

Speech: North East Economic Forum: Exchequer Secretary speech

Introduction

Good morning everyone. It's great to be here in Gateshead today.

This was an area I used to come to regularly when I was growing up.

I'm not actually from the North East – I'm a Yorkshireman born and bred – to the point where I even spent part of my career working for Yorkshire Tea!

But we used to head up the A1 to play the local rugby teams here.

And what's been fascinating to see is just how much this whole region has changed over the decades.

Now when you head up the A1, you're welcomed by that great show of Northern pride – the magnificent Angel of the North.

You see the world's first ever tilting bridge crossing the Tyne to join two vibrant, modern cities.

You see the curved glass of the fantastic Sage Gateshead drawing visitors from across the world.

And you come to the Baltic centre as we have today – and you don't find an old flour mill, you find a contemporary arts value of international renown.

It's certainly changed a fair bit over the years.

Former glories

These are all visible signs of what's been happening in this area – and I think in cities across the North the confidence and self-belief has returned, and is growing.

I don't want to focus too much on the glories of the past.

But the fact is that there was a time when our Northern cities didn't just lead the UK forward – they led the world. When George Stephenson built the first ever public steam railway to take coal between Stockton and Darlington.

When Charles Parsons was developing the steam turbine in Newcastle which revolutionised transport and energy.

When Harry Brearley found a way to make stainless steel – or rustless steel as it was called initially – down in Sheffield.

Restoration

I'm admittedly biased as a Northerner myself.

But the way I see it, our Northern cities used to be the drivers of this country's economic, scientific, and social progress in the 19th century.

That's something that fell away badly in the 20th century as these once powerful cities were allowed to fall into decline.

And now what we want for the 21st century is to recover that ground and see their resurgence.

That's what we're talking about in government, when we talk about our Northern Powerhouse.

It's not a short term project with budgets attached on skills or transport.

It's an idea, an ambition and a promise.

It is a long term government commitment that we will restore our Northern cities to their former place at the vanguard of the UK's economy.

Recommitment

Earlier this month, my colleague at the Treasury, Philip Hammond spoke for the whole of government when he made it clear that the Northern Powerhouse isn't some flash in the pan government project.

It's an economic imperative that is, will remain, and must be at the very top of our agenda.

And it's not just about cities like Manchester, Sheffield and Leeds.

It's the North as a whole – it's Newcastle, it's Sunderland, it's Gateshead, it's Hull.

It's every Northern town and city that has unlocked, untapped potential.

Both to offer a better life for the people who live there – with great jobs, great transport, great attractions adding to all the natural appeal these areas already have in spades.

But as well as improving the quality of lives here, it's also about fulfilling the potential of the North East – and North West and Yorkshire and the Humber too – to really power our national economy forwards as was once the case.

To drive our scientific advances.

To make our cultural mark on the world stage.

Lots to offer

Now in many ways, we can see these things happening already.

The Great Exhibition of the North that will be held here next year is all about showcasing our world-class art, culture and innovation – both past and present. I understand Stephenson's Rocket built in Newcastle is going to be on display.

There also remains a powerful tradition of manufacturing here in the North East – particularly in terms of chemicals, metals and transport equipment.

Particularly of course in cars. The automotive industry is very important in the UK and is a real speciality of this region.

Sunderland's Nissan plant alone produced almost 30% of all UK-built cars last year, and builds more cars than Italy.

And this is a region with a global reputation for life sciences too. Newcastle's Centre for Life is at the helm of that – not only bringing talented researchers together, but also inspiring our next generation of young scientists with their exhibitions and events.

So I was pleased to see it get a funding boost just this month of £2.6 million from the Business Department and Wellcome.

Beyond its manufacturing and scientific prowess, this a great place to invest. Last year, foreign investment in the North East created more jobs relative to the working age population than any other region outside London.

And we saw a faster increase in the number of businesses operating in the North East than anywhere else in the country.

Since 2010, nowhere in the country has seen bigger productivity gains than we've seen here in the North East. Unemployment has fallen most here.

And pay has risen most – an average of 11.5% higher than 2010.

