for their work in coordinating such an impressive programme for the week, which is an especially remarkable achievement given the ongoing challenges of the pandemic. I have no doubt that it is already provoking some lively debate and discussion.

I would also like to extend particular thanks to the organisers for their patience and flexibility in accommodating my own diary – and my virtual attendance – in Parliament's first week back following the Summer Recess.

The depth and breadth of this year's programme and the calibre of its participants – coupled with the Symposium's almost 40 year history – is a testament to the esteem with which the event is held and the truly unique forum it provides for understanding and addressing the enduring and evolving threat we face from economic crime.

As Attorney General, I am one of the Law Officers for England and Wales, and part of my role includes superintending the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and Serious Fraud Office (SFO) – both of which are critical to the UK's operational response to economic crime – as well as working closely with my ministerial colleagues from across government in shaping our response to this pervasive threat.

And despite the unprecedented challenges of Covid-19 – which has itself impacted upon the extent and nature of economic crime – effectively addressing this threat continues to be one of the UK Government's top priorities.

The overarching theme of this year's Symposium is “who pays and who should pay?” for economic crime and the responses to the two parts of this question – first, who is actually harmed and pays for economic crime, and second, who should be held more accountable – have provided important guardrails in shaping the UK government's own response to the economic crime threat.

Echoing and building upon some of the comments that my colleague John Glen MP, Economic Secretary to the Treasury and City Minister, made earlier in the week, I would like to spend some time today talking about this response – as well as the response of the two prosecuting agencies that I superintend.

Firstly though, I would like to touch upon the question of who pays for economic crime and say a little more about the nature of the threat we are facing.

The economic crime threat

At the risk of oversimplifying, the question of “who pays?” for economic crime can be answered quite succinctly: we all pay.

Its impacts can be seen at every level: individuals, communities, organisations and businesses, governments, our societies and economies-at-large.

Most often it is our most vulnerable citizens who are targeted for exploitation and are most profoundly harmed. While much economic crime is often clandestine in nature, which in turn makes detection and measurement challenging, it is also clear that that these impacts are considerable.

For example, fraud is the most common crime in the UK, making up 40% of all crime against individuals, and the telephone-operated Crime Survey for England and Wales estimates that there were 4.6 million fraud offences in the year ending March 2021 – a 24% increase compared with the year ending March 2019.

And the human and financial costs of these crimes cannot be understated.

Innocent people can be left with unaffordable personal losses which have lasting and devastating impacts on their mental health, the viability of businesses can be damaged as consumer and investor confidence is undermined, and there can be significant losses to the public purse.

Indeed, the Home Office estimates that the social and economic cost of fraud in England and Wales to individuals is £4.7 billion per year, and that the social and economic cost of organised fraud against businesses and the public sector in the UK is £5.9 billion.

Nor should we forget that economic crime like fraud can fuel serious and organised crime which – as well as putting drugs and firearms on our streets and putting some of our most vulnerable citizens at risk – is estimated to cost the UK £37 billion a year.

We also know that the economic crime threat is ever-changing and evolving, with criminals standing ready to exploit every available opportunity.

The Covid-19 pandemic has provided a case in point, where we have seen a shift in how people and businesses work, and clear evidence of economic criminals quickly adapting to these new circumstances.

For example, spurred by Covid-19, we have seen evidence of increased use of cryptoassets in money laundering across a range of serious crime types.

In regards to fraud, behavioural changes – such as increased online shopping and banking as a result of home working – has created new opportunities for criminals to commit fraud and to extend their victim base, and enabled fraud to be more easily be committed at scale.

And in relation to public sector fraud, we are increasingly alive to the risk

of fraudsters targeting the over 175 public sector schemes the UK announced to support our citizens and businesses through the pandemic.

While this provides a partial snapshot of the scale of the economic crime threat it is indicative of the pressing need for us all to do all we can to ensure there is no safe space for those wishing to commit these crimes.

The UK government response

This brings me to the question of “who should pay?” for economic crime.

While it is ultimately economic criminals themselves who must be held to account for their actions, it is the whole system working together – the government, the regulatory bodies, corporates and financial institutions, and law enforcement and other operational partners – that should be responsible for combatting the threat.

