

Kezia Dugdale Scottish Labour Conference Speech 2017

Kezia Dugdale, Leader of the Scottish Labour Party

Scottish Labour Conference – Saturday 25th February 2017

Chair, conference, friends,

Thank you for that incredible welcome.

It's great to be back in Perth.

And let me begin by thanking my friend, Sadiq Khan, for such a powerful speech.

Conference, Sadiq is a reminder to us of what we are fighting for.

He reminds us why we should be restless every single day that we are not in power.

Because he shows us what we can achieve when the power of our Labour values are matched with the power of Government.

He inspires us to work harder and to aim higher not just because of the work he does, but because of what he represents.

Conference, to those who say that politics in the United Kingdom can't change, and to those who say that in the days of Trump, hope and unity can't win, I say look to London.

Not a "dark star" as Alex Salmond once called it, but a city whose people elected the boy who grew up on a council estate and ended up in Parliament.

A city which replaced Boris Johnson with the son of a bus driver.

And a city which rejected a Tory smear campaign of racism, intolerance, bigotry and Islamophobia and elected Europe's first Muslim Mayor.

Conference, he is the pride of London.

He is the pride of Labour.

Thank you Sadiq.

Conference, just weeks from now people across Scotland will go to the polls for the sixth time in five years.

Every time there's been an election or referendum we've asked you to go into your communities and make Labour's case.

It's not always been easy.

But you've done it.

And you've done it because you know that every door knocked, every telephone call made and every conversation had, makes a difference.

This year I'm asking you to do the same again.

Because, friends, we have so much to fight for at these elections in May.

In the places where we're in power we've built schools, community centres and libraries.

We've invested in the education of our children, kept our old people safe and warm and got our young people into work.

While the SNP Government has handed on Tory cuts to our councils over the past five years – £1.5 billion of cuts – Labour has shown that we are the last barrier between the people and austerity.

In Glasgow, the Commonwealth Games – delivered by Labour – brought thousands of jobs to the city, and helped to regenerate the East End.

In Aberdeen, where budgets have been stretched, Labour councillors have looked for new sources of funding, and issued bonds to raise an extra £370 million.

In Renfrewshire, Labour led where the SNP Government followed, by finding a way to abolish the bedroom tax.

And in Stirling, it was a Labour council that was the first to introduce 600 hours a year of free childcare and early learning for two, three and four year olds.

Conference, when the SNP find times are tough, they blame the UK Government. When Labour sees tough times, we roll up our sleeves and get on with protecting people.

In 2012, the SNP said Glasgow was a stepping stone to independence. How wrong they were.

And when they say now "It's time for change", I say communities have changed under Labour. They have been transformed.

It's the SNP which has been in power for a decade in Scotland.

It's the SNP which has failed to alleviate Tory austerity, which has failed the poorest in our society, which has our health and education systems in crisis.

Conference, that's the change we need.

That's the change we're fighting for.

So in May let's get out and elect Labour to stand up for our communities, not SNP councillors who only have one thing on their mind.

Conference, our council campaign will be rooted in our communities.

That's why I'm proud that our local government campaign manager and my deputy, Alex Rowley, has been out there leading from the front.

And he's been racking up the miles across the country:

Glasgow, Stirling, Kilmarnock, Rosyth and Dundee.

Edinburgh, Kinross, Aberdeen, Greenock, Perth.

Alloa, Paisley, Bathgate, Falkirk and Inverness.

Conference, Alex's diary is beginning to look like a Scottish road map.

Between now and May 4th, he will be at the forefront of our local government campaign.

And I know that our councillors and candidates will get the support from him that they need... to win.

So, Alex, on behalf of all of them, thank you.

Conference, a little under eighteen months ago, you elected me as your leader with a mandate to change the way we run this party and how we serve working people across Scotland.

Before I took on this job... and after, I was honest with you about the challenge we faced.

The referendum changed Scottish politics for good, and I said that if we were to succeed again in the future, Scottish Labour had to change too.

The last time I stood on this stage, in my first conference speech as leader, I said that decisions about what happens to the Scottish Labour Party would be made here in Scotland.

