

Speech: New Chair of Charity Commission gives first major speech

Good morning

I am delighted to be here with you this morning. It is great to be among so many people involved in such a wide range of charitable endeavours. Thank you for having me here.

This is my first substantial speech as Chair of the Charity Commission. I started in the role at the end of February.

So it is early days for me. And I don't come here this morning pretending to have all the answers. I know I have much to learn from you about the charity and voluntary sector.

But I am clear on what motivated me to take on the role, and on what I want to achieve in the job.

And I'd like to use this opportunity today to set that out.

What drives me, first and foremost, is the importance and immense potential of people's charitable endeavour for our society.

Charity has a meaning and a value that is immeasurable, and lies beyond the sum of what individual charities achieve for their beneficiaries.

It's a value that endures well beyond the reach of any organisational structure.

At its heart, charity is about attitudes, behaviours and qualities that unite us and that we can all sign up to.

Qualities such as purpose, conviction, selflessness, generosity.

Qualities that we admire when we see them in strangers, and that make us feel proud. So much so we look for ways to associate ourselves with people who display them: they are our fellow Brits, our family, friends and neighbours – whatever their race or religion.

And they are qualities that make our communities stronger, and better.

This potential of charity to build meaning and to contribute to a healthy, successful society is profound.

So it must be nurtured and promoted. And many of you do that, every day, as do the thousands of people who work alongside you in your organisations.

But we have a problem.

Some organisations that act as the vehicles of that charitable endeavour, namely the charities on the Commission's register, are no longer trusted automatically by the public to foster what it is I've just described.

And that means all charities can no longer expect the public to give them the benefit of the doubt.

That's not just my opinion. It's the conclusion of extensive, independent research, the latest of which is underway right now and will be published later this year.

I have seen some early findings. And they are sobering.

They show that people now trust charities no more than they trust the average stranger they meet on the street.

It is vital, in my view, that we understand why that is the case – and work together to change what's gone wrong so we can put it right.

Sir Stuart suggested earlier that increased public scrutiny of charities is part of a wider trend. And I agree with him.

We need to examine the problem through the same lens that we use to understand the decline in trust in big business and politics.

People clearly are less trusting of institutions and of those in positions of authority than they once were. But that's not because our parents and grandparents were more naïve.

It's because people now have more evidence to prove their suspicions. They are more sceptical of those in powerful roles or in positions that were once associated with respect, because they can see or have experienced directly how those groups really have let them down.

The failings may manifest themselves in different ways. And in the worst cases we've seen people horrifically abuse and show contempt for the respected position that they hold. But whatever the failing, it adds up to people seeing and believing that those in charge of important institutions are running them in their own interests, for their own benefit.

What we can't escape, is that the underlying causes of public distrust are the same in the public, private and our own sector.

Just as some big businesses have failed the reasonable expectations of the public, so have some charities.

And what we need to understand is that, the expectations of you are even higher because you are charities.

In this modern world of swift communication and greater democracy, people have been provided enough proof to realise they can't even rely on those they thought always do better – because they exist for no other reason than to do

good.

I am not holding charities responsible for failings in other sectors. But nor are they innocent bystanders.

The revelations about Oxfam in Haiti and senior staff conduct in other big charities shows that this sector is part of that wider story.

And it's a story that matters more for charities than it does for organisations that measure success by size, or by the bottom line.

For example, the brand of a big supermarket will be damaged when the public see its leaders fail. But people will still buy their groceries. The supermarket's fundamental purpose is not fatally undermined as a result.

But all a charity has is its purpose. So when a charity's purpose is undermined, whether through misconduct or other failures, your very reason for existence comes into question.

That's why people are so appalled when charity workers in a devastated country exploit the vulnerable they were sent to help.

That's why people feel betrayed when charities seem to respond to misconduct among senior staff by protecting the charity's reputation, rather than by rooting out and stopping the bad practice.

And that's what leads them to question very high pay in charities and doubt whether money that's raised and donated makes it to the end cause.

It's therefore no surprise that the research I've already mentioned... also tells us that people want transparency from charities.

But again, we need to really understand why they are asking for this.

After all, most of us lead busy lives. Few of us are prepared to spend our free time working out which energy tariff is most cost effective for us, never mind want to spend time looking at detailed financial information about charities.

So why the focus on information about and from charities? It is a proxy for something far more profound. They want proof that you are who you say you are.