And I am pleased to say that this whole-system approach is at the heart of the UK Government’s response to economic crime.

In July 2019, the UK Government and UK Finance published its [Economic Crime Plan 2019-22](#) which represented a true step change in our response.

Recognising the need for a multi-agency approach from across the public and private sectors, it set out the public and private sectors’ joint response to economic crime across seven priority areas and 52 concrete actions.

I am pleased to say that despite the unparalleled challenges of the past year, and supported by robust cross-sectoral governance arrangements, we are seeing this approach reap dividends.

In May of this year, the UK Government and UK Finance published a joint [Statement of Progress](#) against the Economic Crime Plan, covering the period from its launch in July 2019 to February 2021.

It shows that the public-private partnership is delivering real progress on several fronts – with 20 of the 52 original actions in the Plan being delivered and clear plans in place to deliver the remaining actions.

To give a flavour of some of our achievements, we have improved our understanding of the threat, including through the recent publication of the UK’s third National Risk Assessment of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing.

We have shared information better shared across the system, including through the National Economic Crime Centre’s public-private “Fusion Cell” – driving decisive action to identify, disrupt, and arrest fraudsters and money launderers.

We have addressed vulnerabilities in the system, updating our anti-money laundering requirements for firms.

Our efforts to improve corporate transparency have progressed, with proposals

on reforming Companies House published in September last year.

Our reforms to the Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs) regime similarly continue and we have commenced IT transformation and dedicated staffing uplifts.

And we have also invested in law enforcement, with an extra £63m for the Home Office to drive our efforts to fight economic crime and crack down on fraud.

And building on these achievements, the Statement of Progress sets out seven actions – focused on joint public and private delivery over the remainder of the Plan – that further steps up our level of ambition. These are:

- designing and deliver a comprehensive Fraud Action Plan
- bolstering public private operational action to tackle known vulnerabilities
- improving the whole system response to economic crime
- continuing to deliver SARs reform
- finalising our efforts to develop Sustainable Resourcing Model to support economic crime reform, including continuing our work to develop an Economic Crime Levy
- developing legislative proposals to tackle fraud, money laundering, seize more criminal assets, and to strengthen corporate transparency; and *using our G7 Presidency this year to strengthen the international response to illicit finance and anti-corruption

I would also add that reflecting our strong focus on fraud, the UK Government's recent [Beating Crime Plan](#), published in July of this year, reiterates our commitment to taking a more systematic approach to addressing this prevalent threat.

In short then, we are capitalising on the benefits of the whole system approach – and while we still have much to do to ensure that the UK remains a transparent, safe, and open place for global business, we are making significant progress.

The critical work of the prosecutors

Finally, I would like to say a little more about the important work of the two prosecuting agencies that I superintend – the CPS and the SFO – and their role in our efforts to tackle economic crime.

On the one hand, I would emphasise that at both a strategic and operational level, both agencies have – and continue to be – active contributors to the Government's overarching approach to economic crime that I have discussed today.

For example, as part of our efforts to prioritise fraud through the design and delivery of a comprehensive Fraud Action Plan, we are already drawing on the specialist knowledge and expertise of the SFO to deliver improvements in our approach intelligence, enforcement, and victim safeguarding.

On the other hand, the CPS and the SFO play a significant role in holding

those most directly responsible for economic crime – the individuals and companies who engage in wrongdoing – to account for their actions.

And despite the wide-ranging impacts of Covid-19, I am pleased to say that both agencies continue to deliver real results.

In 2020-21 for example, the SFO convicted four individuals, opened eight new criminal investigations, and charged 20 individuals and corporates.

It also continued to show the effectiveness of Deferred Prosecution Agreements (DPAs) in tackling corporate wrongdoing, securing two DPAs in 2020-21 that resulted in over £47m in fines, penalties, and costs.

Alongside these DPAs, the SFO's Proceeds of Crime Division secured over £7.4m in new financial orders made against criminals convicted in SFO cases, and received payments relating to outstanding orders of more than £6.9m.

Importantly, the SFO continued to return a significant amount of the money it recovers from criminals to victims, recovering more than £220,000 last year, and I am delighted to say such successes continue in 2021-22.