And a year and a half after I said it would happen, we've made it happen.

Once and for all, no one can question who makes our policy, who selects our candidates and who is in charge of this party.

And for the first time, we have secured permanent representation on Labour's NEC.

I also promised you that under my leadership this would be an open and democratic party. One that puts our members and our most historic partners – the trade unions – at the centre of our movement. And that's exactly what we've done.

Last year, we had a manifesto I was proud of. It was based on a simple idea

that we all believe in. And it told a simple truth. That if you want high quality public services we have to talk about who pays for them.

It was a tough message but it was the right, honest and decent thing to do.

And against attacks from both the SNP and the Tories, we have stayed true to our values.

I take no joy in the fact that our prediction... that millions would be cut from the budget for frontline services... has been proven right.

So we'll continue to make the argument that the richest should pay their fair share for the services we all rely on.

And, friends, just yesterday we passed another milestone in the history of our party.

Labour – the party of devolution, the party that gave life to a Scottish Parliament that many said was an impossible dream, started writing the next chapter of that story.

With your backing, we have set out a plan to deliver a stronger Scottish Parliament, and a vision for a reformed United Kingdom.

We are a party that believes in being part of something bigger, but... understand that decisions should be taken as close to the people as possible.

That is why we have backed federalism.

Friends, it isn't Ruth Davidson and the Tory's status quo, or the SNP's damaging plans for independence.

It is a Labour vision for Scotland's future.

Conference, this is how I have delivered on the mandate you gave me.

And only by working together over the months and years ahead can we complete the task of rebuilding our party.

Together, we have put in place a solid foundation for the future.

Our party – now more open and democratic.

Our voice – strongest as part of a UK movement.

Our decisions – made here in Scotland.

With a plan for a stronger Scottish Parliament and a reformed UK.

And a platform that defends public services, our schools and Labour's lasting legacy – our NHS.

Conference, our world is changing.

At a time when politics can seem more and more narrowly focused on taking us out of the EU, or breaking up the UK, the world around us is transforming at a pace that has never been seen before.

The world is more open than it has ever been.

And technology gives us boundless opportunities, but also demands we think again about the way we work and live.

This time ten years ago, Facebook had only been open to everyone for five months.

And no one had heard of the iPhone.

Today, more people use Facebook than there were people alive one hundred years ago.

And every minute, 300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube.

But it's not just technology that has changed the way we live.

In the past, war, famine and disease killed millions upon millions of people every single year.

But today, more people die as a result of violent crime, than they do as a result of war.

More and better knowledge means that killer diseases are declining.

Humanity has succeeded in taming, if not eradicating, the disasters that held us back throughout much of our history.

I don't think our problems are solved though – far from it – but when you take a moment to stand back and look at where we've got to, you realise that if you gave someone the choice of being born at any point in human history so far, they would choose today.

We live longer, are more peaceful and more prosperous than ever before.

But none of this has happened by chance.

It's happened out of choice, and because of decisions that have been made over the past 50 years.

Technology has improved because of the ingenuity and skill of scientists and engineers, often funded by governments who backed them with billions of pounds.

We've made this progress because people and politicians made choices that got us this far.

Choices Labour made in power. Introducing a minimum wage, raising family incomes, creating civil partnerships, investing in our NHS and lifting millions out of poverty.

And if we make the right choices, there's nothing to say we can't make the same progress again.

But in too many places in Scotland and around the world, that's just not how it feels.

Instead, people look to the future and feel more vulnerable, fragile and uneasy about what is coming around the corner.

Despite the opportunities on offer, our young people feel they have less chance to succeed than their parents did.

People feel abandoned because the world around them is changing too fast and too many people are being left behind.

Ten years ago, we failed to anticipate a financial crash that began to change politics in this country.

Too many people at the time couldn't see that 'business as usual' just wasn't going to work anymore.

After the financial crash, Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling focused on keeping people's life savings secure, as many people as possible in work and off the dole. That was the right thing to do.

In 2010, politicians were taught a hard lesson.

They stepped in to rescue the banks, but no one came to rescue our politics.