The phrase Sir Stuart has used is 'living your values'. It's a useful form of words, because it is evocative.

But I want to add to it. What I propose we're talking about here are standards; standards of conduct and behaviour, and standards of competence.

I really welcome the NCV0's decision to ask Dame Mary Marsh to develop a code of conduct for safeguarding in charities. But we must keep in mind that Dame Mary's important work will be a means to an end, and not an end in itself. People want us to show, not tell.

The public want to be able to trust that, no matter how you slice a charity, what you'll find is a relentless focus on its charitable purpose. And that means demonstrating that the way charities prioritise, behave and conduct themselves is focussed solely on delivering the right results.

I had the pleasure, a few weeks ago, of visiting a charity in Nottingham, my home town.

The charity is called ThinkForward, and it works in deprived areas helping young people make the difficult transition from education to employment. It focuses on those young people most at risk of dropping out.

I met Sally, an impressive, driven young woman who is a beneficiary of ThinkForward.

She told me, in terms, that one of the reasons the charity has made such a difference to her – to her perspective and outlook – is that she believes those running it are genuine, and really care about helping people like her. In other words, that they are walking their talk.

Sally was an inspiration for lots of reasons. And listening to her brought home to me the immense responsibility charities have.

Imagine what might happen in the heart and mind of a young person like Sally if she had a bad experience with a charity claiming to help her. If she had reason to believe those running it were in one sense or another exploiting her.

That charity would not just have failed to make an impact for Sally. It wouldn't just be a case of one less point on the impact measurement scale. It would have done active harm.

That's why it matters so much that charities are relentlessly focused on their mission for the public benefit and on achieving that mission with earnest diligence and while working to the highest standards of conduct and decency.

I've spent a long time setting out the problem of public trust. So let me give you my early thoughts on what we need to do about it.

And this is where the Commission as regulator comes in.

We're currently reviewing our strategy; our current strategic plan ends this year. But what is already clear to me, is the fundamental aim of the Commission.

To help increase – I would say rebuild – trust in charities as vehicles for charitable endeavour.

And the way we will do that is by understanding and articulating the public interest in charity.

This is about more than careful and faithful application of charity law. It's about setting the bar that we believe charities can be expected to reach based on what we know about the factors that drive trust.

Because the Commission's job is not to represent charities to the public, but to represent the public interest to you.

To help you understand what the public expect, and to help you respond.

Not to undermine the independence of individual charities. But to help the sector respond to the reasons the public cherish what it is you do. And to hold the sector as a whole, and its leadership, to account against that bar. I am clear, this is the single most useful and supportive thing we as the regulator can do for charities, and the sector.

We also have our own challenges at the Commission.

First, we are under intense resource pressure. We have seen significant increases in volumes of case work – including most recently around safeguarding concerns. And like other public bodies, we have seen our funding cut drastically – by 50% in real terms over the past 8 years.

I am grateful to my predecessor William Shawcross for all of his work for the organisation.

During his time as Chair, William led a transformation of the Commission. As a result, the Commission has become more proactive, more robust, more effective at holding charities to account on behalf of the public. And most recently, William was successful in securing additional short term funding for the organisation, which will go some way to helping us manage the increased work load.

But we need to do more.

In the context of rebuilding public trust, we must be able to do two things:

The first is to step in and investigate where there are serious concerns about a charity.

It won't have escaped you that we recently placed several well-known charities under formal inquiry – Oxfam, RNIB, The Save the Children Fund.

I am absolutely confident that investigating these charities is merited on the basis of the evidence the Commission holds.

In each case we have different but very serious concerns that we must examine within the confines of a formal investigation.

But as the regulator that promotes the public interest in charities, we have to do more than just investigate when things go wrong.

The second thing we need to do, is help make sure things stay right.

Promoting trust also requires us to be effective in setting out what the public expect from charities. So that charities can help prevent bad things from happening in the first place, and respond in a way that promotes trust when, sadly, human failings do occur.

And so the very same principle I set out earlier applies to the Commission. We too must be crystal clear about our purposes and aims. And we must be able to demonstrate that everything we do – from registering charities, to providing guidance, to investigating – and how we conduct ourselves, is in single-minded pursuit of our purpose.

To help rebuild public trust in charities, so that they continue to inspire charitable endeavour, for the benefit of our society.

The Commission's strategy review continues. We plan to publish our new strategic plan in the summer.

Between now and then, I intend to do a lot of listening. First, to the public whose interest we exist to represent.