The issues

But in celebrating what this region has to offer, and has achieved, I won't gloss over the issues.

It's the problems that this government is working on.

For example, I just mentioned pay rising here – but we also have to remember that earnings here are still a fair way under the UK average.

That's to be expected when hand-in-hand with that, we have 27% per cent of the population aged 16 and over with no formal qualifications, the second highest rate for any English region.

And despite having some of the best universities in the country, the North

East itself has far fewer graduates than the UK average – with just over 31% compared to 38%.

Productivity is another case in point.

Good gains have been made here, but there remains a prominent productivity gap – 12% compared to the UK average and 33% behind London.

Some good things, but some real challenges.

So what can be done to start to turn these things around?

In short, we need two things.

A North that's ambitious and empowered to lead the way.

And a government that's prepared to back it all the way.

Devolution

Now on the former, we've been undertaking the biggest transfer of power away from Westminster to English regions in living memory.

Only a few months ago, six mayors were elected in England – three of which were in the North – Ben in Tees Valley, Andy in Manchester and Steve in Liverpool.

I was saddened to learn last year that the North East would not be electing a mayor, but I understand and respect local leaders' decisions in this area.

However, government was clear at the time that we would continue to work with those authorities committed to devolution and we're having constructive discussions with the North of Tyne authorities on a potential deal and conversations all over the country on what can be done.

Each of the new Mayors has unprecedented powers and funding for local priorities such as transport, planning and skills.

These will make a real difference tackling issues locally and for helping to address the productivity challenge our economy faces.

I'm looking forward to working with these great regional ambassadors and seeing what we can achieve together.

Government backing

1. Connectivity

But it's not just about what local leaders and businesses can do.

Because as I said, the second thing that's needed is a government that is active in backing you.

A clear example of that is when it comes to improving connectivity.

I could be biased. I spent several years as a transport minister. But connectivity matters.

That's both about ease of movement between places – which doesn't just make people's lives easier, it helps businesses win investment and save money too.

But it's also about digital connectivity too – and it's really important that in this new era of information, the North East, and North more generally, is well connected.

I know from first-hand how much that matters for businesses and families – there are still villages and homes in my own constituency in Yorkshire that can't get mobile reception let alone high-speed broadband.

So that requires serious investment from the government and that's what we've been focused on.

This year, for example, I launched a Digital Infrastructure Investment Fund to improve the UK's internet connections.

And we've already started to deliver full fibre in the North East through the Superfast Programme – with potential for much more through our £200 million Local Full Fibre Networks programme.

And on transport links, there's a huge amount going on. Over 20 schemes in the North East will receive investment from the £380m allocated to the region from the Local Growth Fund.

Just today, the first phase of upgrading the A1 between Leeming and Barton is opening – with the full road due for completion this winter. When fully complete this will create a motorway standard route between London and Newcastle for the first time.

But effective transport means a lot more than just creating motorways. We are investing in our major 'A' roads too, such as the improvements to the A19 at Testos and Downhill Lane in South Tyneside, and between Norton and Wynyard in Stockton-on-Tees. We are also making further improvements to the A1 at Newcastle and south of Gateshead – all of these will help to speed up so many daily journeys.

And we are investing in local roads too. We've provided £21 million towards the Morpeth Northern Bypass, the last section of the A1 to South East Northumberland link road. This will relieve congestion to Morpeth, and improve links to development sites in the area. We are not buying tarmac and bridges just because we like them. We are buying opportunity and access across these areas.

There's also the Great North Rail project – in the next five years, well over £1 billion will be spent operating, renewing, enhancing and maintaining the rail infrastructure across the North of England.

This will dramatically improve journeys for passengers across the North. There will be more and faster services across the region, including between

Newcastle, Manchester and Liverpool.

By 2020 all the trains will be brand new or completely refurbished, and all the Pacer trains will be gone.

And train manufacturing has also returned to the North East. There are now over 1,000 staff and apprentices at the Hitachi site in Newton Aycliffe, producing state-of-the-art modern intercity trains. The first of these trains will be in use on the Great Western line from this Autumn.

I first came to visit this site when it was a green field.

