

Speech: Nick Gibb: How can policy ensure education equity?

Thank you.

How can and should policy be developed to ensure education equity? A knowledge-rich curriculum should be at the heart of all schools. We believe that is key to ensuring education equity. Endowing pupils with knowledge of 'the best that has been thought and said' and preparing pupils to compete in an ever more competitive jobs market is the core purpose of schooling.

And ensuring that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds have the same opportunities as their more affluent peers to benefit from the cultural capital of a stretching and rigorous curriculum is key to addressing the burning injustices in our societies and driving forward social mobility.

Designing and implementing these curricula should follow a thorough interrogation of the research. It is right that debates are had about what knowledge we wish to ensure all pupils possess. It is understandable that there are differing opinions about how best to prepare pupils for the challenges of the 21st century. But opinions must change as the facts change.

In 2010, the government came to office in Britain. We inherited a curriculum that was not fit for purpose. The national curriculum had been stripped of knowledge, leaving pupils without the cultural literacy they needed.

England was stagnating in the international league tables and too many pupils were leaving school ill-prepared to compete in our increasingly globalised world. Data from 2012 shows we were the only OECD country where the numeracy and literacy of our 16-24 year olds was no better than that of our 55 to 65 year olds.

We reformed the national curriculum, restoring knowledge to its heart and clarifying what we expected children to be taught. The issues with the 2007 National Curriculum were best summed up by the statutory requirement of secondary chemistry pupils to understand 'that there are patterns in the reactions between substances'.

In 'Could Do Better' Tim Oates used this example to highlight the vagueness of the 2007 curriculum, writing:

This statement essentially describes all of chemistry. So what should teachers actually teach? What are the key concepts which children should know and apply?

The new maths national curriculum for primary schools provides many examples of the specificity and detail needed for a successful curriculum, such as the structured sequence of efficient written methods of calculation that pupils

are expected to have mastered at different ages.

But the curriculum does not sit in isolation. The government also embarked on an ambitious reform of our national qualifications. Grade inflation was rife under the previous government and too many pupils – particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds – were being entered into low quality qualifications. Public confidence in the education system had been knocked.

The government put an end to grade inflation and is introducing new GCSEs and A levels that put England's exams on a par with the best in the world. These changes are breathing life back into the country's education system.

However, the introduction of new assessments has also been important. The government has announced the introduction of a multiplication tables check for year 4 pupils – a short online assessment designed to support the curriculum stipulation that pupils should know their tables by age 9. The government is determined that no child leaves primary school without securing the basics of mathematics.

Already, the government has had success thanks to another curriculum change supported by a short assessment. Conscious of the overwhelming research in favour of teaching children to read using systematic synthetic phonics, the government embarked on a campaign to ensure every child is taught to read using the most effective methods. As well as requiring schools to teach using an evidence based phonics programme, the government introduced the phonics screening check – a short assessment of a pupil's ability to decode simple words.

The phonics screening check was introduced for the first time in 2012. That year, just 58% of 6-year-olds could correctly read 32 or more words from a list of 40. Thanks to the hard work of teachers and the government's drive for phonics, there are 154,000 more 6-year-olds on track to be fluent readers this year. The proportion passing the phonics screening check in year 1 has risen to 81%, with 92% having passed the check by the end of year 2.

The success of this policy has been confirmed by international results. The PIRLS international study of 9-year-olds' reading ability in 50 countries around the world showed that England has risen from joint 10th place in 2011 to joint 8th place in 2016, thanks to a statistically significant rise in our average score. And the data is clear on the role that the phonics reforms played in these results, with the report accompanying the results concluding that:

The characteristics that were most strongly predictive of PIRLS performance included prior achievement in the Year 1 Phonics Check.

Thanks to the hard work of teachers and by twinning carefully sequenced, knowledge-rich curricula with wider support, the government is raising standards in our schools.