And, not least of all, to charities. To you.

Because I believe we can and must work together to ensure that the public – whom we all serve – has well-founded confidence in charities.

I hope what I've said today hasn't sounded too dour. I don't mean to be down-beat. Because I am optimistic.

Yes, we have a problem. But I am confident that we also have the solution.

I am confident in charities' ability to rebuild public trust in their organisations, if they set their minds to it.

And I believe that you have the power, to begin reversing the trend of declining public trust and social cohesion in society more generally.

If you can't lead this change – when you don't have to worry about the sometimes conflicting demands of shareholders – then nobody can.

As I said at the start, I believe charity – what you in this room here and the other 167,000 charities on our register do – is at the very heart of our society.

Collectively, you have a crucial collective importance and amazing potential.

That's why I joined the Commission and that's why I am looking forward to working with you in the months and years ahead.

Not as an adversary, nor as a cosy friend, but as your partner. Your partner in a shared, vital mission to rebuild public trust in what charity does and has the real potential to help our society achieve.

Thank you

Speech: PM speaks at the Commonwealth Business Forum: 16 April 2018

Good morning everyone.

I would like to start by thanking the Lord Mayor for hosting us here today at the beautiful Guildhall, the home of the City of London's administrators for almost 600 years.

As we have just heard, the building has witnessed its fair share of history over the centuries. And today it is a privilege to add to the rollcall of great events with the 11th Commonwealth Business Forum.

We are here today to discuss how best to make this a more prosperous Commonwealth for all, with contributions from leading figures in some of the world's top businesses.

And this is just one of four such fora running this week ahead of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, giving a voice to hundreds of people who, in so many different ways, do so much to make our Commonwealth the amazing institution it is.

There is the People's Forum, providing a platform for the Commonwealth's incredible Civil Society groups. The Women's Forum will look at ways of overcoming the challenges still faced by a great many women and girls. And, perhaps most important of all, there is the Commonwealth Youth Forum.

It is so important because, while the Commonwealth itself is a venerable institution, its citizens are much younger: almost two thirds are under the age of 30.

The young people of today are the Commonwealth of tomorrow, its business leaders, its innovators, its heads of government.

They have incredible potential, and we as a Commonwealth have a duty to help them reach it.

That is why I have put youth at the heart of this week's agenda, and why I began this morning by meeting with some of the Youth Forum's delegates.

As we talked about their ideas and aspirations, about their vision for the future of the Commonwealth, I was struck by the vital role that businesses like yours have in tackling their concerns and giving substance to their ambitions.

They called for cleaner oceans and greater sustainability.

You can help deliver that by changing business practices and creating innovative new products and solutions.

They called for action on youth unemployment.

You, as entrepreneurs and business leaders, create the jobs and opportunities our young people need and, by driving our economies, you fund the schools and colleges that equip them with the skills they need.

And the members of the Youth Forum called for an inclusive Commonwealth where greater prosperity is enjoyed by everyone.

That is something that simply cannot be achieved without strong, successful businesses. Because the best way to raise living standards for all is through economic growth based on free enterprise operating in inclusive, fair and open rules-based markets.

A key part of that, one that has become more important in the years since the Commonwealth was founded, is international trade – and it is an area in which the Commonwealth is flourishing.

The 2018 Commonwealth Trade Review predicted that trade between member states will be worth \$700 billion by 2020. Here in the UK, for example, the value of our exports to fellow members is roughly double what it was 20 years ago.

Yet risks remain. Global growth is fragile. The challenges posed by protectionism are all too clear. And the world economy is changing, as new technology creates new jobs in some industries while supplanting them in others.

If Commonwealth businesses are to flourish in such times, if we are to deliver and secure the prosperous future our young people want and deserve, then the Commonwealth and national governments must not be afraid to act.

Because although the system of international commerce has done much good for the world, it can always be improved. Playing fields can be levelled, barriers removed, the benefits opened up to all.

So while we should be unapologetic in our support for free and inclusive trade, we should also work hand in hand with businesses to make it more efficient and effective, for example by supporting the use of international standards.

Shared standards have huge potential to stimulate trade.

They create a common language for trading partners across the globe, enhance trust in supply chains and stimulate innovation.

Greater use of these international standards across the Commonwealth will reduce the costs of trade between members, as well as with partners beyond the Commonwealth, for greater global benefit.