2. Industry support

Beyond connectivity, it's about supporting our industries as the future marches on.

We're working on a modern industrial strategy to do just that.

But meanwhile, we're making good progress in key areas for the region.

As I've already said, life sciences is real strength in the North East.

And we're working with the leading immunologist and geneticist, Sir John Bell on how we support the life sciences sector. The industry-led Life Sciences Industrial Strategy was published at the end of August. We are now working with Sir John and others in the sector to agree an ambitious Sector Deal – with offers and asks on each side of the table.

We've also made a substantial real terms increase in government investment in Research and Development – an extra £2 billion a year by the end of this Parliament. This will include funds targeted at cutting edge healthcare and medicines.

And here in the North East, we've allocated £8.6 million from the Local Growth Fund to the Life Sciences Incubation hub. This hub, the product of a collaboration between Newcastle University and Newcastle City Council, will take forward the LEP's ambition to develop a life sciences super cluster for the North East – with significant new facilities for research, and space for science-based businesses.

And we are investing now in our manufacturing capacity. Nearby, Redcar is home to the headquarters of the £100 million Centre for Process Innovation, part of our High Value Manufacturing Catapult network.

We're investing half a billion in advanced propulsion technology.

And just nearby – in fact, I'm going to go and take a look this afternoon – there's the International Advanced Manufacturing Park – where £75m of publicly funded infrastructure will support a predicted £400 million of private sector investment, and the creation of over 5,000 jobs across the advanced manufacturing and automotive sectors.

The point that I'm trying to make is that government is serious about investment in our scientific and industrial development, which is so central to this region's economy.

3. Skills

And the third and final factor I'll mention today, is what we're doing on skills.

Because let me take you back to that stat I gave you earlier.

27% per cent of over-16s in the North East having no formal qualifications.

Which means lower wages, and less opportunity and freedom to live the lives people want.

So it really matters that we make a big difference here – not only for people on an individual level, but for our businesses which rely on their talents to succeed.

I think this is an issue for the UK as a whole but particularly where we are.

So we've got a lot of work going on here.

We're completely reforming technical education for a start – we need to see bright people coming through who can work in the advanced industrial roles the 21st century needs.

We're really pushing apprenticeships – again to give people the skills businesses need, and we've done a lot of work with employers to make them really useful, stretching training opportunities.

I hope that the many fantastic businesses in the North East that already take on apprentices – from Hodgson Sayers in the construction and manufacturing sector to Sage Gateshead in the creative – will lead really lead the way as business and Government works together to deliver 3 million apprenticeship starts in England by 2020.

Conclusion

So there is a lot of action happening to lay the foundations for that Northern resurgence.

The Northern Powerhouse is about cultural aspiration but the policies around devolution and transport and skills will help.

And the thing to stress is that this isn't a one-sided venture.

This isn't a bunch of politicians in Westminster laying down the law.

And I don't think it would be.

This is a team effort.

This is about government, business, and local authorities across the North all working together.

And the message I want to end with here in Gateshead is this:

It will take hard work.

It will take investment.

It will take ambition.

It will take partnership and collaboration.

But the North East can once again be the engine of the UK's economic, scientific and cultural progress.

Let's not lose any opportunity to see that happen.

Speech: Daesh Resolution to the UN Security Council: statement by Alistair Burt

Thank you, Mr President. I wanted to begin by thanking Prime Minister Abadi for his statement, and his courage. We know that Iraq and its forces have borne the brunt of the fight against Daesh.

I also want to thank him and his officials for the work they have done with the UK to make this resolution a reality. Mr President, your excellencies I'm delighted to have cast the United Kingdom's vote in favour of this Resolution and I'm grateful to Council members for their unanimous support for this UK-drafted text.

One year after we gathered on the margins of the last UN General Assembly and promised to do all we could to bring Daesh to justice, this Resolution is a vital step towards achieving that profoundly necessary goal.

And as we vote in this chamber, we think of the people who have suffered so grievously at the hands of Daesh – of the innocents whose homelands were overrun, millions who were forced to flee, suffering inflicted on those who stayed, many of whom were massacred or enslaved, civilians who died in terrorist attacks in Europe and around the world, and of the great cities that were occupied and pillaged and subjected to rule by terror.

