Speech: Lord Agnew: By working together we can achieve so much more

It’s a great pleasure to be here today at the North Academies Conference.

It’s also great to be back at the DfE. I feel a bit like an old football manager who has been dusted down and brought back onto the pitch.

An event like this is a great opportunity to celebrate your successes, share what works and what you have learnt through your journeys. You are on the front line of what this government is trying to achieve in education. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for the incredible work that you do.

This is the first academies conference I have attended since being appointed minister and I’m delighted that one of my first official speaking engagement is in the North. As an ex-chair of a trust I’m excited to be able to continue work to improve schools but on larger scale.

I am enthused to hear about the work being done to drive up standards and would like to thank MATs and sponsors that are taking on struggling schools into their trusts and turning them around.

This is hard work. I know that having taken on seven schools in Special Measures and two with Requires Improvement myself. Five years ago I had a full head of dark hair and weighed four stone more than I weigh today!

It also drives our Secretary of State for Education – the first Secretary of State for Education ever to go to a comprehensive school, and that’s probably why she is so passionate about social mobility.

In 2010 the academies programme was built on the principle of contributing to the school-led system through increased autonomy, independence from local authority control and the freedom to set your own curriculum, as well as a greater opportunity for collaboration.

Sharing ideas is powerful; indeed, I’m a bit of a magpie here! On that point, consider putting good local MAT CEOs or chairs onto your own boards. This is something I did with my trust. I managed to persuade Cathie Paine, Deputy CEO of Reach 2, and David Earnshaw, Chair of Outwood Grange, to join us. They gave us a really hard time, which was just what we needed.

I am delighted to see the great progress achieved by Maura Regan and her team at Carmel Education Trust, with over 100 Grade 9s in Maths and English in this year’s GCSEs and a former sponsored academy (St Michael’s) now showing a KS4 Progress 8 comfortably above the national average. I remember exhorting her to expand from her original school three or four years ago and now we see the educational power of her original school spreading across the region.

From my personal experience as an academy sponsor, I have seen at first-hand

how one can harness the energy of individual teachers and deploy them across several schools. This is because they are seeking career advancement not readily available in an individual school, or because they have such strong skills that we have wanted to share their best practice with others.

In your region there are 66 MATs of two or fewer schools and 86 SATs. I want to encourage any of you here today to think seriously about teaming up to create bigger MATs. I speak as someone who has gone from one school to 14 and I can say, without hesitation, that the collective firepower of a bigger group makes a huge difference.

I believe the sweet spot is perhaps somewhere between 12 and 20 schools, or something like 5,000 to 10,000 pupils. I know this means a certain loss of autonomy but I am certain it is the way to strengthen educational provision. Using my own experience again, by doing this we have created a full time director of music, six specialist subject leads who we have used to develop our own curriculum, and we have extended the school by three hours per week. I don't believe these things would have been possible as a small trust.

At its best, the MAT model has the potential to be the most powerful vehicle for improving schools quickly. Great examples of rapid school improvement here in the North include Zoe Carr of WISE Academies, and Rob Tarn, CEO of Northern Education Trust.

In Zoe's case, Bexhill Academy's primary pupil outcomes have increased year on year over the last four years, from 22 percentage points below the national average to 11 percentage points above the national average. I am challenging all the RSCs to give me many more examples like this.

I know that Jan has mentioned the Strategic School Improvement Fund and the MAT Development and Improvement Fund. I want to make two points on these: whoever is bidding for the funding must prove that they have a strong track record in school improvement; secondly, you must prove that the school receiving the support will be able to carry on this work when the funding ends.

These are specific funds that the Department has created to help support the great work trusts are doing in school improvement. With your local knowledge, you are the people best placed to address the regional and local disparities which exist across the country.

The North is a unique region. It is geographically large and covers a very diverse school landscape. This region has an interesting mix of urban, coastal, and rural communities – not unlike my own area, Norfolk – which each bring their own unique strengths and challenges that affect how national policy can be delivered.

It was fascinating to hear from Jan in my first week in the job about the characteristics of this region and how the programme has grown over the last few years – from the challenges faced by small faith schools in the rural areas of the region, to the work that is being done in the North Yorkshire Coast Opportunity Area.

By working together we can achieve so much more. And ultimately, this helps every young person to realise their full potential. So thank you again for all that you're doing.

Speech: Supercharging the Digital Economy

Thank you for the invitation to join you here today.

Whenever I'm with techUK, I feel I'm among like minds. Because my roots are in business, and my roots are in tech.

Both my parents started businesses, and all my siblings have started their own, and it might have seemed natural for me to learn from their example and take that route too – and to go into tech.