That is why the UK will be funding an all-new Commonwealth Standards Network, which will support developing countries in particular to better meet existing international standards.

The network will provide a significant opportunity for national standards experts to collaborate and share best practice.

And it will empower developing countries to have a stronger voice in the international standards community – something that has benefits on a global scale.

We will also be funding a Trade Facilitation Programme, supporting and providing technical assistance to selected Commonwealth countries in implementing the World Trade Organisation's Trade Facilitation Agreement. Full implementation of the WTO agreement is estimated to reduce trade costs by up to 16 per cent for the less-developed countries.

It will cut the average time needed to import goods by 47 per cent, and the time taken to export by as much as 91 per cent, a huge boost for businesses across the Commonwealth.

But no amount of action on these fronts will truly be successful if half the Commonwealth's citizens continue to face significant barriers to participation in the economy.

If our family of nations is to realise its full potential, then we must take action to boost women's access to economic opportunity, and empower them to create and build their own businesses.

Many members have already signed up to the Buenos Aires Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment, which seeks to remove barriers to, and support, the participation of women in trade.

It is an impressive start, but I believe we can go further.

So, over the next two years, the UK will work with the International Trade Centre to deliver a new programme: SheTrades Commonwealth.

SheTrades will offer Commonwealth-wide support to help countries break down gender barriers in international trade.

It will provide a forum for member states to work collectively and share best practice.

And will compile the data needed to identify what works and track progress over time.

The programme will also deliver targeted interventions in a number of countries, providing training for women entrepreneurs, connecting them to market and investment opportunities, and helping firms overcome barriers to engaging with women-owned businesses.

Boosting women's participation is the right thing to do, but business equality is not just about doing what is right – there are real economic benefits.

It has been estimated that if women played the same role as men in labour

markets, as much as \$28 trillion could be added to global GDP by 2025.

If Commonwealth members are not giving women an equal opportunity to succeed in business and in trade, they are trying to take on some of the biggest economies in the world with one hand tied behind their backs.

That will not change overnight. But SheTrades represents an important step in the right direction – one that, like the other initiatives I have talked about today, will deliver benefits across the Commonwealth and beyond.

When we all work to the same standards, when we break down barriers to trade and when we empower women to take their rightful place in the economy, the benefits are felt not just by countries and individuals involved.

Freer, easier trade means stronger economies, more jobs, more choice and lower prices – and that is true here in the UK, across the Commonwealth and around the world.

With its unique scope and global voice, such a Commonwealth can set a powerful example to the world, one that demonstrates and underlines the importance of protecting free trade and the rules-based international order.

Today's initiatives are an example of what can be done to make that happen, of how governments can lay the groundwork for growth. But you in business also have a vital role to play.

The discussions here will feed into the full summit, so I hope you take the chance to share ideas and insights, to identify new challenges and new opportunities, to highlight where Commonwealth governments can step up and do more and even where, perhaps, we should step back and do a little less.

The Commonwealth has never just been about heads of state and government.

It has always been an organisation in which people and businesses from around the world can come together and work together to improve all our lives.

This is your forum, and this is your Commonwealth.

So let us make it an organisation that works for all of us, and shape a future of which we can all be proud.

Press release: International Development Secretary hails role of innovation and finance in helping

developing countries to build back better after natural disasters

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt will today highlight the important role that science, innovation and the City of London can play in helping developing countries build resilience against and recover after natural disasters.

At an event at Lloyd's of London Ms Mordaunt will join Dame Inga Beale, CEO of Lloyd's of London, to showcase how science and technology are powering the design of innovative financial products which are helping developing countries recover more quickly after extreme climates and disasters.

At the event – held on the first day of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings this week – Ms Mordaunt will announce:

- A package of support to the Caribbean to help prepare for future disasters and explore how innovative finance products can provide much-needed pay-outs quickly, to help speed up the recovery of businesses and critical services, like hospitals, power and schools.
- An increase in continued support to the Pacific disaster risk insurance pool (PCRAFI) following the disaster wreaked by Hurricane Gita in Tonga last year, to strengthen its proven ability to pay out following future disasters.

Ms Mordaunt will also reflect on the progress of Global Parametrics, a UK aid-backed social enterprise that is using cutting-edge climatic, seismic and financial risk modelling to build products that make a real difference when natural disasters hit. This includes a recently launched facility with its first client, VisionFund, which will help 4 million people access crucial finance to rebuild their lives and businesses in the wake of natural disasters.

