

Sarah Champion speech at the London School of Economics

Sarah Champion MP,
Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Women and Equalities,
speaking at the London School of Economics today, said:

*****CHECK AGAINST
DELIVERY*****

It's such an honour to
be here at the LSE.

Founded by Beatrice
Webb, a visionary woman who paved the way for the Beveridge report, and who
arguably drew up the blueprint for what would later become the welfare state
and the birth of our NHS.

I would like to thank
the LSE Department for Economics as well as the Equality and Diversity
Taskforce, for hosting this important event here today ahead of the Spring
Budget next week.

It is great to see so
many senior female economists and academics here. Too often women's voices on
the economy are ignored or take a back seat.

Just over a year ago,
the Fawcett society analysed newspaper coverage of the economy and found that
over 80% of those quoted or referenced were men, and over 80% of articles
were
imbalanced in favour of men.

From that I take two
things:

One, that the voices of
women, like many of you here today, with relevant expertise and experience,
are
rarely given a platform – which reinforces the public perception that being
an
expert on the economy is a male role.

Secondly, the economy is
an area where there have been significant negative impacts on women since
2010.

From cuts to tax credits
to the crisis in social care budgets – it is women who have consistently been
hit hardest, yet it is our voices that are continuously excluded.

This year, the Spring Budget is on the same day as International Women's Day – so the 8th March becomes a critical day both for women's rights and for the economy.

Labour are determined to ensure that we do not miss this opportunity to lay out our demands for women to be at the heart of economic decisions.

For women's voices, perspectives and interests to be properly understood, considered and heard.

As of the last autumn statement, 86% of the net gains to the Treasury through tax and benefit changes since 2010 had come from women.

That figure is up on the previous year's autumn statement, in which the figure was 81%.

That is why, today, Labour are calling for a Spring Budget that works for women.

A budget that invests in jobs for women.

A budget that recognises and supports the services that women depend on.

A budget that advances women's equality and economic independence

At its heart, we expect a budget that works for women as it is a key opportunity for the advancement of gender equality.

This concept, often referred to as gender budgeting, now takes place in more than 40 countries around the world.

It was originally inspired by the early experiences of countries such as Australia, and then given further momentum by the United Nations commitment to gender budgeting in the Beijing platform for action.

The perceived assumption is often that budgets are neutral, that they benefit and impact on everyone equally, regardless of gender, ethnic background or disability.

We know this is not the case.

Women are particularly vulnerable to being hit harder by this Government policies, for a number of reasons.

First, social security payments make up a greater share of women's income than men's, as women still earn less in the labour market.

Women make greater use of public sector care services than men, because they have greater caring responsibilities.

Women also pay less direct tax than men, because they tend to earn less. Meaning that tax breaks for top earners disproportionately benefit men.

Finally, women are hit harder by this Government's policies, because a higher proportion of women are employed in the public sector, which is consistently under attack.

If we are to create a budget that works for women, these factors must be properly taken into account during the formative stages of policy making and budget setting. It needs to be done in a way that ensures that women are not disproportionately penalised, and that gender economic equality is advanced.

However, Gender inequality will not simply be addressed through gender budgeting.

Children aren't born with expectations about what is, or is not, appropriate for their future careers, or beliefs about what their work is worth.

The stereotypes we see embedded from such a young age [ultimately contribute to the inequalities we see in adult life](#), in the workplace and in the economy more widely.

This must change.

Violence against women, maternity discrimination, unequal pay and lack of access to decently paid, secure employment: all take an economic toll.

Gender inequality is economically inefficient. Gender equality is good for economic growth.

Janet Stotsky, who has researched the economics of gender since the mid 90's, recently led an International Monetary Fund survey. She has said simply that;

'gender budgeting is good budgeting'.

The imperative for a budget that works for women goes far beyond an economic one. Legal and international obligations on the Government are clear in the need to protect and advance women's economic equality.

The Equality Act 2010, introduced by Labour, enshrined in law the public sector equality duty which requires public authorities to have due regard of equality considerations when exercising their functions.

In section 149 of the Act, Labour placed the provision that any public body must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to "eliminate discrimination" and "advance equality of opportunity" for those with protected characteristics, which include gender and ethnicity.

Given that the legal and economic arguments are clear that budgets must work for women, why is it women who continually fair worst under this government?

My belief is it is a combination of outdated and intrinsically biased assumptions in accounting and policy, as well as a lack of transparency in how equality considerations are taken into account, have brought us to the point where the 86% figure I mentioned earlier is a reality.

Take, for example, the way investment and current expenditure are defined by the Treasury.

Currently, the wages of construction workers paid to build a school count as public investment. However, when government staffs the school to provide education, the wages of the teachers are not counted as investment expenditure, but as current expenditure.

The benefits produced by teachers accrue over the years, both to the children who have been educated, and to the wider economy. These are not just 'day to day' immediate benefits.

Feminist economists have long argued that the work force is a produced asset that requires investment of resources for it to be available on a daily basis.

In the example I just gave – both the wages of the teachers and the construction workers would be

defined as public investment.

Similarly, there is also an inherently skewed way that governments think about infrastructure.