There can never be adequate recompense for those who were forced to endure the wanton brutality of Daesh, and the dead will not be brought back, but this Resolution means that the international community is united in our

belief that there should, at least, be accountability for those who perpetrated such wicked acts.

The United Nations will now help to gather and preserve evidence of Daesh's crimes in Iraq. I can announce that Britain will provide £1 million to establish the UN investigative team that will lead these efforts – and I would respectfully encourage other countries to contribute.

Bringing Daesh to justice is only possible because Iraq's courageous armed forces have liberated one city after another, including Mosul, advancing with the support of many nations, including my own, who have sent their warplanes into action against the terrorists, breaking Daesh's grip on about three quarters of the Iraqi territory they once occupied.

Wherever Daesh have been driven back in Iraq, the painstaking process of gathering evidence of their crimes can now proceed under the auspices of the UN.

As the United Kingdom Commissioner for the [International Commission of Missing Persons](#), set up after the conflict in former Yugoslavia, it is my hope that some of this evidence will help Iraqi families find out the fate and, even the remains, of their loved ones. Especially in the terrible mass graves which dot the lands which Daesh occupied.

Britain has worked closely with the government of Iraq to bring forward this resolution. And we will continue work alongside the government of Iraq and our partners to implement this Resolution, ensuring that the UN does everything possible to support domestic and international efforts to hold Daesh to account.

And by striving for justice, we shall also be seeking to heal the sectarian divides that Daesh has exploited and inflamed.

The defeat of Daesh as a territorial entity is now within sight, but their downfall will not in itself create peace and stability. Lasting peace will only be secured once we've helped Iraq to overcome sectarian division and achieve the national unity that its people deserve.

And justice is an essential requirement for reaching that goal, for it's justice that leads to reconciliation. And reconciliation is the only way to protect a society, any society, against extremists who would sow hatred and division.

This is why we must help Iraq strengthen its justice system, to ensure all those who commit atrocities in the conflict are brought to justice. In the meantime, we know that bringing Daesh to justice will take time, demanding patience and resolve from us all.

But we owe it to those who have suffered to press ahead, however long the road might be, remembering that many offenders have been prosecuted years after they committed their crimes, as those in Srebrenica will remember.

I will close by reminding the Council of an old phrase: "The millstones of

justice turn exceeding slow, but they grind exceeding fine.” Those millstones have begun moving today.

I want to thank my friend the Foreign Minister and the Government of Iraq for our work together in making this resolution a reality. Let us make the consequences of the resolution a reality and bring some justice to those who have suffered for too long.

Thank you, Mr. President.

Speech: Non-proliferation: UN Security Council statement by Mark Field

Thank you Mr President, and thank you Secretary Tillerson for calling this important meeting of the Security Council.

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is the greatest of regional and international security concerns. This threat does not respect national borders. The proliferation of these weapons must end. We all play our part in this.

Our shared rules and norms are designed to keep the world safe. This Council has a responsibility to prevent proliferation, to tackle threats and to respond when these weapons are used.

Individual nations also have a responsibility to implement the measures imposed by the Council and indeed to be ready to go further when the situation requires.

Individually and collectively, we must enforce these rules, working through organisations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, or as groups of concerned states. If we are to succeed, this Council and strong multilateral institutions must be at the heart of that approach. And we must persist when countries continue to defy the international rules-based system.

That is why it is right that we have collectively developed a framework of sanctions against North Korea, and that we have continued to strengthen these sanctions in the face of DPRK's dangerous provocations.

In Seoul only last month, I was struck by the focus of President Moon's government in trying to resolve the situation, recognising that what has long been a regionalised dispute now has truly global ramifications.

Let us be clear. Secretary Tillerson has made it clear that the US does not seek regime change, nor accelerated reunification of the peninsula, nor to

garrison its forces north of the 38th parallel, nor indeed to harm the North Korean people.