Speaking ahead of the event International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

Last year Hurricanes Irma and Maria showed once again the destruction extreme weather events can cause – and the devastating effect this can have on the lives of families and communities.

When disaster does strike, it is crucial that finance is easily and quickly available to help people rebuild their homes and livelihoods. The use of science, real-time data and innovative finance can be game-changing – helping to cut response times and get countries back on their feet faster.

Dame Inga Beale, CEO of Lloyd's of London said:

Insurance exists to provide critical support in times of disaster, enabling quick recovery and economic protection. Sadly, many of the world's most vulnerable countries also have the biggest protection gap, meaning that recovery is slow and costs so high that rebuilding takes significantly longer.

Lloyd's has worked in partnership with the Department for International Development to co-sponsor the Global Centre for Disaster Protection's first Innovation Lab focussed on developing new financial instruments that combine incentives for resilience with risk transfer. This initiative is part of a collaborative effort to help mitigate the devastating and long-term economic and social impacts of disasters most keenly felt by developing nations around the world and across the Commonwealth.

The International Development Secretary will also announce a partnership with the Met Office and the World Bank to strengthen weather forecasting systems and deliver new technologies and innovative approaches to help vulnerable communities use climate warnings and forecasts to better prepare for shocks across Asia.

International Development Secretary, Penny Mordaunt said:

Changing global climates will impact all our lives, but can have deadly consequences for the world's poorest people. By improving the use of forecasting information such as early-warning systems, and sharing the Met Office's world-leading expertise, we can help governments and communities prepare for these shocks, so fewer lives are lost each year to extreme weather.

Professor Stephen Belcher, the Met Office Chief Scientist, said:

The Commonwealth brings together a rich heritage and shared cultural values. But these aren't the only common bonds linking member states. Each is also inextricably connected by the shared impacts of weather and climate. Improving resilience and forecasting will provide a lifeline for vulnerable communities helping them to cope with weather and climate shocks through measures which improve food security and provide protection from extremes of weather.

There can surely be no better aspiration than sharing cutting edge climate science to improve the fortunes and prospects of people in their day-to-day lives.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings take place this week in London, bringing together representatives from business, civil society and government from across the Commonwealth.

Notes to editors

Caribbean – Package to strengthen resilience

- Following the devastating impact of last year's hurricane season, DFID is announcing up to £19m of additional support for Caribbean countries to strengthen capability for early recovery at a regional and national level, and to work with countries to develop options to strengthen disaster preparedness and financial resilience.
- This will be the highest priority of our new Centre for Global Disaster Protection in 2018. The Centre for Global Disaster Protection brings developing countries together with partners including the UK Government, the World Bank, civil society and the private sector with the shared goal of enhancing resilience to climate and disasters. The Centre works with governments to strengthen disaster preparedness, embed early action and enhance their financial resilience, including through the use of financial tools like insurance.
- In January, the Centre ran its first Innovation Lab in partnership with Lloyd's of London to explore how innovations in finance could help countries to build back smarter after disasters. The event brought together more than 50 people from across the finance, humanitarian, engineering and development sectors. A first report by Risk Management Solutions, Vivid Economics and re:focus partners on the outcomes of the Lab will be available from today (16 April 2018).

Asia – Regional Resilience to a Changing Climate programme

The UK will provide up to £23.5 million through the Met Office (£12 million), World Bank (£10 million), and activities directly executed by DFID (£1.5 million) over four years. The programme will deliver:

- At least ten pilots of new technologies and innovations to deliver climate information and advice to vulnerable groups of people;
- One regional and four sub-regional forecasting and early-warning systems, to provide targeted information on the impacts of weather events such as floods and storms;
- Improved access for 30 million people to climate information, services and early warning systems;
- Three regional bodies established to deliver seasonal and long-term climate projections and analysis;
- And will mobilise additional resources for building climate and environmental resilience from national, international and private sector sources.

Uplift to Pacific disaster risk insurance pool (PCRAFI)

- The UK is providing a further £1.3 million to the PCRAFI, in the wake of major devastation to Tonga following hurricane Gita on top of £6.2 million of capital already provided.
- At the Commonwealth Summit in 2015 the Prime Minister announced £15 million to help extend an international disaster risk insurance fund to the Pacific Islands.