The Labour Party have long acknowledged that economic development requires a well-functioning social infrastructure; Schools, hospitals, care and public services.

Investment in social infrastructure both alleviates unpaid care work and generates more jobs for women.

Underinvestment in public services and infrastructure not only reduces the productivity of the current and future work force, but it also dumps the burden of, often unpaid, care work on women. This leads to an inevitable impact on women earning ability.

Yet in statement after statement, we hear the government effortlessly justify investment of tax payer money in roads and transportation projects, while their last Autumn Statement, failed to offer any investment in care or the NHS.

The government's excuses for their unprecedented lack of investment in care, the NHS and public services don't stack up for the economy, and they definitely don't stack up for women.

When the UK Labour government invested in creating the NHS in 1948, the ratio of debt to GDP was over 200 per cent, and that higher public investment led to higher growth. High debt ratios did not prompt cuts to public investment in the 1940s, 1950s or 1960s.

What is unarguable is that at the same time as imposing cruel spending cuts that have been shown to hit women hardest, this government has added almost £700bn to the national debt.

That's not just more than the last Labour government.

It's more than every Labour government, in history, added together!

So, not only have public services like our NHS or our Local Councils been shredded, the scale of the failure is such that the Tories can't even claim to have reduced the debt!

The question that we must focus on is whether an individual investment project has economic returns that are higher than, or at least equal to, its costs in terms of interest payments.

If the returns are high enough, debt sustainability would automatically be satisfied as the additional growth would decrease, or at least stabilise the debt to GDP ratio.

But, if we continue to think of public investment exclusively as spending on physical infrastructure – roads, railways, ports, airports – the benefits to women will continue to be limited by this definition.

And remember, this is in addition to the deepening and damaging cuts to social infrastructure under this government that fail to invest in our future workforce, and women in particular.

The last autumn statement posed a real opportunity for the Government to make changes:

They had the opportunity to start a new economic path with a new female Prime Minister.

They missed that opportunity by a mile.

The disproportionate impact on women had in fact increased from the autumn statement the previous year, from 81 to 86%.

Joint analysis from the Runnymede Trust and the Women's Budget Group also showed that, as of the last autumn statement, low-income black and Asian women are paying the highest price for this Government's failed austerity agenda.

The 86% impact figure sounds shocking, but we know it isn't just a number in a textbook or a policy paper.

These are real women.

Real women whose lives are being made increasingly more difficult through government policy and successive budgets.

Women who have to

struggle with more caring responsibilities due to the ever increasing gap in social care funding.

Women on increasingly insecure employment terms, unable to plan properly for their family's future.

Women born in the 1950's who, with little to no notice, are having to face a crisis in their retirement planning.

54,000 women a year who are forced out of their jobs through maternity discrimination and who can't afford this government's extortionate fees to take their employer to tribunal.

Women in my constituency and constituencies up and down the country who will have to wait another 60 years before the gender pay gap closes.

155 women and 103 children on a typical day, who are turned away from refuges due to lack of space, according to Women's Aid

Women struggling under more pressure placed on them through cuts to universal credit and to child tax credits.

And perhaps most shamefully, women who, as of next month, will have to prove their third child is a product of rape if they wish to qualify for child tax credits.

I'm not sure how we have ended up here?

But I am sure that this cannot continue, and that Labour will hold this government to account for their seismic failings.

Twice Labour has formally presented the government with clear analysis on the impact of their budgets on women, only for the data to be dismissed out of hand by Ministers.

It would be far more credible if the government produced their own gender impact analysis alongside their financial statements, rather than to criticize the House of Commons library data without producing any alternative of their own.

To add insult to injury, the Government knows how to conduct a proper audit of their policies on women

and
those with protected characteristics.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission, and the Women's Budget Group, have outlined suggested methodologies very clearly.

We have to ask why, in the light of the availability of those methodologies, the Government continue to be so evasive in stepping up to their duties.

It is getting to the point where the government can no longer plead ignorance of the way their policies are impacting women or that there doesn't exist evidence to show this impact or the strategies to overcome it.

And the continued lack of transparency is deeply concerning.

The cross party, parliamentary Women and Equalities select committee have had precious little cooperation from the government in this area.

The Treasury have refused, in writing, to send a minister to answer questions on the impact of the Autumn Statement on women. And they have sent inadequate or incomplete answers to questions asked by the committee.

The committee have stated publicly that, I quote,

'The lack of information provided to us demonstrates a concerning lack of transparency. The promotion of transparency is a central aim of the Public Sector Equality Duty requirements, but the Government's current position does not engender confidence that these requirements are being complied with.'

Next week, during the Chancellor's budget, on international women's day, there will be nowhere to hide if the government continue to avoid addressing this omission.

The game is up.

Labour is demanding the government put an end to this embarrassing ducking and diving and produce a transparent, cumulative impact analysis of their policies on women since 2010, as well as an equalities impact assessment of the specific measures announced in the Spring Budget.

The usual one-off cash

give-away, or a gimmicky policy aimed at women, will not suffice.