But what I also came to learn is that business needs the right environment to thrive. How can the whole system work against, or work for, the hardworking, enterprising, entrepreneurial founder?

This is a question I first asked for very personal reasons. When I was growing up, the business that my parents ran – my stepfather wrote the code, my mum was in charge – was all around me and the main subject even at our dinner table. My first job was in the company, solving the Y2K bug in COBOL.

When I was a teenager, in the early 1990s, recession hit. If our customers struggled, if they couldn't pay their bills, then our business struggled along with them, and that impacted the twenty or so people we employed. Friends, I should say, as much as colleagues. At one point, in the worst of the recession, we came close to losing everything. My mum, my stepdad and all the people who worked in the business would have lost their jobs. All through no fault of our own, all through outside factors.

We got through it. In fact the software became a big hit. And now every time you type your postcode into the internet and it brings up your address, you can thank my stepdad Bob. I hope we've helped you with your christmas shopping over the years.

But what those early experiences taught me was that it isn't ever enough to have a good idea and the will to drive it through. To go from concept to reality – and then to ubiquity – requires a strong environment for enterprise.

And that environment, while best not entirely determined by Government policy, can certainly be shaped and guided by it.

Because while I did go on to work for the business, I then went to the Bank of England as an economist, and that's where I discovered all the big decisions are made in Westminster. So here I am, and in a job directly concerned with improving the environment for tech businesses.

So I really feel it when I say it is an honour and a privilege to be the UK's first ever Minister for Digital, working to give others the opportunities we had, to – wherever we can – help you take those ideas, those sparks of hope and make something real and successful.

But what does that mean, in this time of digital revolution?

It means harnessing this amazing new technology, so that it works for the benefit of everyone and not only an interested few. It means mitigating the risks, and ensuring the benefits can be accessed by all. It means supporting a thriving digital sector, and a digital infrastructure that is not only fit for the present but the future, with easy and ubiquitous access for everyone in this country to the growing opportunities digital technology offers.

Our Digital Strategy, published in March of this year, set out how we intend to make the UK the best place to establish and grow a digital business and the safest place for citizens to be online.

I'm pleased to tell you that, only six months since the launch, we are making great progress. Today, I would like to update you now on how we are making the UK the best place in the world to start and grow a digital business, and how we are set to continue these developments in the very near future.

We understand that in order to have a thriving digital economy, we need to support tech businesses at every level, from startup to scaleup.

Over the past year we have seen investments in UK tech, including from Microsoft, Amazon, Apple, IBM and Google, and into British stars like Zopa, Monzo, and ARM.

We've significantly expanded the British Business Bank's capacity in scale up capital, and actively support the opening of incubators across the country.

Preparing Britain for success in the rest of the twenty first century, in the face of the fastest advance in technology in history, means making sure everyone has the skills they need to thrive in the digital world.

Britain needs stronger digital skills at every level, from getting people online for the first time, to attracting and training the world's top coding talent.

Again, this isn't something we in Government can do on our own. So when we launched the Digital Strategy in March, we committed to establish a new Digital Skills Partnership, to both bring greater coherence to provision of digital skills training at a national level, and to increase the digital capability needed to build thriving local economies throughout the country. Our partners in industry pledged more than four million free digital skills training opportunities. Since then, we have made great progress, through

companies like Barclays, Lloyds, Google, and many others.

On top of that, we have put coding in the curriculum from age 8, and recently announced that one of our first new T-level technical qualifications will be in Digital.

We want all these opportunities to be open to as wide a range of people as possible. We firmly believe that digital skills are essential, for everyone, to thrive in this digital age and that training in such skills should be an entitlement for all our citizens. So we legislated for Digital Skills Entitlement in the Digital Economy Act and are now developing the detail of the policy with the Department of Education. My friend and colleague Karen Bradley, Secretary of State for DCMS, and I are working to deliver this entitlement, so that everyone can get the basic skills they need.

We're not stopping at digital skills, we are also looking at technologies of the future.

The Industrial Strategy Green Paper, published in January, identified AI as a major opportunity for the UK, with real potential to boost our future economy. We already have some of the best minds in the world working on AI, and many areas of the UK economy – health, education, finance, to name just three – have already embraced innovation through AI.

The challenge now for Government is to build a strong partnership with industry and academia to cement our position as the best place in the world to base and develop this new technology.