- In February this year, Tonga, Samoa and Fiji were hit by Cyclone Gita. Gita was particularly severe when it hit Tonga and there was widespread damage. The nation's parliament building was amongst the buildings destroyed.
- Tonga is one of 5 Pacific nations that has disaster risk insurance in place with PCRAFI, thanks to UK support. The Government of Tonga received £2.8 million (\$3.5 million) within 10 days of being hit, which helped speed recovery.

Global Parametrics

- Global Parametrics is a UK social enterprise – started with funding from DFID and KFW – with a focus on using cutting-edge climatic and seismic risk modelling to offer financial products that improve recovery and resilience in the event of natural and climatic disasters
- DFID has invested £1.5m into Global Parametrics. In addition, DFID has also provided a loan of £6.4m.
- Global Parametrics products are backed by the Natural Disaster Fund. Like an insurer, the Natural Disaster Fund collects premiums and makes pay-outs when natural disasters occur.
- DFID has invested £25 million in the Natural Disaster Fund over 20 years, in order to support pioneering new products from Global Parametrics.
- Global Parametrics has partnered with microfinance institution VisionFund to launch the world's largest non-government climate insurance scheme.
- The scheme will provide automatic disaster-linked pay-outs to microfinance institutions in Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Zambia, Cambodia and Myanmar, allowing them to provide new loans to allow families and small businesses to get back on their feet after a disaster.
- DFID made £2m available to finance disaster recovery loans by VisionFund during last year's El Nino. Following loan repayments, DFID was able to reinvest all of that that money in other development projects

General media queries

Email

mediateam@dfid.gov.uk

Telephone

020 7023 0600

Follow the DFID Media office on Twitter – @DFID_Press

]

Press release: National primary offer day

- 90% per cent of pupils offered their first choice of primary school and 97.2% were offered a place at one of their top three last year
- Disadvantage gap index at Key Stage 2 down 10.5% since 2011
- 825,000 new school places created since 2010 – with 90,000 more over 2016-17 alone

Pupils across the country will find out today (Monday 16 April) which primary school they will be going to in September, amid rising education standards in England.

Figures show 97.2 per cent of pupils were offered one of their top three primary schools in 2017 and follows the creation of 825,000 new school places since 2010.

Families will receive their offers as standards continue to rise thanks to the government's reforms and the hard work of teachers, with 1.9 million more children in good or outstanding schools than in 2010 and nine out of ten schools awarded this rating at their last inspection.

School Standards Minister Nick Gibb said:

This morning, thousands of pupils and their parents will find out which primary school they will be going to this September. Thanks to our reforms and the hard work of teachers, academic standards in our primary schools are rising across the country. Our young readers are among the best in the world, the proportion of primary school pupils reaching the expected standards in reading, writing and maths standards went up 8 percentage points last year and the attainment gap between children from wealthier and poorer backgrounds has narrowed by 10.5% since 2011.

A good primary school education lays the foundations for success at secondary school and beyond, so it is right that we help make sure every child reaches their potential from the moment they start their education. That's why we're investing £5.8 billion to create even more good schools and good school places – building on the 825,000 we've created since 2010 – resulting in 9 out of 10 pupils securing one of their top three choices of schools.

Academic standards are rising following the introduction of a more rigorous primary school curriculum to match the best education systems in the world, with latest performance data showing:

- The gap between disadvantaged pupils and others in a combined measure of

English, reading and mathematics has decreased in each of the last six years, narrowing by 1.3% in the latest year and 10.5% since 2011;

- There are now 154,000 more six-year-olds on track to become fluent readers than in 2012, with England's recent rise up the international PIRLS rankings putting the success of the government's reforms on a global scale; and
- In 2017 72% met the expected standard in reading, 75% in maths and 77% in grammar, punctuation and spelling.

On top of this, the government has invested in programmes to help raise standards in these crucial early years of education, including a £26 million network of specialist English Hubs around the country to improve pupils' literacy and £41 million to follow the same approach to teaching maths as world leading countries through the Shanghai Mastery for Maths programme. □This is on top of wider changes to the primary assessment system which will reduce unnecessary workload for teachers so they can focus on what really matters in the classroom.

[Speech: Airstrikes show we stand up for principle and civilised values: article by Boris Johnson](#)

There is a very simple reason why it was right for the UK to join our closest allies in launching strikes against the Assad military machine.

This is about our collective future. It is about the kind of world we want our children to grow up in.

It is about – and exclusively about – whether the world should tolerate the repeated use of chemical weapons and the human suffering they cause.