Yet the DPRK responded with yet more missile tests and another nuclear test. While the regime prioritises its military programmes, North Korean people suffer deprivation and hardship.

That is why we must all continue to press North Korea to respect the Council's resolutions and even at this stage, to change its reckless course. We must enforce the measures that we have adopted and be prepared to expand them if North Korea continues on its reckless path.

Turning to the very different case of Iran, we now know that the multilateral system can and will continue to deliver results. The [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action](#) has succeeded in limiting Iran's nuclear capability. Iran has rolled back its nuclear programme. The International Atomic Energy Agency has had unprecedented access.

So the British government will continue to abide by our commitments under the deal and we urge other parties to do the same. Iran must continue to do so if we are all to have confidence in the peaceful nature of its nuclear programme.

However, whilst the JCPOA has dealt with one risk, others, as we all know, remain. Iran continues to play a destabilising role in its region and its ballistic missile testing remains inconsistent with [UN Security Council Resolution 2231](#). Iran must respect the call of this Council and cease these activities.

As other members have said, the situation in Syria also poses serious proliferation challenges. This year sarin gas has again been used as a weapon, a clear violation of the international prohibition on the use of chemical weapons. There must be no impunity for perpetrators of these terrible crimes.

I call on Members of the Council to support the vital work of the Council-mandated Joint Investigative Mechanism and to renew its mandate.

And we must keep driving forward our efforts based on [United Nations Security Council Resolution \(UNSCR\) 1540](#) to prevent non-State actors from acquiring and using weapons of mass destruction.

We all recognise that these proliferation challenges are complex. They require a persistent and united approach, in line with existing treaties and norms. That is why the UK government, for one, does not believe the treaty banning nuclear weapons, which opened for signatures yesterday, is helpful. It will only, I believe, create unnecessary divisions and undermine the [Non-Proliferation Treaty](#), which rightly sits at the heart of our non-proliferation efforts.

Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, This Security Council has a heavy responsibility to protect international peace and security. Member states share that responsibility and must play their part in implementing the

Council's resolutions. We now need to work tirelessly together to stop proliferation, to save lives and make the world a safer place.

[Speech: Amanda Spielman's speech at the Birmingham School Partnership conference](#)

Thank you Estelle and Tim. And thank you to Birmingham Education Partnership for inviting me here.

I've been to Birmingham quite a few times since starting this job. The first time, earlier this year, was to meet the previous chief executive at the city council, Mark Rogers. And I visited some schools with our regional director, Lorna Fitzjohn: Billesley Primary and Queensbridge School.

Of course I'm not the first Chief Inspector to take an interest in Birmingham. But were you aware that the region has been a focus of attention since the very earliest days of the inspectorate?

Ofsted is 25 years old this autumn. We took a look back at the announcements from the early months and it turns out that Sir Stewart Sutherland, the very first Chief Inspector, chose the West Midlands for his first out-of-London visit. Some things have changed though: he met chief education officers from the region before visiting Menzies High School in Sandwell, which I'm told is now part of Phoenix Collegiate.

And beyond the names, schools in this region have changed a great deal since then too. Against the backdrop of wider social and cultural shifts in the city, you have got some exceptional schools, giving children a real, full education and setting them up to succeed.

But there is still much more to do, particularly at primary, where key stage 2 results are still below the national average. We need to make sure all children, whatever their background, receive the education they deserve.

That is why this conference, and BEP's work to help improve schools, regardless of their particular type, is so important – especially your project on Raising Attainment for Disadvantaged Young People, which I know is held in high regard.

And Ofsted's role in improving schools is critical too. It's clear that our mission to raise standards in education is just as relevant today as it was 25 years ago. The Ofsted of today is now, more than ever, focused on what works, and far more outward facing and engaged with the sectors we inspect, than at any point in our history.

Yet there is more to do. Later this month we'll be publishing our new strategy which will underpin our role as a force for improvement over the coming years. And 'force for improvement' doesn't mean we are an improvement agency; rather, we want our work to give others the tools they need to drive improvement and that of course includes BEP. It is clear to me that Ofsted adds most value when we give an informed, fair and objective view of education standards. And that means giving clear messages: both the good and the areas for improvement.