In April of this year, following a guilty plea, the SFO secured a conviction against GPT Special Project Management Ltd for corruption, which included over £30m in confiscations, fines, and costs.

Furthermore, in July 2021, it entered into a DPA with Amec Foster Wheeler Limited. Under the terms of the DPA, the company will pay a financial penalty and costs amounting to £103m in the UK, which forms part of a US\$177m global settlement – and which also includes a compensation to the people of Nigeria of more than £210,000. This is a significant achievement not only for the SFO, but also for the UK and for international law enforcement cooperation.

The CPS is similarly working hard to fight economic crime, with its Specialist Fraud Division ensuring it devotes the right skills and resources to prosecuting complex and serious fraud and economic crime.

In 2019-20, the CPS prosecuted over 10,000 fraud and forgery offences – which includes money laundering, bribery, and corruption – with a conviction rate of 86.4%.

Meanwhile, the CPS's Proceeds of Crime Division continued to pursue cash and assets that defendants have gained through illegal activity, taking more than £100m from criminals' ill-gotten gains in 2019-20.

And this work continues. For example, just last month the CPS secured a £1.3m Conviction Order against an ex-Cambridge academic who fraudulently claimed £2.5m in Government grants.

And reflecting the CPS's commitment to tackling the economic crime threat, it published its first ever [economic crime strategy](#) in March of this year to help ensure it keeps pace with the constantly changing nature of crime.

The strategy provides a high-level vision of where the CPS want to be in

relation to economic crime by 2025, allowing it the flexibility to respond and adapt to new and emerging threats as well matching its level of ambition with the rest of the system – including government and law enforcement.

And importantly, the Strategy also includes a clear commitment to depriving criminals of their illicit gains and compensating victims where possible.

While just a brief summary, I hope this gives you all a sense of the essential role of the CPS and SFO in our fight against economic crime.

To conclude, I will briefly return to the guiding theme of this year's Symposium – “who pays and who should pay?” for economic crime.

These are of course fraught, complex questions with much more nuanced answers than I have been able to present today.

However, I think we can all agree that: first, we all pay the costs of economic crime and that these costs are most keenly felt by the most vulnerable in our societies; and second, that while we must hold criminal to account for their actions, we all bear a responsibility – working together in lockstep rather than silos – to address the continuing threat.

[MHRA statement on booster doses of Pfizer and AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines](#)

News story

It will be for the JVICI to advise on whether booster jabs will be given and if so, which vaccines should be used.



Dr June Raine, MHRA Chief Executive said:

We are committed to getting safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines to the UK public. This means ensuring that existing COVID-19 vaccines can continue to be used in the most effective way possible.

We know that a person's immunity may decline over time after their first vaccine course. I am pleased to confirm that the COVID-19 vaccines made by Pfizer and AstraZeneca can be used as safe and effective booster doses. This is an important regulatory change as it gives further options for the vaccination programme, which has saved thousands of lives so far. It will now be for the JCVI to advise on whether booster jabs will be given and if so, which vaccines should be used.

We have in place a comprehensive safety surveillance strategy for monitoring the safety of all UK-approved COVID-19 vaccines and this surveillance will include booster jabs.

Background

- The current supply of the COVID-19 vaccines made by Pfizer and AstraZeneca has been authorised on an emergency use basis by the MHRA under Regulation 174 of the Human Medicine Regulations 2012 and the changes today have been made to the Regulation 174 Product Information only. Both vaccines are also authorised under Conditional Marketing Authorisations (CMAs) but changes to these would follow a different procedure. Vaccines covered by CMAs can also be used as part of a deployment programme via "off-label" use under a prescriber's direction.
- This regulatory decision follows a careful review of available data on safety and effectiveness of booster or supplementary vaccine doses by the MHRA and the independent [Commission on Human Medicines](#) (CHM), which advises the government.
- For more information, please see the product information: [AstraZeneca vaccine](#), [Pfizer vaccine](#)

Published 9 September 2021

[Cutting global emissions is essential](#)

to keeping 1.5 degrees alive

Prime Ministers, Presidents, Secretary-General Guterres, US Special Envoy Kerry, Friends, it is an absolute pleasure to join you all today.

And I want to start by thanking President Fernandez and indeed everyone who has been involved in organising this incredibly important dialogue today.