Let me be very clear;

We are talking about a fundamental, structural, disproportionate impact on women of government policy since 2010.

Nothing short of a fundamental, structural solution will do.

This government seem keen to support gender equality on paper if it only means marginal changes, or a few one off measures.

What is needed however, are root-and-branch changes on how the fiscal system supports gender equality.

I appreciate this is much more challenging, but it is vital and long overdue.

The Labour Party will not shy from this challenge.

I am pleased announce today that Labour will build upon current equalities legislation, consulting over the next 12 months on bringing in an Economic Equality Bill.

Put simply, this Bill would seek to ensure that on equality, the money follows the policy.

It will no longer be possible for governments to talk the talk on equality while implementing economic policies that make life harder for women and protected groups.

It's about ensuring that we eliminate intrinsic, structural barriers that prevent people from reaching their full economic potential.

Next week, during the Spring Budget, Labour will be watching.

In the absence of the government conducting their own gender impact analysis on the budget, once again, Labour will be working hard with the House of Commons Library to produce this data.

I have to say, I find it shameful that we have to hold the Government's feet to the fire in this way,

simply to ensure that their policies are not disproportionately impacting one particular group and reversing progress on economic equality.

Globally, when one of Trump's first acts as President, in a room full of men, was to curtail women's reproductive rights while Vladimir Putin has de-criminalised domestic violence, leadership from the UK on gender equality has never been so urgent.

Then there is the triggering of Article 50 and a Government white paper that failed to even mention the word equality.

The prospect of the UK becoming a deregulated off shore tax haven, free from EU treaties and law does not bode well for women.

Labour will make clear during our budget next week that that we expect the government to fundamentally and structurally enable and promote economic equality for all women.

Labour's economic aims always have, and always will be, our social aims too.

Our new Economic Equality Bill is the next step in realising this.

Labour is committed to overturning a rigged economic system that sees women bearing the brunt of failed austerity.

Labour has committed to producing a gender impact analysis alongside all of our financial statements in government.

Historically, I am extremely proud that that almost every major piece of legislation that has improved the lives of working women has been introduced by a Labour Government.

It was a Labour Government who introduced legislative protections for women under the Equal Pay Act, the Sex Discrimination Act and the Equality Act.

Labour were the first administration since the Second World War to accept state responsibility for developing childcare policy, and we introduced paternity leave and increased maternity leave. Labour brought in Sure Start centres, working tax credits

and
all-women shortlists, and we have more women MPs than all the other parties
in
the House combined.

And it is Labour who are
now at the forefront of challenging the government on their abysmal record on
gender economic equality and it is Labour who are taking the lead on working
to
develop in government, a budget that works for all.

[Press release: Lord-Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire: Julie Spence](#)

The Queen has been pleased to appoint Mrs Julie Spence OBE QPM DL as Her Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire when Sir Hugh Duberly KCV0 CBE retires on 4 April 2017.

Julie Spence was Chief Constable of Cambridgeshire from 2005 to 2010. Since her retirement from the police, she has served as Chair of the [Cambridge and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust](#) and as a Trustee of [Ormiston Families](#) which supports young people from disadvantaged communities.

Mrs Spence lives in Cambridge with her husband, John.

[Speech: Greg Clark speech to the British Chambers of Commerce](#)

Introduction

Thank you – it's a great honour to speak to you today.

William Beveridge once wrote about the strength of our civic institutions.

He described it as the “distinguishing mark of a free society” and an “outstanding feature of British life”.

This country's rich array of business organisations is very much part of that tradition and that is something that Adam (Adam Marshall, BCC Director General) has been talking about.

As you will know, having met so many of you in all areas of the country, you are the leaders of your community as well as the prominent people in business.

For too long there has been a distinction drawn that is not the reality in all the towns, cities and areas that you are in.

You have a great opportunity to reassert your historic role as a civic institution of leadership in our country, of particular importance at this time for reasons I'll come onto shortly.

Your network of chambers creates a presence and creates advocates around the world.

Your unique network of chambers is a powerful means of not only promoting business, but the other way of making sure policy makers have their finger on the pulse of the concerns and the priorities and intricacies, not just around this country but around the world.

And through the BCC, your voice is heard loud and clear in Government.

Adam (Adam Marshall, BCC Director General) and I meet very regularly, we sit down most weeks together in my office and have a very candid conversation about all of the things on your mind that Adam and his team know from his conversations with you and the surveys you do and it is incredibly useful for me to have that direct connection to you.

But of course as you know, and as you've seen, there is no substitute for getting out and talking to people in these places and in your hometowns and cities.

And I was just looking through the list of Chambers while looking at the programme for today. It isn't quite an A to Z, but rather an A to W I think I'm right in saying – ranging from Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce to the Wirral Chamber of Commerce.

As it happens, it was the Aberdeen Chamber that kindly hosted one of my first ministerial visits in the summer as Secretary of State and I was grateful for the roundtable that was arranged there.

Building on local strengths

Every time I visit a Chamber it reminds me of the fact that the UK economy is literally nothing without its local economies.

And therefore it seems to me that the diversity of our communities, their challenges and their opportunities, should mean everything to economic policy.