So I hope we can continue to have the type of honest and constructive conversations that Lorna has already championed in the West Midlands. We all know that in Birmingham you're facing some tough cultural, social and economic challenges. But in my visits I've been really encouraged by the collective will of many heads and teachers to tackle these issues head on.

Common values

That collective will is so well demonstrated by your choice of subject for today: values. Education plays such an important part in establishing our moral codes and standards of behaviour. It opens up our minds to different ways of thinking, to new concepts and ideas, and allows us to be challenged by what we learn.

Good education takes people on a journey of enlightenment, which is far more difficult without democracy, individual liberty, the rule of law, and tolerance of different belief systems. It should go without saying that without being tolerant and open to new ideas you can't absorb them. And without having respect for other people's views you won't listen to them. And that is why what we call British Values are so important.

And we shouldn't be afraid to say that British Values are not universal values. I often hear people react against the word 'British' in this context. But while they may not be unique to Britain, they are certainly not understood everywhere in the world. And even where they are understood and valued they aren't always fully reflected in practice. We know, that even in the UK some children are being brought up in an environment that is actively hostile to some of these values.

So the education system has a vital role in inculcating and upholding them. Most children spend less than a fifth of their childhood hours in schools and most of the rest with their family. And so if children aren't being taught these values at home, or worse are being encouraged to resist them, then schools are our main opportunity to fill that gap.

So, I think education has to be the values anchor in a stormy sea. And the sort of education we are talking about is not superficial displays of British Values, or tick box exercises. I heard a strange one the other day, from a colleague, whose son had come home with a homework: to craft a picture of the Queen out of sequins. A charming task in itself perhaps, but that's not teaching children about our common values.

Instead, 'the active promotion of British values' means giving young people a

real civic education. As I have said before, it is the kind of education that teaches young people not just what British values are, but how they were formed and how they have been passed down from generation to generation.

So, a strong civic education includes a rich and deep curriculum in subjects such as history, English and geography – to name just a few. Learning, for example, through history lessons about the struggle for democratisation in Europe, or about civil rights through studying American literature.

And while we don't necessarily teach these subjects with promoting British Values in mind done well they should encourage those very debates. Through them, pupils should learn how we became the country we are today and how our values make us a beacon of liberalism, tolerance and fairness to the rest of the world. They should emerge as educated adults with a broad, informed perspective on the world. So, to sum up, I don't see British Values as a distraction from the curriculum, but at the very heart of it.

There are many good examples of this across Birmingham. Take Parkfield Community School, where the school's motto of 'No outsiders in our school' helps pupils confront prejudice and stereotypes and where they teach pupils to make a positive contribution to their communities. Or Harborne Academy, where teachers use a 'thought for the day' to openly discuss issues such as attitudes, friendship, tolerance and respect.

But it can also go terribly wrong. And this, I believe, was where the so-called Trojan Horse schools failed. Not only were there issues with promoting British Values in many of those schools, but in some cases members of the community were attempting to bring extreme views into school life. The very places that should have been broadening horizons and outlooks were instead reinforcing a backward view of society.

And while those inspections are a long way behind us, and many of the schools involved have completely transformed since, it is fair to say that the wider social and cultural issues leading to the events still need addressing.

And these issues come into play in another area of concern to me; namely, the continuing risks presented by unregistered schools. Actually most of these are not places that anyone would be happy to call schools: they are places that hide from the rule of law, from regulation by government and from inspection by Ofsted. They often teach a narrow curriculum of just a few subjects, perhaps with a particular single-faith focus, and are often housed in buildings that wouldn't pass the most basic of health and safety checks. Some of the images taken by inspectors that I have seen show places that are filthy and downright dangerous. In short, they put children at risk.

This is a very real problem. And, let me reassure you, our inspectors are working hard to identify and help shut down these illegal operations. But we know we cannot do it alone: all of us have a role to play, whether by being alert when children are taken off the school roll, or by passing on intelligence about where these schools may be located. And part of this is continuing to build confidence in mainstream education, and to make sure parents understand the risks of sending their children to unregistered

schools.