We have all acknowledged in the remarks we have made is that our planet absolutely at a pivotal moment.

Climate change is affecting every region on earth.

That was the very clear message, the wake-up call, from the IPCC in their report on the latest climate science.

But of course we know, and as we have heard in the passionate speeches today, that Latin America and the Caribbean are particularly vulnerable.

And this was illustrated starkly by the recent report by the World Meteorological Organisation.

Which shows the impact of climate change is already having on this region and is compounding the effects of Covid-19, which has hit this area so hard.

I have visited a number of countries in the region and I have seen myself and I have witnessed the impact of extreme weather first hand in places like Antigua and Barbuda, which is still recovering from the ravages of Hurricane Irma.

But in your region and indeed around the world, we know that these effects will get much much worse unless we collectively act now.

And we also know that time is running out, time is running out to avoid the most severe effects of climate change and it is running out fast.

And that was another clear message from the recent IPCC report that we must act immediately to keep alive the goal enshrined in the Paris Agreement to try and limit the rise in global temperature to 1.5 degrees centigrade.

So as many of you have made clear, the time for talking is behind us.

What we need now is action.

Action to drive down global emissions.

Action to protect people and nature from the effects of climate change.

And action to seize the benefits on offer from the move to green resilient economies.

We must make sure that COP26 is the moment that every country and ever part

of society embraces their responsibility to protect our planet so that we can indeed, keep the 1.5 degree within reach, keep 1.5 alive, as I have heard many of you say very passionately.

And of course, this requires us all to act. It requires, government, business, finance and civil society. We all have a part to play.

And we all need to recognise the relationship between climate, biodiversity, economics and livelihoods is intertwined.

We know that a changing climate contributes to biodiversity loss, as habitats are threatened.

Biodiversity loss in turn contributes to climate change, as carbon sinks are destroyed.

And our treatment of nature presents very grave dangers and risks to our economies and livelihoods, as was laid bare by the Dasgupta Review on the economics of biodiversity which was published earlier this year.

Likewise, unchecked climate change is going to have a catastrophic economic impact.

The cost of inaction is far far greater than the cost of action and that is something all of us need to understand.

Indeed, back in year 2006, the Stern Review, put together with our dear colleague and friend, Lord Nick Stern, estimated that failure to act on climate could see up to 20 percent of global GDP wiped out each year.

By contrast, the move to clean economies presents enormous opportunities.

For example, we know that solar and wind power are now cheaper than new coal and gas in most of the world.

And renewables investments can create more jobs than their fossil fuel equivalents.

So, as well as acting on these trends, we ask businesses and financial institutions to make robust commitments to reach net zero emissions by 2050, by signing up to the United Nations Race to Zero campaign, or indeed signing up to the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero, which currently has almost 90 trillion dollars of assets signed up to net zero.

We also ask that businesses commit to removing deforestation from their supply chains, and that financial institutions commit to zero deforestation by 2025.

And, of course, also incredibly important, we urge governments to take urgent action.

To reduce emissions and tackle deforestation, working across different ministries, recognising that climate is not a niche matter just for

environment ministers, but something that affects every single part of government.

This has to be a unified effort from every part of every government.

Now, a number of countries in this region have made net zero commitments already, and ambitious or NDCs, and I commend them for it.

I would just say to those colleagues in those countries that have not done so, I would urge you to please come forward ahead of the UNFCCC deadline of 12 October.

And of course, we also need, importantly, the biggest emitters, the G20 nations, which have moderately done so, to come forward with their own ambitious commitments to cut emissions in the near term, but also make commitments to net zero by the middle of the century.

We know that this report by the UNFCCC is going to be vitally important because it will allow all NDCs to be included in this update since this report for COP26.

So, the world will be able to see precisely where we are in terms of commitments we have made and what the gaps are in front of us.

And that's why we have to arrive at COP26 with these firm commitments on the table.

And we know that the process of creating an NDC can be the process of creating an NDC can establish climate as a cross-government issue, and help countries to seize the benefits of the green economy.

We must also take action on adaptation, to protect people and nature from the effects of climate change.

And this is of particular importance in this region, as we have just heard from many of friends, given its vulnerability.