No one who has actually been to Aberdeen and the Wirral, could mistake one for the other.

And, nor should they imagine that the same set of measures could be relevant

the business and industries uniformly of both.

And the same applies of course to Cornwall and Cambridge, Northamptonshire and Northern Ireland.

The difference is that across our United Kingdom, from Suffolk to South Yorkshire. each is as economically distinct as it is socially, environmentally and architecturally.

So as I go on to say something about our Industrial Strategy, I want to emphasise from the beginning that what I don't have in mind is a monolithic plan composed of identical policies implemented by the same people in every part of the country uniformly.

Rather it seems that our approach needs to take inspiration from your approach.

The BCC is composed of local Chambers, each with their own identity and leadership as I discovered and I know that Adam knows from his travels round the country, and I'm sure you emphasise your unique circumstances every time you get together and you communicate what's happening in your area.

It seems to me that in a similar way, our Industrial Strategy should be composed of local industrial strategies in which local business leadership has a bigger say as central government.

Now, few countries pack in as much diversity across a few hundred miles as ours does.

In our component nations, cities, shires, towns and villages, the sheer richness of our culture, our history, our architecture and our landscape is unsurpassed.

And yet each part of this country, though wonderfully distinctive, is no more than a few hours away from any other part.

Britain as a whole offers both variety and connection – and, therefore, huge potential for innovation and prosperity.

So I think it is therefore a tragedy that we became one of the most centralised countries in the western world – one of the great wrong turns in our national history.

A country that was founded on insurgent towns and cities led by, very often, local industrialists and local business leaders.

Over a period of over a hundred years we saw power seep away from the great centres of our country to Westminster and Whitehall.

And during my research I came across documents from the middle of the 20th century, the earliest heyday of central planning, in which Britain beyond the Home Counties was referred to as "Outer Britain" – which tells you everything you need to know about the mind-set and mentality of the time.

Of course, attitudes have since changed considerably, but not before doing a great deal of damage.

British productivity, on average, lags behind most of our competitors.

That's not because we lack for world-class companies, big or small, across a range of industrial sectors.

At its best, British business is unbeatable.

Yet, economics is not like the Olympics – it's not just about the medal-winning positions that count, but the performance of the whole team.

And that's one of the challenges that we have because the British economy is distorted by some unusually wide disparities in productivity compared to our competitors.

Much of that unevenness is geographical.

This country has the richest area in northern Europe, but also nine of the ten poorest.

And we're not talking about remote places, as I said earlier, beyond hope of development.

They are vital parts of the country, many of them close to our great cities – which ought to be powerhouses of productivity.

You just need to look at our competitors to see that this can be done. Look across the channel to France and to Germany, take the biggest cities outside of the capital, seven of the eight have productivity per capita that is above the national average, dragging that national average up.

Whereas in England it is the other way round, only one of the eight biggest English cities outside of London, Bristol as it happens, over performs the national average.

And if France and Germany, and Italy for that matter, can have strong regional centres in productivity driving forward the national economy, many of which are not with dissimilar industrial heritages to us, then there is no reason why we can't be more steadily prosperous in every part of this country.

I'm convinced it's one of the big imperatives of our Industrial Strategy to make sure that every part of the country is firing on all cylinders. Not just the cities themselves, but the surrounding towns and the countryside.

This is one of the initiatives of the Chambers of Commerce. You exist to bring people together and gather the local strengths and to turn those local strengths into national strengths.

This is exactly the path we need to take as we plan our industrial future.

The good news is that change is not only possible, it is already underway.

Actually a prime example is London itself.

Did you know, for most of the 20th century, our capital city, where we sit today, also underperformed the national average – but in the last few decades it has achieved a remarkable turnaround.

There was a time when London was thought to be in decline and its economic prominence was declining.

That was turned around and Bristol followed suit – and now we see real progress being made in all areas of the country – including cities in the Midlands and the North.

For instance, before 2010 there was only one private sector job created in the North for every ten created in the South.

But since 2010, that gap – more of a chasm actually – has almost disappeared.

In fact, cities like Birmingham and Manchester, with representatives sitting here today, are now among the top job creating areas in the country.

Obviously, that's a tribute to the effort and enterprise of the businesses represented here today and by colleagues back at home.

There's no surprise that 2010 was the turning point – because that's when I think there was a recognition, crossing all parties, that we need to turn back the process of centralising power in Westminster and Whitehall and start to devolve real decision making and economic power to local communities.

A different policy is producing a difference result which in my view should encourage us to push further and faster in this new direction.

Industrial Strategy

When Theresa May became Prime Minister she declared her intention to build an economy that works for everyone.

And that means that businesses in every part of the country must be helped to achieve their full potential.

And Government does have a role to play in that, an enabling role that includes public investment in areas like science, innovation and skills which I know right across the country is one of the challenges we face to fulfil.

There is, however, no doubt that over the decades some parts of the country have been better served than others.

Putting this right means addressing questions of the leadership and the institutions that we have working.

As part of this we announced the biggest increase in public funding for

research and development since 1979.