The way we did politics had to change. We had to work harder at taking people with us, hearing what they had to say, and making sure they knew we were listening.

This should have been our focus. Instead we were diverted by arguments about independence and Brexit.

Two sides of the same coin.

And the truth is they're ideas that risk turning the clock back on the progress we've made.

Progress built on Labour and trade union values.

Solidarity, co-operation, mutual understanding and respect.

They are the values that are under attack from independence and from Brexit.

And I won't stand for it.

Conference,

The 2014 referendum shook me to the core.

I know that for lots of people, it was exhilarating.

But for many others, it was both physically and emotionally exhausting.

It divided our country.

It set family members and friends against each other.

It created arguments and rows that most people are pleased are now behind them.

Our country now feels more divided and more fractured than ever before.

Instead of focusing on what we can do to build our future, we're too busy labelling each other because of decisions we took in the past.

Yes. No.

Leave. Remain.

Focusing on what makes us different rather than what we can do to bring us together.

Conference, I am still so proud that I fought for our values in that referendum, and that so many of you here today made the argument alongside me.

We put the national interest and the interests of working people ahead of our own party interest.

Well let me tell you conference.

We made the right decision.

When we warned about threats to our public services, we were told we were wrong. Now Scotland's deficit is even bigger than it was then.

But some people still say that we should back independence. Not because it's right, but because they think it's popular.

Let me say this to them.

The Labour Party I lead will never betray its values so easily.

It will never turn its back on the idea that together we're stronger.

That we can achieve far more working in partnership than we can alone.

Conference – Labour's historic values will endure even under this greatest threat.

We will never sacrifice the jobs of workers at Rosyth and Govan and Faslane.

The jobs of thousands of people in Edinburgh and Glasgow in science, technology and financial services whose companies are already feeling the effects of Brexit.

Or the oil workers in Aberdeen who need more support, not greater uncertainty.

It will never cut off opportunities for our young people and tell them that their life chances should be curtailed by a border.

Or look our older people in the eye and say that we are willing to put their pensions at risk.

Or ask working families to face higher bills.

And it will never turn its back on the millions of people who feel not just left behind, but abandoned by the people in charge.

It will always put the people of this country first.

Conference, the Labour Party I lead... will never support independence.

Independence. It's not an escape from Tory rule, it's not an escape from Brexit, it's not an alternative.

It's the same old song that the SNP has been singing for decades.

Conference, it's time Nicola Sturgeon changed her tune.

I want the First Minister of Scotland to focus on the Scottish NHS, on our economy and on our schools.

I don't want a First Minister whose priority is the constitution.

It may serve up a convenient headline to divert attention, but it doesn't put food on the table or teach our kids how to read and write.

I don't want any more uncertainty and upheaval.

We need stability and focus. And that's what I will strive for... each and every single day.

Friends, yesterday, you supported my plans for change with an even stronger Scottish Parliament inside a federal United Kingdom.

This is an historic milestone for our party which will protect the rights and benefits we get from being part of the UK.

And with Brexit, more power is returning to the UK, and I want that to mean more powers for Scotland.

It presents us with a significant opportunity.

In the first instance, in areas that are already devolved, like fishing and agriculture, powers should return directly to the Scottish Parliament.

But in a whole host of other areas where power currently sits with the European Union, we should be asking what should happen in the future.

And I will be guided by where I think the rights and protections for working people will be best guaranteed.

So, with the social chapter ceasing to apply in the UK, this is the right time to look at protections at work, and the minimum wage, and ask if power over those should sit in Holyrood. And I believe it should.

The same is true of power over immigration. As we leave the single market, we will need to design a new immigration system for the UK.

It needs to better serve Scotland's needs and consider the views of business and of people across the country. We need to make sure we have a fair system.

These decisions about the future of our country cannot just be taken by politicians.

That is why we need a People's Constitutional Convention, made up of men and women from every corner of the UK, to decide how this country should be run in the 21st century.

With the Tory Government refusing to take this idea forward, it is now the job of the opposition to make it happen.

Jeremy Corbyn has already given his support.