The problem with such weapons is not just that their effect is hideous. Anyone looking at the pictures from Eastern Ghouta can see the kind of suffering involved: the foaming at the mouth, the floppy bodies of children, and the particular terror those weapons deliberately inspire.

Vile, sick, barbaric though it is to use such weapons – that is not the principal objection. These munitions are not just horrible. They are illegal.

It is now centuries since humanity first recoiled against the use of poison in warfare. The French and the Holy Roman Empire were so disgusted by the use

of poisoned bullets they signed a treaty to ban them in 1675.

It is now almost 100 years since the great post World War One treaty to prohibit use of chemical weapons – and in that period we have seen nation after nation sign up to the global consensus that this particular means of killing is evil and should be banned.

Indeed, the universal abhorrence of chemical weapons, and the destruction of declared stockpiles, must be considered one of the great achievements of the modern world.

The global community simply cannot afford to turn a blind eye to what is happening in Syria.

In 2013 the Syrian regime committed to destroy its chemical arsenal while Russia – the mentor of the Assad Regime – guaranteed to oversee the process.

Since then the Assad Regime and Russia has made a complete mockery of that pledge.

A significant body of information, including intelligence, suggests the Assad regime was behind the chemical attack at Douma on April 7 that killed about 75 people and resulted in hundreds of casualties.

Multiple accounts located a regime Mi 18 helicopter in the vicinity at the time. The opposition does not have helicopters and no other actor in the Syrian theatre is thought capable of launching a chemical strike of that scale.

The only reasonable conclusion is that the regime has become so hardened and cynical that it is willing to exploit the extra potential of these weapons for removing entrenched urban resistance – in complete defiance of global disapproval and the norms of civilised behaviour.

The Douma atrocity alone would be enough to demand a response. But it is not a one off.

The Douma massacre is now part of a pattern of use of chemical weapons by the Assad Regime. International investigators mandated by the UN Security Council have found the Assad regime responsible for using chemical weapons in four separate attacks since 2014.

The UK and our allies have done everything in our power to deter the barbaric use of these weapons. The EU has imposed sanctions on key figures linked to chemical weapons use in Syria.

We have tried countless resolutions at the UN. But Russia has repeatedly shielded the Assad Regime from investigation and censure, vetoing six separate UN Security Council resolutions, including torpedoing the UN mandated Investigative Mechanism set up to attribute responsibility for chemical weapons attacks in Syria.

Instead, Russia has repeated its lies and obfuscation that we have seen in

this country since the attempted murder of Sergei and Yulia Skripal, including the grotesque assertion that the UK is somehow behind the attack in Douma.

Last year we had a military response from the US, when about 20 Syrian planes were destroyed at the Shayrat airfield after the chemical massacre of civilians at Khan Sheikhoun.

Now the world is forced to act again – not only to protect those who would otherwise fall victim to Assad's monstrosities, but because unless we do so his regime will continue to weaken what has become an effective global taboo, with significant humanitarian consequences for many more.

If we do nothing there will be other people and other governments around the world who will look at the impunity of Assad and ask themselves: they got away with it – why shouldn't I?

Unless we act there is a risk of moral contamination, a coarsening and corruption of what we have until now thought to be acceptable.

Yes of course it was also right for the UK to stand shoulder to shoulder with America and France – close allies who were instrumental in helping to forge the 28 strong group of countries that expressed their palpable outrage at the Salisbury attack by expelling more than 150 Russian diplomats.

Yes of course there are diplomatic considerations – but this is about more than diplomacy. It is about principle.

And in its specific focus on the use of chemical weapons – and the consequences that must flow – this action is limited, and we must be both acutely aware of those limits and clear about them.

These carefully targeted and calibrated strikes are not designed to intervene in the Syrian civil war or effect regime change.

The action was carried out to alleviate further humanitarian suffering by degrading the Syrian Regime's Chemical Weapons capability and deterring their use.

At a time of understandable tension in our relations with Russia it has been important to stress that this action does not entail some attempt to frustrate Russian strategic objectives in Syria.

In short this does not represent any major escalation of UK or western involvement in Syria – and we should have the courage to be honest about that.

In degrading Assad's chemical weapons capabilities we intend to do what we can to protect his people from that specific form of cruelty.

We are standing up for principle and for civilised values.

We may not end the barbarism – but we are telling the world that there is one

type of barbarism that is banned and that deserves to be banned.