Vitality that includes investment in both the R for research and the D for development – because the development of research to create commercial opportunity, translating our brilliant scientific ideas into opportunities for manufacturers and other suppliers I think is one of the great chances we have in this country

And so using our resources effectively to find out what is needed and what capabilities there are, not just in London and the South East, but in every part of the country to benefit.

It requires, I think, an attitude on the part of the Government that looks to empower and looks to bring into the conversation the business legion in every part of the country.

So as we develop a modern Industrial Strategy, it's vital that coordination in producing a strategy as a government should never be confused with centralisation.

Of course, some decisions can only be made centrally – for instance in regard to nationally important infrastructure like hub airport capacity.

But most decisions should be made on the basis of local knowledge and practical experience of businesses and the community.

In other words, Government needs be aware of when others know best.

Government is good at some things, but not everything.

The success of the Industrial Strategy will depend on us knowing the difference.

But this begs a question:

If Government does step back, who takes over?

The obvious answer, to everyone in this room, is that it is the people who know better – the business leaders, community leaders and the people who live and work and do business in their local communities.

But that requires strong local institutions – so that decisions are made at the right local and geographical scale and for the common good, not special interests.

Since 2010, we've been building those institutions.

For instance, the Local Enterprise Partnerships to which many Chambers of Commerce have made such a valuable contribution.

Then there are new local government institutions like the Combined Authorities and elected mayors in metropolitan areas. They all have very strong business involvement.

If these were just talking shops then they wouldn't really matter.

But through the City Deals, Growth Deals and Devolution Deals is a significant transfer of power and resources that is moving away from Whitehall.

And I want to see the Industrial Strategy developed and implemented in the same way – as a genuinely devolved policy in which Whitehall is a partner not the boss.

This will require institutions, local institutions and sometimes sectorial institutions – so that investments can be coordinated across industrial sectors as well as geographical areas.

There are some excellent examples of this approach already in action – for instance in the automotive sector, where bodies like the Automotive Council and the Advanced Propulsion Centre play a vital role in channelling public and private investment for the good of the whole sector.

Much of the strength of a business comes from within – from the dedication of its management and workers, the soundness of its business model and the quality and originality of its products.

These things are ultimately up to you as individual enterprises.

But some of your strength comes from without – from the strength and depth of the markets and supply chains you depend on.

Now these are things that you can't do as much about as the decisions within your own companies, at least you can't on your own.

But this gathering today, and your Chambers across the country, are an outstanding answer to the challenge of how you can make use of the connections that you have as a local business to improve the environment generally for business and prosperity.

When companies cooperate, there's a great deal that local economies and industrial sectors can achieve together through shared institutions.

Sector deals

So that is why as well continuing this agenda of strong devolution and decision making, especially around things like infrastructure and skills, I have invited British business to come forward with sectoral deals to advance the productivity of particular sectors.

The idea is that sectors show how they can work together to improve prospects in the productivity and competitiveness of that sector.

We'll then sit down with you and hammer out a deal.

There is of course a big overlap between the sectoral and the local approaches to industrial policy.

Companies in the same sector are often concentrated in particular parts of the country.

I mentioned my first Chamber visit was to Aberdeen and they really conveyed the importance of the oil and gas industry and how it was absolutely vital to that economy and to businesses there.

I know talking to the ceramics industry, I think Sara Williams may be here in the audience, that the work the Chamber does in Staffordshire with the ceramics industry is bringing together the local knowledge and depth of experience to make sure that sector and place come together.

In Somerset Dale Edwards and I spent some time together in recent months making sure that the opportunities for the nuclear sector and at Hinkley Point C galvanizes the local economy and businesses across the area benefit from it.

So already we see, without any nudge or prompt from me, real activism in sectors and places coming together. I think this Chamber model, this collaboration between sectors and place; I'd like to see as a motif of our Industrial Strategy.

I fully recognises the importance of these geographical clusters and will ensure that the sectoral and the local approaches go hand in hand.

So I want to issue an invitation to you through Adam and to Chambers across the country to participate in the development of these sectoral deals, as well as the local arrangements that we have.

We want you to advise us on how we get everybody pointing in the same direction and making sure we've got the right institutions, the right skills, the right trade, the right colleges and the right research and development institutions.

Your local knowledge is something that is irreplaceable, it is absolutely essential that this is put to work to ensure every part of the country prospers.

Later this year we will be unveiling a formal framework for the negotiation of sector deals.

But I can announce today that the Chambers of Commerce will be invited to be an integral part of that framework – and the deals that emerge from it.

Getting involved

As we are thinking about an Industrial Strategy, my view is that there is no such thing as a short-term strategy. It is a contradiction in terms, who ever heard of a long term strategy.

And so when we are going through a time of uncertainty, I think that is the time where you should look to the long term and work together to be able to put in place the policies and institutions and relationships that can endure

beyond the next few weeks, months and years.

This should be a force of stability and confidence. Something that we shape together and we can rely on together so that businesses and industry can make investment decisions knowing that the framework that has been adopted that represents the whole view between businesses and Government in every part of the country.