In carrying out the reforms implemented since 2010, the government was

careful to pursue evidence based policies. In the world of education, there are many voices who argue that the 21st century has somehow changed how education must be done. They conclude that the technological age necessitates a different approach to education. With the support of some in the business world, they encourage teachers to turn their attentions to developing the creativity, problem solving and critical thinking skills of their pupils.

Around the world, many educationists – and I see one or two of them here – promote skills-based curricula as the way to prepare pupils for life in the 21st century. Often, knowledge-rich curricula are derided as an impediment to helping pupils to become creative critical-thinking problem solvers, but this is to confuse means with ends.

The mistake made by these influential voices in education is to believe that creativity is a skill independent of subject domain-specific knowledge; that critical thinking can be taught discretely from the subject being thought about, or that one becomes a better problem solver simply by practicing solving problems.

Just as musicians become proficient by learning their scales, it is as important that pupils build up the underlying knowledge they will need. We cannot expect a pupil to think critically about the causes of the First World War without an understanding of the delicate balance of power that existed at the turn of the 20th century. And we will not prepare pupils to be the creative, problem solving mathematicians of the future without giving them a firm grounding in the foundations of mathematics.

This government in the UK is determined that the new national curriculum endows pupils with the knowledge they need, so that they are best prepared for the rigours of a globalised 21st century jobs market. But doing so must be done with due regard for the evidence. There are too many examples of governments around the world that have mistaken ends with means in the hope of preparing pupils for the 21st century, damaging educational standards in the process.

Writing for the London School of Economics, Professor Lindsay Paterson of the University of Edinburgh has been a vocal critic of movements calling for skills-based curricula, writing of the underlying philosophy:

It belongs to that strand of curricular thinking sometimes known as constructivism. The essence of this view is that studying bodies of knowledge is pedagogically ineffective. Knowledge goes quickly out of date, and learning it is dull. Children emerge allegedly unable to think for themselves, unskilled for work in the new economy, and unprepared to act as democratic citizens. Instead, children should be enabled to construct knowledge for themselves.

This description exemplifies the belief system behind such changes. But this view is not supported by the international evidence. As Professor Paterson goes on to say, referencing teachers who are leading the knowledge-revolution

in England:

It is increasingly clear from international comparisons that neglecting knowledge is educationally disastrous. One body of international evidence for that is assembled by E. D. Hirsch in his 2016 book *Why Knowledge Matters*. Especially cogent arguments in the same vein have come from two teachers in England who have become eloquent writers – Daisy Christodoulou’s ‘Seven Myths About Education’ (2013) and David Didau’s ‘What If Everything You Knew About Education Was Wrong’ (2015). The critique does not deny that skills matter, but rather says that the best way to acquire skills is through gaining knowledge.

This nuanced understanding of the relationship between knowledge and skills is crucial to approaching curriculum design. In particular, the importance of subject domain specific knowledge to skill acquisition and transferability should be more widely understood.

A successful curriculum should enable pupils to participate in the great conversations of humankind, and it should prepare pupils to thrive in an ever more globalised and competitive economy. Both of these ambitions require a curriculum designed to give pupils access to the best that has been thought and said. Pupils deserve a rich and stretching knowledge-based curriculum that provides them with cultural literacy and a foundation of knowledge to use and apply in a variety of contexts.

We should judge our curricula by their success in achieving these aims.

Thank you.

Speech: William Shawcross’s speech at the Charity Commission’s Annual Public Meeting

Good morning.

Thank you all for making the time to come to our public meeting.

This is a very special event for the Commission.

First, of course, because of His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge.

His Royal Highness follows in a noble, important tradition in the monarchy in his regard and support for charity.

Since the reign of George III, royal patronage has been vital to British philanthropy.

Charities should heed the [Duke's reflections](#).

I agree with him that it is crucial that charities work together to secure the best outcomes.

Charities should be judged, ultimately, by the difference they make. By their impact.

And so must we, the Charity Commission.

I am confident that we are now better equipped to achieve this than we were in 2012, when I started as Chairman.