Conference, let's thank him for everything he is doing to make this happen.

And I can share with conference today, that in the coming months, together with Gordon Brown, I will join Labour representatives from Wales and the regions of England to begin to set out how we will take this agenda forward together.

Conference, I do not want another referendum on breaking up the UK.

Our country still bears the scars of the last one, and no one wants to go through that again any time soon.

That's why Labour will never support one in the Scottish Parliament.

But the unfortunate truth is this.

With the SNP supported by the Greens, they have a majority in the Scottish Parliament.

So if this country faces another referendum at any point in the future, I will work tirelessly to make sure that our side of the argument is successful again.

To ensure that we show that our values of solidarity and co-operation can win out.

And to protect the jobs and opportunities of everyone who lives and works in Scotland.

That is why today I am announcing the launch of together stronger.scot and asking everyone who shares Labour's vision, of a strong Scotland inside a reformed UK, to sign up.

If you share our values.

If you believe our country is already divided enough.

And if you believe the First Minister should shelve her plans for a second independence referendum.

Then join with us.

Instead of exploiting division, we want people across Scotland to share our vision of an open, tolerant and outward looking Scotland.

Friends, this is our movement for a new Scotland.

Our movement for a fairer, better more equal Scotland.

A Scotland that is strong and secure in its own identity, and where we think more about what unites us than divides us once again.

Conference, our argument against Independence is built on our Labour values, and our movement for a new Scotland has at its heart creating jobs and building our economy.

Because without a strong economy, we can't put our values into practice.

Government has a responsibility to the poorest, but it also has to make sure that working families are protected, and that wages keep up with prices.

Under the SNP, Scottish growth is now less than a third of the UK's.

Two of the largest sectors in our economy – the oil industry and the financial industry – are declining.

The problem for the SNP is that its drive for independence means it can't admit the weaknesses in our economy.

And it means it can't take advantage of the opportunities that may be round the corner.

Because you can't make the case for oil and gas decommissioning work to come to Scotland, if your case for independence relies on an economy fuelled by never ending oil.

You can't admit how many jobs have already been lost in the financial sector, if you still need to convince people that they'll be there long into the future.

And you can't use Brexit to explain away all the problems when you're calling for Scotland to withdraw from its biggest single market.

For Labour, our priorities are, firstly, equipping Scotland for a future of high skill jobs.

And, secondly, doing what we have always done – protecting the incomes of working families across the country.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, at the outset of the first wave of automation, too many industrial jobs were replaced with low pay and low skilled jobs in the service sector.

Now, other skilled jobs – long thought invincible to machines – are under threat. Some experts say that we will lose 20 per cent of Scotland's jobs in the financial sector to machines in the next two years.

No matter how you look at it, it's clear that our economy needs to radically change if it is going to succeed.

We have to prepare people for the future with the best education to give them the ability to compete for high skilled jobs.

This week, we saw the SNP Government push through another budget full of measures that will cut right to the heart of our public services.

It will see millions lost from frontline local government services.

And will, once again, make the job of our school teachers even more difficult.

I've always called spending on education an investment, because that's exactly what it is.

It's the payment we make as a society so that the next generation get even better opportunities than our own.

But no matter how the SNP tries to dress it up, the budget the government passed on Thursday can't make up for nearly a decade of neglect.

The gap between the richest and poorest children has persisted, while teachers have been lost and literacy and numeracy rates have declined.

Giving every child the best start in life means giving them a better chance to succeed, to get into university or a good college course, a trade or training, and ultimately to get a job that will set them up for life.

Our country has the potential to take advantage of opportunities in some great, new innovative industries, but they need far more support.

Edinburgh is now one of the country's centres for computer coding, designing the apps and programmes that we use on our phones, tablets and computers.

But the SNP Government still doesn't have a published strategy for how we can grow our tech sector so it can provide more jobs in the future.

This isn't a consequence of a lack of power – it's a lack of political will.

As the Scottish Parliament takes on more tax powers, growing our economy – through investing in the skills and ingenuity of our people, and supporting new businesses – is even more important.