I want you to be part of this. If something is to be for the long term it has to endure and if it is going to endure that means it has to be done collaboratively.

That means, given the local knowledge that is unique to you and your colleagues in every part of the country, it is absolutely vital that you are part, not just of the consultation, but of the delivery of our Industrial Strategy.

I, working closely with Adam and colleagues, will absolutely ensure the recommendations in response to the consultation that he makes on behalf of the Chambers of Commerce will come direct to me and be highly influential.

But more than that, as I set out, I want you to be part of the delivery of our Industrial Strategy in every part of the country so that we can do what our competitors have done to make sure that we are firing on all cylinders and make sure that every part of the country can contribute to our national prosperity.

An economy that works for everyone is one in which there is business confidence and business planning for the future.

There is more to our economic lives than economic efficiency alone, vital though it is.

There are commercial values and also civic values. Through your work in your businesses in your Chambers, you put forward not just the interest of your businesses, but you also put into practice the interests of your local economies and accumulatively through that, the national economy.

Your involvement is something I hope and count on. I look forward to developing our relationship with those Chambers that I haven't visited so far, I can go there and get to know all your challenges and solutions that you might have to offer to our shared future.

Speech: Karen Bradley's UK Digital

Strategy Speech

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Thank you, Alice [Bentinck, CEO of Entrepreneur First].

I am delighted to be here today to launch the Government's [Digital Strategy](#). We have taken our time getting it absolutely right, but it has been time well spent!

Digital technology is revolutionising all aspects of our lives, whether healthcare, transport, manufacturing, entertainment, or our connections with family and friends.

It is going to lead to the creation of industries that do not currently exist – and of which few of us can conceive. But all industries, all businesses, all consumers will benefit from the use of digital technology.

The UK is in a position of real strength.

We have fantastic innovators.

Our universities and research centres are helping to lead the way.

The vibrancy of the digital economy across all the regions of the UK is laid out in Tech City UK's excellent annual Tech Nation report. I look forward to reading the 2017 report later this month.

In this job, I have been lucky enough to see cutting-edge digital work being done throughout the United Kingdom – in cloud computing, virtual reality, Artificial Intelligence, cyber security, and FinTech.

The digital sector is worth 7 per cent of our economy. And grew nearly three times faster than the rest of it in 2015.

But that does not mean that we can stand still.

And just keeping up should not be the limit of our ambitions.

The UK must lead the world. Meanwhile, none of our citizens should be left behind.

This strategy will ensure that the benefits of digital are spread throughout the country; that we have the necessary infrastructure; that regulations are agile and benign; and that everyone has the skills they need to be citizens in the digital age and workers in the digital economy.

The Government's new Industrial Strategy will create an economy that works for everyone. It backs business, builds on strengths, and tackles weaknesses.

The Digital Strategy is based on the same principles. But, vitally, not only is digital a key sector in its own right, it is central to the success of all

other sectors – and central to all our personal lives.

Because it reaches across so much of society, this Digital Strategy is part of implementing our Plan for Britain – a plan to build a stronger, fairer country that works for everyone, not just the privileged few, where wealth and opportunity are spread throughout the country. Make no mistake – digital technology will be a major factor in accomplishing this.

The Digital Strategy will help to create a world-leading digital economy that works for everyone.

It will require a big effort. And just as the prize for success is enormous, so too would be the price of failure.

Simply put, our economy, public services, and country will not be fit for purpose unless we have fully embraced digital technology.

So let me take you through our vision, and how – working together with the sector – we will achieve it

The Digital Strategy has seven strands:

Connectivity;

Digital skills and inclusion;

Making the UK the best place to start and grow a digital business;

Making all British businesses digital;

A safe and secure cyberspace;

Transforming government to make it more digital; and

Making the most out of data.

1. Digital connectivity

First and foremost, being a digital leader depends on being connected.

Digital connectivity was once a nice-to-have. It is now essential. This means that government has a responsibility to create the framework and conditions for investment in the right infrastructure throughout the UK.

We have already made great progress.

Nine out of 10 premises now have access to superfast broadband, and the Government's rollout programme has been connecting 3,000 homes a day.

99 per cent of UK premises now have indoor mobile voice coverage – and as a result of our licence agreements with phone companies, 4G geographic coverage has increased substantially over the past year, from 48 per cent to 72 per cent.

That is no reason to become complacent or to stand still.

So while we will continue our work to complete the roll-out of 4G and superfast broadband, we are also introducing a Universal Service Obligation – giving every business, public premises, and individual in the country the right to request an affordable high speed broadband connection.

Moreover, we will seize the opportunities promised by the broadband and mobile networks of the future. We will invest £1 billion in a programme to explore and encourage next generation digital infrastructure, including full fibre and 5G.

And because consumers must be able to find the best deal and know what they're getting, we will make sure that broadband adverts accurately reflect reality.

But I also recognise that connectivity isn't just about statistics. It needs to reflect how people now live their lives. That is why, for example, we will roll out free wifi on trains and in more public places, and improve mobile coverage on our road network.

2. Digital skills

But connectivity is of no use if people do not have the skills to benefit from it.