And so we are asking every country to arrive in Glasgow having set out their adaptation priorities and of course as a number of leaders have noted at this event, we also want the developed nations and donor countries to deliver on their commitments when it comes to finance support to developing countries.

As I say, the time for talking is behind us.

But by taking action now, we can improve lives and livelihoods, ensuring a just transition.

So, I say to you friends, let's all of us, together, make COP26 the moment we put the world on track to protect people, nature and the planet, and, really importantly, keep 1.5 degrees alive.

Thank you.

Education Secretary speech at Universities UK Annual Conference

Steve, thank you ever so much for that introduction can just start off by saying an enormous thank you to Julia, who over the last two years we worked so closely with and I can assure you that your past chairman was always incredibly firm and yet tenacious, but always incredibly polite in terms of the way she fought for the sector and put the interest of the sector at the heart of government. I'm really looking forward, Steve, to working closely with you and I know you will take that same approach, recognising that working together we can achieve so much more

I am delighted to be joining you today.

When we gathered this time last year, we were very much in the grip of the pandemic, vaccines were still in development, and none of us could clearly see when we would be able to return to some form of normality.

Back then I began by thanking you for the incredible leadership and resourcefulness you had shown throughout the pandemic.

It is no less true today than it was then, and I am no less grateful for everything you have done, and that includes the universities throughout the United Kingdom, not just England, to keep your students learning throughout the past 18 months at incredibly difficult times.

Now we start a new academic year with the hope that we have the worst of the disruption behind us.

I would like to thank you especially for the preparations you have put in place to welcome a record number of new students in a few weeks' time.

More than 230,000 18-year-olds in England have had their university places confirmed. What's more, the number of applications that were made by young people from a disadvantaged background were up 9% on last year. This will have a major impact on our ambition to level up the country. It also reflects the hard work by students in exceptional circumstances.

Still, I know this year's bumper influx, however welcome, has been testing your administration systems to the full.

But equally I know that you are just as determined as I am that we cannot put young lives on hold, especially when so many have already paid a very high price for Covid.

This is why I have been working so hard... and I know from conversations I've had with many of you here today, that you've been working equally hard... to

make sure that all our young people can still look forward to seeing all their hopes for the future start to become a reality.

And I am, of course, delighted that there are currently two important Bills for the higher education sector in Parliament, on Skills and on Free Speech, which we will be continuing to take forward over the coming months. One other key policy reform is post-qualification admissions, which will help us to address a long-standing unfairness in our university admissions system.

We need a simpler and fairer admissions system, because we know the current one can work against the interests of some students, especially high achieving disadvantaged students, and drives unwelcome behaviours such as unconditional offers.

The last two years have emphasised the importance of delivering on our plans for PQA – not only to stabilise the system but to empower students to have the very best opportunities to succeed.

That is why I am determined to accelerate our plans to bring forward this important reform. We've been engaging the devolved administrations closely on our plans, and I was pleased to see that they endorsed our consultation. We will continue to work with them as we move forward, and I'm also keen to continue working with Universities UK, exam boards and school leaders on this policy.

By working together, we can make this important change, the main beneficiary of who, will be students. Alongside this, I'm pleased to say that we will shortly be appointing a new Director of Fair Access and Participation to the Office for Students. I'd like to see our access regime re-centred on the principles of equality of opportunity and high standards, and to see higher education providers working in partnership with schools to drive up attainment.

We need to recognise that just sending kids with low academic achievement into universities isn't going to magically change them into highly mobile graduates – indeed, it's more likely to lead them to failure and poor outcomes.

And that there is no substitute for the hard grind of driving up standards.

Since I took on the job of Education Secretary, I've been on a mission to bring in greater fairness and wider choice in the post-16 landscape and I am very glad to say that we have made huge progress over the last two years.

We are entering a new era, one of greater choice and increased opportunities. This is critical not only to level up opportunity across society, it'll be critical as we recover from the pandemic and start to build back better.

Although 50% of young people now go to university that still leaves 50% who do not.

Thanks to our reforms, those 50% now have more options than they ever did before, options that can lead to a well-paid job and satisfying career.

Five years after completion, the average Higher Apprentice earns more than the average graduate. T Levels, apprenticeships, Institutes of Technology are all expanding throughout the country. They are being developed hand in glove with employers and will be geared to developing the skills the country needs as we build our recovery.