If we don't, it will mean a direct impact for our schools, hospitals and other public services.

That is why I can announce today that in the coming months, that I and our economy spokesperson, Jackie Baillie, will launch Scottish Labour's Industrial Strategy, and begin to set out our thinking for the new economy.

This will include specific work, as many – including Dundee City CLP – have called for, on how Scotland responds to the rise in automation, actions we can take to protect Scottish jobs and ideas for how we can create new opportunities in the technology and digital sectors.

And as the other powers of the Scotland Act arrive in Holyrood, we will set out plans to use them to grow our economy, and also to protect those who are hardest hit by austerity and by the consequences of Brexit.

Scottish Labour.

Doing what it's always done.

Stepping up to the challenges of the future.

Focusing on the economy.

Creating jobs.

Improving lives.

And building a better future, together.

Our second economic priority is protecting family incomes.

As the effects of rising prices begin to take hold over the coming months, Scotland and the rest of the UK faces a renewed cost of living crisis.

For the first time ever, real wages are expected to decrease over the course of this Parliament.

This is unprecedented and demands attention and action.

In 1946, Labour introduced family allowance because we believed that everyone – regardless of their income – deserved support from the Government when they had children.

It demonstrated Labour's commitment to giving every child the best start, and giving every family something back from the money they paid in.

It was an idea that said very clearly that together we're stronger.

Today, with the new welfare powers in the Scottish Parliament, we have a duty

to look at what we can do to return to those principles.

Conference, I've given Nicola Sturgeon a fair number of ideas over the past few years that she's taken on as her own.

Quite a few were made in my last conference speech I made here in Perth.

Guaranteeing a living wage for care workers.

An attainment fund for every school.

Full grants for every looked after child in Scotland who wants to go to university.

Every one of them Labour policies that I announced on this stage in 2015.

Every one of them now a Government policy.

So don't let anyone tell you, conference, that we can't make a difference from opposition.

Today I've got another idea for Nicola Sturgeon.

220,000 Scottish children are still in poverty.

Charities, anti-poverty organisations and others across Scotland have called for an increase in child benefit to tackle this. And I agree.

So today I can announce that Labour will respond to calls to support families by backing the campaign to top-up child benefit in Scotland.

Using the new welfare powers in the Scottish Parliament, we will campaign to create a new Scottish Child Benefit.

Our plan would see child benefit increase by £240 per year by the end of this Parliament, increasing by £13 a month next year, before rising to £20 per month in 2020.

The Child Poverty Bill – now in the Scottish Parliament – should take meaningful action to combat poverty, as well as setting targets.

That is why in the coming weeks, we will push the Government to include this action in the Child Poverty Bill.

And if they won't do it we will seek to amend the law ourselves.

Our plan would mean help for the majority of families across Scotland, and would mean 18,000 fewer children living in poverty in the first year, and up to 30,000 once these changes are fully implemented.

It would mean starting to reverse the fall in the value of child benefit that families have seen over the past five years.

And it would send a strong message, that Scotland will not allow hard working

families to bear the brunt of Brexit.

Conference, families across Scotland are sick and tired of living in a divided country.

They want politicians they can trust.

They want a plan to get us through Brexit.

They don't want us to divide our country all over again.

That should be Labour's priority.

Throughout our history we always put working people first.

The clue is in the name – Labour.

And that should be our guide again, as we begin to chart a new course for our party and our country.

My promise to people across Scotland is this.

I will always put your jobs first.

I will fight for the support your family and your community needs.

I will never shy away from being honest about the challenges our country faces.

And that's why I say clearly today – I will never support dividing our country.

Friends, our country has always succeeded when we have been united.

Scotland was built by people who came together to create something bigger than themselves.

Whose ideas didn't just shape our country, but shaped the world.

And who realised that we have more in common than that which divides us.

Let's discover that spirit again.

Let's reach out into our country, and into the world.

Let's tell Labour's story for a new time.

Let's go out and tell all of Scotland that together, we're stronger.

Thank you.