Helen has set out the many ways in which we have improved.

Forgive me if I say a bit more. When I arrived it was clear that we were still reeling under the impact of the 50% real-terms cut in our budget since 2010. My predecessor Susie Leather and her chief executive Sam Younger had valiantly struggled to limit the impact of that cut, but times were very hard.

Soon after I arrived in 2012 it was revealed that we had registered in good faith a new charity which was later considered to be operating an elaborate Gift Aid Scam. Margaret Hodge hauled me before the Public Accounts Committee, where I did not give a very good account of myself. Understandably enough she unleashed the National Audit Office on us.

A few months later the NAO published an appalling report saying we were not fit for purpose and Mrs Hodge muttered darkly about putting this little quango on the bonfire.

By then I had assembled a strong new board, all of whom agreed that given our reduced circumstances we must first of all carry out our statutory duty to protect and enhance the reputation of the charitable world. And to do that we had to be seen to regulate firmly. We agreed three priorities – to stop fraud in charities, to protect vulnerable beneficiaries such as children and old people in charitable care, and to protect all charities from abuse by extremists.

I hope we have carried out all three tasks effectively. That could not have been done without our staff – our two excellent new chief executives, Paula Sussex, and now Helen Stephenson and their executive teams – and above the staff in our four offices – London, Taunton, Liverpool and Newport. Because, don't forget – we are the Charity Commission for England and Wales.

Our staff have demonstrated a commitment that goes way beyond duty. Indeed, it is quite remarkable. Many of them have said often to me they enjoy the job because of the essence of charity which they are trying to protect and because of its extraordinary variety.

So I take this opportunity to say publicly what I say to many staff members privately: thank you.

I am delighted that their work, and that of our Chief Executives and Board has now been recognised by the National Audit Office in their most recent report, last autumn. They said we had made 'significant progress' – that is a gold medal in NAO language.

More than one government has also been helpful. In 2014, the Chancellor George Osborne gave us a one-off grant of £8 million to modernise and (dread word) digitise our systems.

And in 2016 Parliament, with government backing, passed a new Charities Act to give us more powers to act against those few dishonest or recalcitrant trustees whose misbehaviour threaten the reputation of all others. We have used those new powers sparingly but, I hope, effectively.

I am delighted that the government has also recognised that our resources must be bolstered. Yesterday, we were awarded an additional £5 million per year to help us respond to significant increases in demand on our core functions, including registration and compliance. That's an increase of almost 25% on our present budget.

We have also been granted permission to consult on charging charities so that we can provide more of the enabling work that charities tell us they need. I think this is absolutely vital to securing the future of the charitable sector.

I would also like to thank the many wonderful charities I have had the privilege of encountering.

They have made my time with the Commission among the most fulfilling, and rewarding of my professional life.

Some charities have made a truly lasting impression.

I was very impressed with volunteers I met at the charity Mosaic. A charity incidentally, with its own links to Royalty – it is supported by the Prince's Trust.

The charity runs a mentoring programme for young people, supporting them through education and into work. Meaningful philanthropy does not always need to involve giving vast amounts of money away. Sometimes, the most precious thing we can give of is our time.

I was also deeply moved by my visit to the offices of the charity Afghan Connection, founded by the inspiring Dr Sarah Fane. The charity focuses on educating children in Afghanistan, especially girls. I think education of girls and liberation of women is one of the most important issues in many parts of the world today.

In 2001, when the US led invasion overthrew the brutal Taliban there were 1 million children in school, almost all of them boys. Now there are almost 8

million children in school, about 40% of them girls.

Afghan Connection has built 46 schools for 75,000 children, about half of them girls. That is a huge change – and a hugely important one.

They have also taught children cricket – which has become a national craze in Afghanistan!

Some charities improve the lives of individuals, others enrich communities. Last year I met the Cornwall Community Foundation, which raises funds to support charities across the county. Often tiny, “kitchen table” charities and projects. Such as, recently, refurbishing a play area in St Keverne, whose equipment had become unsafe. The play area now sports a zip wire. I know the joy of zip wires. They can make a big impact in young lives – and older ones too.