Universities are fundamental to this mission. Take Northumbria University, where you are today, it's one of the leading universities in Europe for product design. How do we enhance that, how to we grow it how do we make sure that where universities are strong? We invest, we push them forward, and able to lead the world, but also drive this country forward

I believe more universities should be more willing to carve out expertise in more technical fields, excelling on a different set of axes to those used by the traditional league tables. Too often, this can be interpreted as meaning 'everyone must have prizes', or that all universities and courses are equal.

This is not what I mean: Professor David Phoenix's Social Mobility Index demonstrates that some universities, such as my old university of Bradford, Aston and Imperial College and others, perform particularly strongly at transforming students from disadvantaged backgrounds into highly employable graduates.

A real-world focus is not about lowering aspirations, but achieving excellence through a focus on STEM, applied research, close links with employers and a ruthless focus on employability.

The Prime Minister's ground-breaking Lifelong Loan Entitlement will help enable this. It is going to change the way we prepare people for adult life, and especially their working lives. It will address the need to future-proof training and skills so that everyone can study and train in ways that suit them.

The loan entitlement will make it easier for students to access courses and to study in a modular way, or to commit to blocks of study as they do now at higher technical and degree levels, regardless of whether they are provided in colleges or provided in universities. They can fit learning around work, or their family or whatever personal circumstances they may have. It is, in a sense, a season ticket to further and higher education that will last for many academic years.

We've recently invited universities and further education colleges to bid for a share of £2 million in funding to create new short courses across five important subject areas which are STEM, healthcare, digital innovation, education, and supporting Net Zero.

Earlier this year we launched a new £18 million fund to help providers of Higher Technical Qualifications invest in equipment and training to meet the growing demand for skills at this level across a number of sectors including digital, construction, health and science.

We're also going to be consulting on the detail and scope of the Lifelong

Loan Entitlement this year, and in the meantime, we will continue to work closely with you and your colleagues in the college sector.

Whether they opt for modules, a higher technical qualification, or a three-year degree, I think all of us would agree that every student is entitled to expect a high-quality, rich learning experience.

As they plan their futures, they will be asking themselves how best they can get it... is the course the right for them? Is the course the thing that will be a good investment for them and their future?

Above all students want the university experience to be the one they worked so hard for before Covid came along. We've all missed over the last few years, and students, I think they've missed the life on campus the creative buzz they get, the thrill of discovering new friends, new ideas, new ways of seeing the world.

But perhaps what they are craving most of all at the moment is a return to normality and they'll be making a beeline for the institutions that are quickest off the mark in delivering this.

We know from this year's Student Academic Experience Survey, that many of them haven't been getting it.

This has obviously been coloured by the restrictions that we had to impose because of Covid but the students who responded to this survey have still sent a very clear message.

The survey shows that in-person teaching is now one of the top three areas singled out for improvement by students.

This is something we cannot ignore. While the switch to online teaching was a necessary and vital way of keeping young people learning in as safe a way as possible, we have now moved on and students quite rightly expect that they can study in person alongside other students.

Imagine trying to make sense of the subtleties of interpreting Chekov for the stage or carrying out complex molecular biology techniques over Zoom. I for one would need the full benefit of that in-person, world-class teaching that you and your members can rightly be so proud of.

Obviously, I am not saying that you relax all those health measures which are there to keep people as safe as possible and minimise the risk of COVID transmission.

What I do want to make clear is that I do not expect to see online learning used as a cost-cutting measure. If there's a genuine benefit to using technology, then it should be done – and Sir Michael Barber's Digital Teaching and Learning Review sets out some of the opportunities. But that is not an excuse to not also deliver high quality face-to-face teaching.

And let's face it, in this new era of choice students don't have to settle for poor value.

I should at this point congratulate all of those universities, so many of them that have quickly and swiftly pivoted back from pandemic response to resume face-to-face teaching. And I know the overwhelming majority of you have done that.

This is not just expedient or sensible, it will help maintain the United Kingdom's reputation for exceptionally high quality.

How else can we guarantee that students get the best possible experience from their studies, one that prepares them for adult life and which also represents good value for money?

In one word, it is quality.