ENDS

News story: FinTech Week 2017: celebrating Britain's status as global Fintech hub

Announced by the Chancellor today (26 February 2017), FinTech Week 2017 will take place in April and showcase the sector's successes, aim to attract more investment into Britain and share global regulatory expertise. Planned events include:

- Innovate Finance's Global Summit (April 10-11)
- the government's first International FinTech Conference (April 12)
- Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) International Innovate Seminar (April 12)

Designed to bring together industry, government and regulators, the second UK FinTech Week will build on the success of last year's event, and focus of the issues affecting Britain's world leading sector, including investment, access to skills and business support to FinTech start-ups.

As part of the week, the Chancellor will host the first International FinTech Conference on 12 April in London. He will be joined by the Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, Simon Kirby and other market leading industry voices.

The conference, which will connect hundreds of FinTech companies from across the UK with investors from all over the world, will also include expert led discussions and panels as well as workshops from the government, FCA and financial services organisations. UK FinTech firms will have an opportunity to showcase themselves in an exhibition space and during a pitch session.

The Innovate Finance Global Summit on the 10th-11th April will convene the start-ups, investors, regulators and institutions shaping the global FinTech agenda. With over 2000 expected attendees, 100 speakers, the inaugural Pitch360 demos and Innovate Finance's 300+ member companies, the summit will bring the global FinTech community together in London.

The two-day summit will focus on the themes driving innovation in financial services, such as the blockchain, digital identity, cyber security, financial wellness and inclusion.

The FCA will also be hosting an International Innovate Seminar on 12 April, which will bring together regulators from around the world who are working on, or have an interest in, the regulation of positive innovation and technological developments in financial services.

The seminar will provide an opportunity for regulators to share experiences,

approaches and perspectives on a range of different issues and challenges related to the regulation of FinTech.

Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Hammond said:

The FinTech sector is one of our fastest growing sectors, adding more than £6.6 billion into the UK's economy and attracting more than £500 million of investment.

FinTech Week 2017 is an opportunity for Britain to build on these successes and attract further investment in our world-leading sector, ensuring we remain at the cutting edge of financial innovation.

HM Treasury's special envoy for FinTech, Eileen Burbidge said:

The UK is already the best place in the world to start, grow and scale a FinTech company thanks to our strong financial services heritage, leadership in digital technology, strong investment landscape and progressive and innovative regulators.

This second annual UK FinTech Week will showcase all of the many strengths of the UK, and highlight the reasons why even more entrepreneurs and investors should look to the UK for value creation and market opportunities.

CEO, Innovate Finance, Lawrence Wintermeyer said:

The UK has developed a blueprint for the best FinTech ecosystem in the world through progressive government policy, an innovative regulator, and a global pool of FinTech talent that is the envy of the world. We have invited the world to the UK in April to showcase our community and share with entrepreneurs and investors why this is the place to do FinTech.

Further events taking place on April 13 will be announced nearer the time.

If Labour stands together we can turn back the Tory tide – Jeremy Corbyn

Jeremy Corbyn MP, Leader of the

Labour Party, writing
in the Sunday Mirror, said:

Theresa May talks about delivering
an economy that works for working people. But in practice, she's doing the
opposite.

In next month's Budget, the Tories
are set to press on with their endless austerity: still deeper cuts to health
and social care, education and local services.

They're now trying to take away
more money from people with disabilities – while they're handing out multi-
billion
pound tax breaks to the wealthiest. It's the nasty party all over again.

Labour is campaigning for an
investment-led economy that restores pride to every community. And we are
determined to end to a tax system rigged for the richest. We think everyone
should pay their fair share.

On Thursday, the people of Stoke
rejected Ukip's politics of hate and division – and its sham claim to
represent
the working class. They voted instead for the NHS, decent jobs and homes,
investment and fairness.

But the result in Copeland was
deeply disappointing. Labour's share of the vote in Copeland has been falling
for 20 years and of course I take my share of responsibility.

Both these areas, like many others
in Britain, have been left behind by globalisation and lost out from a rigged
economy.

So it's no surprise that they
rejected the status quo by voting to leave in the EU referendum. That's why
it
was important for Labour to respect the result and vote for Article 50.