I have also enjoyed our public meetings enormously, as they bring me and Commission staff into contact with local charities across the country.

Those in Wales have always been especially fun, thanks to the sheer energy and enthusiasm of attendees.

Last year we held a public meeting in Cardiff, and one of the trustees attending arrived three hours early, as he didn't have a ticket and wanted to make sure he would be admitted.

Another time we had an annual meeting in a pub in Carmarthen. We were so overwhelmed with attendees that our staff had to drag in sofas from elsewhere. There was still standing room only and a very lively debate ensued.

These experiences speak of the vibrancy of charity and also how much trustees value the Commission's advice and guidance.

The sheer idiosyncrasy of charity has never ceased to delight me.

A Commission staff member told me only last week about one of her cases, involving a small village charity in Herefordshire. It was set up in the late 18th century to provide gifts for the poor at Christmas. The charity's governing document until this day has been in the form of a stone tablet. It hangs in the local parish church for villagers to inspect.

It is a reminder of the long, deep, Christian history of charity within communities across the country. But a reminder also that charities should not rest on their past, however glorious or eccentric: the Commission is helping the trustees modernise the charity's purposes, so that it can make a more meaningful impact in the community today.

These are just a few examples of the diversity and wonder of the modern charity world.

I see charities as being among the greatest of our national assets. They are part of what makes us distinct as a nation, and what brings us together as

citizens.

I would like to end with a quote from William Beveridge in the pivotal year, 1948 when the NHS was created.

Beveridge was the philosopher behind the creation of the welfare state by the 1945 Labour Government, in which my father was a proud Cabinet member.

Some members on the left of that government thought that the welfare state would replace philanthropy and charity. Beveridge never thought that, nor wished it. He wrote:

“The making of a good society depends not on the State but on the citizens, acting individually or in free association with one another, acting on motives of various kinds—some selfish, others unselfish, some narrow and material, others inspired by love of man and love of God. The happiness or unhappiness of the society in which we live depends upon ourselves as citizens, not only the instruments of political power which we call the State.”

That is why charities which live their values, and demonstrate the greatest possible impact for their beneficiaries, and respect for their donors and for the public are so vital.

And why, I believe, the work of a strong Commission that regulates with purpose and intelligence, is so necessary too.

Thank you.

[Press release: Foreign Secretary in Paris for Middle East talks](#)

The Foreign Secretary will attend a meeting on Syria organised by France and the US to discuss how best to make progress towards a political solution to the conflict and support the efforts of the UN Special Envoy for Syria.

Following this, the Foreign Secretary will host his US, Saudi Arabian and UAE counterparts at the British Embassy in Paris for a meeting to discuss a political solution to the conflict in Yemen. The “Quad” group of Foreign Ministers last met in December in the UAE.

Speaking ahead of his travel, Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said:

The conflicts in Syria and Yemen have created two of the worst humanitarian crises of our time. There can be no military solution to either conflict, only peaceful and carefully negotiated

political solutions will truly end the suffering.

The UK will continue to take a leadership role in these crucial diplomatic efforts with our international partners around the world, intensifying work to find a sustainable way forward.

Further information

[News story: Sam Gyimah signs agreement for UK universities to expand in Egypt](#)

UK universities will now be able to expand their education offer in Egypt thanks to a new agreement signed by Universities Minister Sam Gyimah and Egypt's Minister of Higher Education Khaled Abdel-Ghaffar today (23 January).

The Memorandum of Understanding will remove barriers for UK Universities to set up branch campuses in Egypt, giving the UK HE sector a competitive advantage in the country.

The announcement builds on the UK's vast experience of delivering transnational education across the globe with 82% of UK providers already delivering UK degrees overseas.

Universities Minister Sam Gyimah said:

I am delighted to have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Egyptian government which will allow UK universities to deliver world class degree programmes in Egypt from today.