So in March we launched an independent review – Growing The Artificial Intelligence Industry – led by Jérôme Pesenti and Dame Wendy Hall. The final report was published just a couple of weeks ago and sets out what we must do to support the enormous potential of AI – from smarter scheduling of operations in health care, to hiring on-demand self-driving cars – while mitigating its risks. My thanks to Dame Wendy, Jérôme and team for their excellent work.

Now I look forward to working with all of you, and with the wider industry, to deliver its proposals. Together we can make the UK a world leader in this amazing new technology, and can make sure all our citizens benefit from its use.

We are also endeavouring to make the UK the safest place in the world to live and work online, as set out in detail in our Digital Charter, which sets out to balance the freedom of the internet whilst mitigating potential harms.

We want to work closely with all of you to develop solutions to the issues at hand. We will make sure that the Charter is underpinned by an effective regulatory framework, but will only use regulation where other options are not working. Where regulation is necessary, we will ensure it supports rather than stifles innovation and growth, by providing clarity for innovators and building confidence amongst users.

So there we are. Just over six months on from our Digital Strategy and we

have been consistently working on making the UK the best place in the world to start and grow a digital business.

But coming from small business myself, I know there are more good ideas out there. So I want to hear from you, I want to know what we're getting right, what we're getting wrong, what amazing innovations you're developing, and how we can make it easier for you to grow your businesses here in the UK.

We have a big agenda and much to do, and I look forward to working with you to deliver it.

News story: Pubs Code Adjudicator (PCA) Bulletin October 2017

This bulletin includes information on the Pubs Code tenant survey taking place during November, the appointment of the Deputy Pubs Code Adjudicator, Independent Assessor fees and investment exceptions.

PDF, 117KB, 2 pages

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News story: Transport Minister visits cycle taxi scheme to highlight Accessibility Action Plan consultation

Transport Minister Paul Maynard has urged people to make their views heard on the government's Accessibility Action Plan, with just 2 weeks of the consultation remaining, during a visit to East London today (31 October 2017).

The Minister was in Hackney to see a demonstration of the Ride Side by Side project, a cycle taxi scheme which received £55,000 funding as part of the government's Innovation Challenge Fund. The scheme helps older people or

those with limited mobility make free, short local trips by road, using specially adapted cycles, while accompanied by a co-rider.

Transport Minister Paul Maynard said:

> The Ride Side by Side project shows what can be done to help those with limited mobility travel to the shops or clinics for appointments. It is a great innovation and will make life easier for many people.
>
> I take the issue of accessibility across all modes of transport very seriously and that is why I encourage as many people as possible to respond to the Accessibility Action Plan consultation.
>
> This will help us tackle the issues that make it difficult for people with disabilities to use our transport network.

Mobility-impaired transport users, including older people, often rely on services such as Dial-a-Ride or taxis to make short trips. However, they can often be impeded by long waiting times.

The Ride Side by Side service can be booked online or by phone and takes people as far as 2 miles or 30 minutes from where they live. Further support is then offered, such as help to access a clinic or shop.

David Dansky, Head of Training and Development at Cycle Training UK, said:

> There has been much enthusiasm for the project from local people who use the service for leisure rides, to go to the supermarket or local market, or to visit friends and family.
>
> There is also an amazing social element where participants sit next to the rider and are able to chat. Ride Side by Side not only offers exercise, practical and social benefits, it is also great fun.

The government is consulting on its Accessibility Action Plan until November 15. Among measures to improve transport for people with disabilities are:

- improving accessible toilets on the railways
- ensuring better use of Blue Badges
- trials in autonomous vehicles

News story: Event – Leeds Cross Government SME Roadshow

The Leeds Cross Government SME Roadshow is a great opportunity for SMEs in Yorkshire and beyond to hear directly from Central Government (Department for Work and Pensions, Ministry of Justice, Crown Commercial Service), NHS (Department of Health, NHS England, NHS Digital) and local government (Leeds City Council) about the opportunities to sell to the public sector.

You'll hear about what organisations based in Yorkshire are looking to buy, what they expect from their suppliers and about government's commitment to see more of its business won by SMEs.

You'll also hear from an SME who has successfully sold to government and who is now advising them how to get more of their business done with SMEs.

It is a chance to meet the people who make purchasing decisions, find out how you can find opportunities and what you can expect when you bid for a contract and after you've won it, and also find out about future opportunities.

Confirmed speakers include:

- Emma Jones – SME Crown Representative
- Liz Freeman – Category Specialist, Crown Commercial Service
- Elizabeth Vega – SME Panel member and supplier to government (Informed Solutions)
- Stephen Tokely – Small Business Policy Team, Crown Commercial Service and representatives from DWP, Ministry of Justice and Leeds City Council.

To register your attendance, please visit here.