The task now is to fight for a
positive future for Britain after Brexit – not the kind of bargain basement
tax
haven the Tories want to engineer.

And we must take our message of
economic renewal and fairness to every part of Britain – and show that Labour
has changed under my leadership.

The Conservatives have neglected
working people by cutting investment and letting wages stagnate or fall year
after year. Six million people now earn less than the living wage.

Labour will be campaigning for investment in decent jobs and homes, education for all, support for the NHS and social care, and fair taxation.

Last year Labour forced the Government to U-turn on £4bn cuts to personal independence payments for people with disabilities. If we stand together we can stop the latest attack too.

We haven't done enough yet to rebuild trust with people who have been ripped off and sold out for decades and don't feel Labour represents them.

But if we stand together, I am confident we can do that and turn back the Tory tide.

I was re-elected Labour leader five months ago with a bigger majority and I am determined to finish that job: to reconnect Labour with our working class voters and values – so we can win power to rebuild and transform Britain, for the many, not just the few.

[Press release: Foreign Secretary to visit Egypt](#)

In his first visit to Egypt as Foreign Secretary, Mr Johnson will also host a reception with British investors and some of Egypt's best and brightest entrepreneurs. During the trip the Foreign Secretary will also meet with representatives of civil society and Human Rights activists.

Speaking ahead of the visit, the Foreign Secretary said:

I am looking forward to my first visit to Egypt as Foreign Secretary and meeting both President Sisi and Foreign Minister Shoukry to discuss a wide range of issues and deepen the strength of our bilateral relationship.

The UK is a longstanding friend of Egypt. We are Egypt's top economic partner and strong allies against terrorism and extremist ideas. The UK is a champion of a renewed Egypt, because stability, peace and growth in this region are the bedrock of opportunity and security for British people and people in the region.

News story: Two-year university courses come a step closer

The government has today, Friday 24 February, tabled amendments to the Higher Education and Research Bill to encourage more flexible learning and increased choice for students.

These include a key amendment to enable universities to offer more accelerated courses, including 2-year courses, where content is condensed into a shorter period.

This amendment would enable a higher annual fee limit to be set for accelerated courses, subject to Parliamentary approval. This amendment responds to evidence which shows that inflexible fee structures are seen as a major barrier to the availability of accelerated courses, with many universities unable to deliver their traditional 3-year courses in two years because of the existing limit on annual fees.

This delivers on a manifesto commitment to encourage universities to offer more 2-year courses and extends the opportunity to study at England's world-class universities to even more people.

The government intends to consult on the detail of how to deliver higher annual fee limits for accelerated courses ahead of tabling secondary legislation. The proposals will include clear measures to ensure the limit would only apply to accelerated courses.

Other important amendments to the bill tabled today include:

- an amendment which will help students to store up academic credits and to switch institution more easily
- an amendment which will place a requirement on the new sector regulator – the Office for Students – to have regard to institutional autonomy in everything that it does
- amendments that will guarantee that the standards against which providers are assessed are determined by the higher education sector
- an amendment that enshrines in law for the first time the Haldane Principle, which dictates that decisions on individual proposals should be reviewed and made by experts in their fields; this means with that all governments will, in the future, need to have regard to the Haldane Principle when making a grant or giving directions to UK Research and Innovation – the government's single strategic research and innovation funding body

Speaking at the Universities UK conference in London, Jo Johnson, the Minister for Universities and Science, said:

Change is long overdue and this bill gives us the chance to introduce new ways of learning. Students are crying out for more flexible courses that enable them to get into and back into work more quickly, and courses that equip them with the skills that the modern workplace needs.

I absolutely recognise that for many students the classic 3-year model will remain the preferred option but that cannot be the only option. That is why we have tabled amendments that give real flexibility in learning.

These changes will not mean any compromise in quality, or an increase in overall degree costs for students. The tuition fees for a student taking an accelerated degree will never be more, in total, than those for the same degree over a longer time period. It is also likely that students will end up paying less overall because they will have fewer years of maintenance costs and a real chance of entering the workforce more quickly.

Read the [entire speech](#).