The UK has already has a strong track record of delivering higher education overseas and this agreement underscores that proud tradition.

I welcome the contribution that this partnership will make to both UK and Egyptian economies and the wider benefits it will provide to students and institutions in both countries.

Egypt's Minister of Higher Education Khaled Abdel-Ghaffar said:

This MoU is a symbol of continued collaboration, cooperation and mutual understanding between our governments and our university communities.

The opportunity for UK universities to establish International Branch Campuses in Egypt will support Egypt's internationalisation ambitions and labour market demands.

We are excited to see how IBCs will contribute to the fabric of Egypt's higher education landscape and be catalysts for broader international partnerships between the UK and Egypt in research, innovation and mobility.

Director of UUKi, Vivienne Stern said:

This is an exciting opportunity for the UK to establish new forms of transnational education in Egypt. It all marks another significant step in the strong relationship between the UK and Egyptian higher education sectors.

The quantity and depth of UK-Egypt partnerships has been growing steadily over recent years and there is clear demand to expand this further.

This is a unique example of the UK being invited to support the development of a new framework enabling new opportunities for transnational education.

I'm delighted that Universities UK International could facilitate this MoU and look forward to see UK university provision in Egypt to continue to grow.

The agreement was signed during the annual Education World Forum, which was opened by the new Education Secretary Damian Hinds on 22 January.

Attended by more than 500 people, the Education World Forum will run until Wednesday 24 January. It is supported by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for Education, the Department for International Trade, the Department for International Development, the British Council and the EWF industry partners.

The event comes ahead of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting which will be hosted by the UK in April and will bring experts from around the world together again.

[Press release: Crackdown on illegal](#)

waste and fishing activities

During 2017 the Environment Agency successfully prosecuted 108 individuals and companies for flouting waste and fishing laws in the North East resulting in almost £170,000 in fines and costs.

There were 16 prosecutions of individuals or companies for waste offences, amounting to total fines of £62,763 and costs of £40,493.

There were also two custodial sentences, three suspended sentences, two community orders and two rehabilitation orders. The courts also awarded a total of £14,735 in compensation to those affected by the crimes, which included a landowner left with costs of £100,000 to remove 585 tonnes of waste dumped on their land.

In addition, the Environment Agency revoked two environmental permits from waste companies who continually failed to meet their permit conditions.

Courts imposed a further £19,162 in fines and costs on an individual and company for twice polluting a protected water course.

In fisheries enforcement, there were three serious offences resulting in £1115 in fines, costs and victim surcharge, plus two 12 month conditional discharges.

There were a further 87 offenders prosecuted for 119 rod licence offences, including 77 offences for fishing without a licence. This resulted in total fines, costs and victim surcharge of £29,461, with three offenders also given conditional discharges.

Enforcement activity has taken place right across the North East in Teesside, Tyne and Wear, County Durham and Northumberland.

The Environment Agency's enforcement teams work alongside other specialist teams to support businesses in abiding by their permit conditions, but take tough action against those who deliberately flout regulations.

Fisheries enforcement officers carry out regular patrols and act on information and intelligence to target illegal activity on our rivers.

Jamie Fletcher, Environment Manager at the Environment Agency in the North East, said:

We take illegal waste and fishing activity very seriously. We have had some excellent results in court over the last year and will continue to work hard in the coming year to ensure enforcement action is taken against those who flout the law.

Waste crime can cause serious pollution to the environment, puts communities at risk and undermines legitimate businesses, impacting

on investment and economic growth.

Similarly those fishing illegally are cheating other anglers and putting the future of the sport and quality of our rivers in jeopardy.

We have specialist teams that work hard to target those suspected of being involved in illegal activity and to ensure any necessary action is taken against them.

We work closely with a wide range of partners including local authorities, police and the fire service, and I'd like to thank them for their continued support.

To report information about illegal activity contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111. To report a crime ongoing dial 999.