Quality is what sets our universities apart from the rest of world's.

Quality is what will deliver a meaningful qualification that offers the right skills and preparation for a working life. And quality is what will justify the huge investment that students are making to study.

But quality covers more than teaching. Quality extends to the value of the degree. You represent the best of the best but to keep that reputation for excellence, you must be vigilant in showing that the degrees awarded to students are a reliable indicator of academic achievement.

Students and employers need to know that a degree means something. And not all degrees are created equal.

There have been too many instances where pockets of low quality have undermined the teaching or value for money that students and taxpayers rightly expect.

Lowering the bar for certain groups of students serves no one. It is patronising to expect less from some students under the guise of supporting them. Effective academic writing requires good spelling, punctuation and grammar from every student.

It is so disappointing to see some in the field of higher education cling to the myth that the quality of a course or degree makes no difference to a student's outcomes.

While it may be comforting for some institutions, what it is actually saying is that they don't believe in education.

It is also easily disproved.

Take Aston University, for example, where over 40% of entrants come from the most deprived neighbourhoods – nearly twice the average in England and yet it achieves a 96% continuation rate – streets ahead of other comparable institutions and on a par with many of the Russell Group.

There are many other universities, both old and new, that are similarly doing great work.

But at the same time, at 25 higher education institutions, fewer than half the students who begin a degree will go on to graduate employment or further study.

As I have said before, this is simply unacceptable. This represents a shocking waste of potential as well as a heart-breaking failure in someone's hopes and dreams.

The Office for Students have a key role to play in raising quality and standards. They will take action where quality is low. And I am clear that, in the future, students recruited on to such courses should not be able to be counted against a university's access targets for access.

To address some other important matters, I'd first like to thank the many universities who have already signed up to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism. I am very pleased that over 80 universities have signed up already, up from about 30 a year ago.

And for those who have not yet done so, I'd ask you to reconsider and to do so quickly. The dreadful spike in antisemitic incidents on campus earlier this year demonstrates just how important this is – and it goes without saying that there is simply no excuse for antisemitism or any other forms of racism anywhere but least of all in a university.

More broadly, although our universities are, in the main, fantastic communities, we would all admit that, like anywhere in society, they are not perfect. Whether it is the antisemitic incidents I've just mentioned, the use of non-disclosure agreements to silence victims of sexual assault, or increasingly casualised workforce or inadequate teaching provision for disabled students, there are genuine injustices which we should strive to put right.

I would at this point like to thank UUK for their incredibly helpful guidance in this area. Supporting the sector to learn from the best and constantly raise the bar.

Improving these matters would command strong support from all walks of life. Yet too often, some universities seem more interested in pursuing a divisive agenda involving cancelling national heroes, debating about statues, anonymous reporting schemes for so-called micro-aggressions and politicising their curricula. Vice-chancellors who allow these initiatives to take place in their name must understand that they do nothing but undermine public confidence, widen divisions, and damage the sector.

I call on you to help bring our nation together, instead of driving our nation apart. Rather than manufacturing offences from the past, let us instead come together to tackle injustice and promote equality for the students and staff on today.

One area that I believe universities can make real and measurable improvements, is to get rid of the ball and chain of bureaucracy. Some of you may have heard me talk of this before, but I still believe we have some way

further to go.

The Augar review concluded that the amount spent on teaching seemed low, while around £1,000 was spent per student on corporate activities and around £500 per student on marketing.

I remained concerned that the sector isn't doing enough to shift more of its income towards direct activity that improves learning outcomes or vital services like mental health support, and less on its own administration.

As recipients of tens of billions of pounds of public money, universities have a duty to be careful stewards of taxpayers' money. Our world reputation is built on the confidence we have in our academics, in their passion, their drive and their commitment to the pursuit of knowledge. We need to free them to do what they do best.

And I do recognise that we in Government must also play our part. My department is working closely with the Office for Students on our shared agenda to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy, and to ensure the higher education regulatory system is clearer, more effective and more accountable and crucially less bureaucratic.

I know that since the OfS's announcement on reducing bureaucracy on last September, the sector has particularly welcomed its more streamlined communications and guidance, and the greater clarity on timelines for upcoming announcements, and of course the increased engagement.