That is why we have committed to help every adult in the UK who lacks core digital skills to access free training. Digital skills now merit being placed on the same footing as literacy and numeracy.

We are committed to closing the digital skills gap, giving everyone the knowledge and confidence to prosper in the modern economy.

And we want to work with others who feel the same way. So we will establish a new Digital Skills Partnership, bringing together technology companies, local businesses, local government, and voluntary organisations – to make sure that people have the right skills for the jobs in their area.

I am delighted to announce that as part of this, we already have a commitment that more than four million free digital skills training opportunities will be created.

I am very grateful to all the companies that have already stepped forward.

Lloyds Banking Group will give face-to-face digital skills training to 2.5 million individuals, charities, and small and medium-sized businesses by 2020; Barclays plan to teach basic coding to 45,000 more children and assist up to one million people with general digital skills and cyber awareness; Google, as part of their commitment to five hours of free digital skills for everyone, has pledged to help boost digital skills in seaside towns.

The Digital Skills Partnership will help people find the training they need

and identify digital job vacancies for them.

This local expertise is crucial, because local needs will differ. One area may have a lot of expertise in data analytics but need different digital skills, for example.

We will also equip the next generation.

Coding is being put in the National Curriculum – and we are taking forward the recommendations of the Shadbolt Review into computer science degrees – so that younger and future generations will have the specialist skills they need to take full advantage of digital.

As part of the effort to encourage young people from a wider range of backgrounds to consider a tech career, we will support the National Citizen Service in piloting new ways to include digital skills and careers in NCS programmes.

We will also run a national after-school programme for the most talented students, cyber apprenticeships, and adult retraining – so that the UK has the pipeline of cyber security skills that it needs.

And I can assure you that the Government is well aware of the importance that industry places on an immigration policy which enables you to hire the best talent – both now and after Brexit.

Last month's immigration statistics show that more than 30,000 Tier 2 workers were sponsored in the Information and Communication sector.

Take-up of the Tech Nation Visa Scheme continues to rise. Government has agreed a temporary increase to meet demand for this year, demonstrating our commitment to attracting the brightest and best to come and work in the UK.

We also recognise that digital businesses are concerned about the future status of their current staff who are EU nationals. Securing the status of, and providing certainty to, EU nationals already in the UK and to UK nationals in the EU is one of this Government's early priorities for the forthcoming negotiations.

3. Making the UK the best place in the world to start and grow a digital business

Connectivity and skills are vital to our ambition of making the UK the best place in the world to start and grow a digital business.

The UK has always been a highly innovative country. It has a long record in building and using cutting-edge technology. Our start-ups are among the best in the world, and we have some of the strongest technology clusters. Our fusion of digital and creative expertise gives us a unique edge.

This is a perfect example of why the Industrial Strategy is absolutely right to identify what the UK is strong at and the Government is right to be

determined that this success should be spread throughout the country.

Let's be clear: the digital economy is not confined to London.

Tech City UK's Tech North programme is spurring the development of the tech ecosystem around Hull, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield, and Sunderland.

We have a thriving FinTech sector in Edinburgh, leading video games developers in Dundee, tech clusters in Cardiff and Swansea, and cyber security expertise in Belfast.

A variety of Government programmes are already lending support – and we will build on this to back talent and innovation wherever we find it.

To create the right conditions for growth, we will work with independent regulators so we have the right rules in place to build a world-leading framework for digital.

Being the best country in the world to start and grow a digital business also relies on extensive research and development.

In last year's Autumn Statement, the Government announced that we would invest an additional £4.7 billion – so that British business will remain at the cutting edge of scientific and technological discovery. This was the biggest increase in public R&D investment of any parliament since 1979.

The Government has announced a number of steps to help businesses to secure the finance they need to grow throughout their life.

We also want to support emerging technologies, capitalising on strengths such as robotics, clean energy, biotechnology, and FinTech.

The UK is the global capital for financial technology, which generated £6.6 billion in revenue in 2015. So I can announce that we will launch a new competition to harness the power of FinTech for people who struggle to manage their money.

The UK is also at the forefront of the Artificial Intelligence revolution, so we are appointing leading academic Professor Wendy Hall from academia and Jerome Pesenti from Benevolent AI to undertake a review of how we can create the conditions for the AI industry to thrive and grow here. Jerome will be speaking later on, and will I'm sure have more to say on the subject!

And £17 million from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council will boost the development of new Robotics and Artificial Intelligence technologies in UK universities.

This will support pioneering research, including a project by the University of Manchester to develop robots capable of operating autonomously and effectively within hazardous environments like nuclear facilities, while researchers at Imperial College London will be able to make major advances in surgical micro-robotics.

We will also establish a network of UK Tech Hubs in developing countries. These hubs will work alongside the key existing hub in Israel, boosting our impact in emerging digital economies around the world, and providing jobs and trading opportunities for British firms.

4. Helping all British businesses to embrace digital

With connectivity, skills and the right backing in place, we want to help all British businesses to embrace digital.

This is a huge prize – and I want all UK companies businesses to share in it.