Thanks to information passed to us by the Council, we have uncovered 10 suspected illegal schools in Birmingham in the past 2 years. We have either closed or registered 8 of them and the other 2 are now operating legally. Without the strong and strengthening relationship we have with Birmingham City Council we couldn't have achieved this. And we are continuing to work with the Council and with the government to close down illegal schools.

And while we know differences in values are normal and inevitable – we don't all share the same politics, nor should we – there is a specific issue at play here. There are parents who, uncomfortable with the full and varied education on offer in local mainstream schools, are seeking out alternatives. Usually alternatives that they perceive as fitting better with very conservative cultural or religious values, such that young people in these alternatives are not being prepared for success in modern Britain. It is vital that we expose the risks of these so-called schools and help parents understand the dangers.

A rich curriculum

And it is especially important that a rich and deep curriculum helps to anchor British Values within schools. And by the curriculum I don't just mean subject choices and the timetable – though they are important parts – but the real substance of what is taught in schools. I have said before that I think this is an area we can too easily lose sight of. But it really matters, especially for disadvantaged children, who are less likely to have any gaps filled at home.

This is why I started our thematic review on the curriculum earlier this year. And I'm really pleased about the reaction to this work so far; we seem to have lifted the lid on a huge amount of untapped thinking about curriculum content and design.

But, as is always the way, alongside the enthusiasm come the myths. So I want to explain clearly what we are doing and, importantly, what we're not doing in this review.

First off, we have a good National Curriculum, which has now been in place for 3 years. Most schools are maintained schools that are required to follow it, or they are academies that say they choose to follow it. So our starting point is to see how well it's translating into practice. Other schools should be clear about what it is they are offering. So that inspectors can see whether they are delivering on their promises, as well as how outcomes compare with other schools.

And let me say very clearly, this is not about creating an Ofsted-prescribed curriculum. But inspection must always be able to look at whether a curriculum is coherent and well implemented, particularly with reference to the types of knowledge and cultural capital we want young people to gain in school. And the evidence we collect from the review will shape how we look at the curriculum in the new inspection framework, due for 2019.

And to come on to the second myth, I've talked about my concern with schools shortening key stage 3 to start GCSEs early. This is a real problem, which leaves many pupils getting a year less of the full set of National Curriculum subjects than they otherwise would. Yet this has been reported in some quarters of the press as if I was criticising the new GCSEs. Actually, it is quite the reverse.

So I want to say quite explicitly that I think the new GCSEs are a good thing. There are many reasons for this, and not just because I was involved in their creation. The first is that they are specifically designed to give schools more time for teaching and less for assessment, meaning pupils have the space to get a much deeper understanding of the subjects they're studying.

And secondly, the new GCSEs have a much better balance of knowledge and skills than their predecessors. To anyone who has swallowed the rather misleading rhetoric about them being just lists of facts, I'd say go and read the DfE-published subject content and assessment objectives: they really aren't.

But these GCSEs are designed to be 2-year qualifications and that is why I am sceptical about schools that extend the course to 4 years: ultimately not about learning more knowledge, but practising exam technique. With the result that children drop whole subjects – history, geography, languages – after just 2 years of key stage 3 study.

So our curriculum review will be looking at how schools think about the curriculum, how they structure and design the content, and how they teach it. And you might like to know we have just finished the first phase of this work, which I'll be discussing in my first commentary of the new academic year later this month.

There are some really interesting findings from this first stage, which is just the start. One thing that has struck me so far is the lack of shared language to discuss the curriculum. Even the most commonly used terms mean different things to different people. And so by doing this research we are starting a national conversation about the curriculum, helping to establish a common language and to build up our collective expertise.

Getting safeguarding right

Another important debate I have been encouraged to see take off over the summer is around safeguarding and safety in schools.

[Writing about this last month](#) I wanted to get across the importance of achieving the right balance when it comes to keeping young people safe. Sometimes schools have a difficult tightrope to walk between making sure children are safe from harm and providing them with valuable opportunities to enrich their lives. I am also well aware that school leaders are obliged to more than half an eye on their insurance policies and potentially litigious parents.