But clearly there is so much more we need to do on the side of Government, so while I'm asking you to do more, I also recognise that we need to do more to support you.

I have spent a lot of time today talking about quality. I know that in many respects I am preaching to the choir... You all know what good looks like. But we can never ease up on trying to make good, better, and better excellent.

I began by saying that we are entering a new era of opportunity and choice. It is such an exciting prospect not just for students today who are even now preparing to make their way to your doors, some for the very first time, but for those who are still at school and dreaming of what their lives might look like.

I am enormously proud that we are working together to guarantee that those dreams of so many young people are going to be realised, and that working together we are truly, truly going to unleash their full potential.

Thank you.

Street lamps and bus shelters to help boost 5G roll out in £4 million trial

Mobile network operators will get easier access to lampposts, bus shelters and other street furniture to speed up the roll out of next-generation, ultrafast 5G technology under a new government trial.

A £4 million competition launched today will explore ways to make it simpler and quicker for mobile companies to use publicly-owned buildings and curbside infrastructure – such as CCTV poles and traffic signals – to host 5G radio equipment.

Street furniture and buildings can be used to host 5G network equipment more cheaply, quickly and with less visual impact compared with traditional phone masts. However, network operators often find it difficult to acquire the information needed to verify that a structure is suitable, such as its location, physical dimensions, proximity to the street or access to a power source.

In response, the government will invest in piloting the latest innovations in digital asset management platforms. This will enable local councils to more easily share data mobile companies need to accelerate their roll out plans and deliver the revolutionary benefits of 5G to people and businesses.

Digital Infrastructure Minister Matt Warman said:

The lampposts lining our streets have huge potential to accelerate the roll out of 5G and reduce the need to build new masts, but right now getting access to this infrastructure can be tricky.

That's why we are investing millions to help local councils and mobile companies work together more effectively to bring people the incredible benefits of faster connectivity as we level up the UK.

Hamish MacLeod, Mobile UK, said:

Mobile networks are critical to the UK's economic recovery yet deploying infrastructure on public assets has often proved difficult.

We welcome this competition aimed at breaking down these barriers and accelerating investment in 5G by piloting new digital platforms that bring together public bodies and mobile operators to make public-owned infrastructure more easily accessible.

We are committed to working closely with the DCMS and Local Authorities on this project.

5G is the next generation of mobile internet connection and offers download speeds up to 100 times that of 4G, making mobile phones much faster and able to process ever larger amounts of data. But it is also expected to broaden the role that mobile technology plays in wider society by enabling thousands more 'smart' devices on the street which connect to the internet and each other.

This will pave the way for new virtual and augmented reality services and help drive the take-up of new innovations such as autonomous cars and remote healthcare technologies. And it could transform the way public services are delivered – such as energy and transport – by allowing greater real-time monitoring and responsiveness in order to reduce waste, pollution or congestion.

The [Digital Connectivity Infrastructure Accelerator \(DCIA\) project](#) is the latest in a number of measures announced by the government to level up the UK by busting the barriers holding back the roll out of lightning-fast digital connectivity, such as plans to trial running fibre broadband cables through drinking water pipes [announced](#) last month.

The government is also considering giving broadband firms access to more than a million kilometres of underground utility ducts to boost the rollout of full fibre broadband – including electricity, gas and sewer networks – and will soon respond to a [consultation](#) consultation on changing regulations to make infrastructure sharing easier.

The deadline for applications to the competition is 18 November.

ENDS

Notes to editors

- Local and regional authorities are encouraged to form partnerships with industry to submit joint proposals for pilot project funds that will test the use of digital asset management platforms in different locations across the UK. On completion of the project, the government's aim is to support local authorities on the nationwide adoption of digital asset management platforms.□
- The DCIA project was a collaborative bid between DCMS and the Department for Transport (DfT) as part of the Shared Outcomes Fund. Spending Round 2019 announced £200 million for the Shared Outcomes Fund to fund pilot projects to test innovative ways of working across the public sector, with an emphasis on thorough plans for evaluation. The first round of the Shared Outcomes Fund is funding a wide range of projects that will run between 2020-21 and 2022-23. [Spending Review 2020](#) announced a further £200 million would be made available for a second round of the Shared Outcomes Fund.