There are four core digital activities that most businesses need to be competitive: a web presence; an e-commerce capability; working in a cloud-based computing environment; and digitising back-office functions such as payroll.

Small and medium-sized enterprises with a strong web presence grow on average more than twice as quickly as those with minimal or no presence, export twice as much, and create twice as many jobs. Businesses that use data to help automate functions and inform decisions are around 10 per cent more productive.

Although overall UK companies have similar levels of Internet access and web presence as those in other European countries, they are less likely to digitise their back-office functions. Changing this and embracing other digital ways of working could play a crucial role in closing the UK's productivity gap with other G7 countries.

To help this, we are investing £13 million in seed funding for the creation of a private sector-led Productivity Council.

We will also encourage the use of digital technology to help 100,000 more UK businesses export by 2020. We want the UK to be the place to be for digital and to export our expertise and products.

As we encourage businesses to embrace digital, we also want to see a more diverse workforce. Just 17 per cent of people who work in the tech sector and only 9.5 per cent of students taking computer science A-level courses are women. We cannot expect to lead the world if we largely ignore half the working population.

We have wonderful role models like Alice, and there are a number of programmes doing valuable work. They include the CyberFirst Girls competition, run by GCHQ to encourage young girls to consider a career in cyber security; the TechFuture Girls programme, an after-school club designed to encourage girls to stay engaged in IT; and the SheMeansBusiness Partnership, run by Facebook and Enterprise Nation to deliver training to more than 10,000 women across the UK.

The Government will play its part, including by supporting further

development of the Tech Talent Charter, which outlines key measures that encourage organisations to think differently in support of a workforce drawn from all sections of society.

5. Making the UK the safest place in the world to be online

These ingredients for a world-leading digital economy that works for everyone must be underpinned by a safe and secure cyberspace.

As our reliance on technology grows, so do the opportunities for those who want to compromise our systems and data.

A quarter of all businesses experienced a cyber attack or breach in the past year – and two-thirds of large businesses were victims.

That is why we have an ambitious, new five-year strategy, backed by £1.9 billion of investment.

The National Cyber Security Centre will manage national incidents, provide an authoritative voice and centre of expertise, and deliver support and advice to government departments, devolved administrations, regulators, and businesses.

And we will step up Active Cyber Defence, employing the skills, knowledge, and technical expertise of GCHQ working with Internet service providers to tackle a significant proportion of the cyber attacks that hit the UK, and so provide a new level of protection for British cyberspace.

We are also committed to making sure that people of all ages – and especially children – can enjoy the Internet safely.

The Government has begun work on a new Internet Safety Strategy, which I will be leading. It is clear that government, industry, regulators, families, and individuals all have a role to play.

In order to tackle children's exposure to harmful sexualised content online, we will continue to support companies in rolling out family-friendly filters to all broadband customers and introduce age verification controls.

6. Maintaining the UK Government as the world's leader in serving its citizens online

Just as citizens want to be safe, they want their public services to be improved by the use of digital technology, which can radically advance the efficiency of our public services – raising standards and lowering costs for taxpayers.

The UK is already a world leader in digital government – topping last year's UN survey of e-government – but we want to go further and faster. Citizens and businesses deserve an even better, more coherent experience when using

government services online – one that matches the expectations set by the best apps and websites they use every day

7. Unlocking the power of data and improve public confidence in its use

Finally, I want to make clear that the Government understands that the public also want to be confident in the use of data – and that data is essential for world-class public services and business alike.

To maintain our position at the forefront of the data revolution, we will implement the EU General Data Protection Regulation in time for the May 2018 deadline.

So in conclusion, this is a Digital Strategy that is rooted in the Government's plan for a country that works for everyone. We want the UK to lead on the global stage and ensure that no-one at home is left behind.

It contains ambitious plans for infrastructure, connectivity, skills, business, safety and security, online government services, and data – guided by experts, underpinned by investment, and led by a Government that will work with industry to address challenges and build on existing strengths.

This will be a joint effort, and this strategy is just the start. I am looking forward to chairing a new Digital Economy Council, working side by side with all of you in the tech community to make our digital economy both stronger and fairer.

Together, we really will lead the charge and change the world.

Thank you. ENDS

£1 million St David's Day fund for children who have experienced care

Funding will be made available to eligible young people aged between 16 and 25 and either still in local authority care or care leavers to help them progress towards independence.

In 2015/16 there were 5662 looked after children in Wales and 702 care leavers.

Carl Sargeant said:

“Typically, outcomes for children in care or care leavers are less

positive than for those young people who live at home with a parent or parents. We are committed to improving the life chances of children who have experienced care, so they have the opportunity to flourish and realise their potential.

“Local authorities, as corporate parents are expected to help the young people in their care move towards independence in a similar way to parents who have children living at home. Providing appropriate support and guidance to a young person early in their journey towards independence helps to maximise life chances.

“I hope this fund will offer timely support to care leavers and go some way in helping them achieve their ambitions and make a successful transition to adulthood and independent living. We will work with the Children’s Commissioner and young people who have experienced care to discuss how the fund will work. I welcome Sally Holland’s Spotlight report on looked after children which will also help inform our decision.”