And I am the first to admit that we at Ofsted haven't always got this right. I have heard from heads and teachers how it has sometimes felt as if inspection was a box-ticking exercise when it came to safeguarding – perhaps more worries about the height of a fence or the existence of a specific written policy, rather than how children at real risk were being identified and supported.

So over the summer our inspectors have been trained to focus on what schools are doing to identify children potentially at risk of real harm; how these children are being helped; and how they manage accusations and other serious problems with staff. Keeping children safe from serious harm should always be your primary concern here.

I hope that with Ofsted more focused on these important elements of safeguarding, school leaders will be empowered to do the same. We want school leaders to make decisions based on their experienced judgement, rather than to feel the need to invent and then conform to prescriptive policies, or to succumb to pressures from overly protective parents. Not just because this limits children's experiences, but because it can obscure the sometimes very real safeguarding risks that children face.

Recognising challenge

Turning to our role as a force for improvement, I said earlier that we at Ofsted add most value when we give a fair and objective view of standards, both for individual schools and at a national level. It isn't easy to explain just how important this is, especially when those teaching in challenging circumstances feel that their effort is not recognised.

Being at the very sharp end of school improvement, as I know you are at BEP, is one of the most difficult jobs in the country. It requires a huge amount of energy and commitment to transform education in some of our most challenging schools. Having been part of ARK Schools through its first 7 years, I have seen how even the most intractably difficult schools facing the biggest social and cultural challenges, where pupils had been getting a very raw deal indeed, can be turned around. I am sure this is all too familiar to you.

But I'm not prepared to lower the bar on our overall judgements for schools in these circumstances. If we did, we would be neither fair nor objective, and we'd end up lowering expectations for disadvantaged children – children for whom underperformance is not and should never be predestined.

Instead, what Ofsted can do, and does do, is recognise that it takes a very effective leadership and management team to turn around those schools. We would fully expect that a school in a disadvantaged area with the same level of pupil progress as one in a more affluent area, to have better leadership and management teams.

And this is borne out by the data on what Ofsted actually does. If you take the Requires Improvement category, you find that schools with the toughest intakes are two and a half times more likely to be graded good for leadership

and management than those with the most affluent intake. And if you look at the Good category, schools with the most deprived intake are nearly twice as likely to be rated outstanding for leadership and management as those with the most affluent intake.

So we do recognise the challenge of running tough schools; it comes through clearly in how we judge the effectiveness of leadership and management. And we will be putting more emphasis on this particular judgement than we have done in the past, to make clear that no head, manager or teacher should be penalised for working in a challenging school. I hope that governors, multi-academy trusts, local authorities and school commissioners, who all make important decisions off the back of our judgements, will do the same.

I'd like to ask for your help with this, to tackle the myth that Ofsted does not recognise the challenge of running disadvantaged schools. And to spread the word that we do want to encourage ambitious, talented people to work in our toughest schools.

Conclusion

So, thank you again for inviting me here. I hope you might be reassured by some of the messages I have given, and my determination for Ofsted to be a force for improvement. And while I know things haven't always been easy in Birmingham, I am really optimistic about the future. We will of course be continuing to work closely together, with Lorna and James, and everyone here to build on the good work. Thank you for listening, I look forward to your questions.

[News story: New apprentices join the fight against cyber-crime in nuclear decommissioning](#)

The NDA is placing apprentices at the heart of the nuclear decommissioning industry to help protect against cyber-attacks.

This is the first programme of its kind for the NDA. It is an important step in ensuring the sector is developing the right skills to tackle the increasing threat from across the globe.

9 apprentices have been placed at 5 of the NDA's businesses across the UK as well as with the UK Civil Nuclear Constabulary (CNC).

Bill Taylor from the NDA said:

Cyber is one of the greatest security related challenges we face, something that has been recognised by UK government and our regulators.

Having high calibre people with the right skills to tackle this 21st century threat is crucial.

Our apprentices will join the existing cohort of cyber experts who will play a vital role in protecting our national security.

[Find out more about Cyber security CNI apprenticeships](#)