

WHAT IS EDUCATION FOR?

Speech by Michael Gove MP to the RSA

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INTRODUCTION

It's a pleasure to be here at the Royal Society for the Arts – I am grateful to you Matthew for the kind invitation and appreciate the trouble you've taken to provide me with a platform today.

I am also appreciative of the work you have done with the RSA since you took over – under your leadership the Society has flourished as never before, and leads debate in social policy, in science policy, and on educational reform.

And talking of leadership changes...

It is just over two years to the day since Gordon Brown took over as Prime Minister. Many of you I know will have chosen to mark the occasion quietly, in your own way with an appropriate private ceremony. And perhaps Matthew you, and your old boss Tony Blair, were among those of us reflecting on what might have been...

And as well as marking the second anniversary of the Prime Minister's accession, this month also marks the second anniversary of the demise of the old Department of Education and the birth of the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Now names themselves, especially names of Whitehall departments, are far less important than what goes on in their name –

Titles, as Lord Mandelson could tell us, are far less important than the substance of policy.

But the renaming of the old Department was no idle exercise in empty rebranding – it reflected a philosophical shift in how Government sees its role.

Under Gordon Brown and Ed Balls, schools have lost their principal purpose – and been saddled with a host of supplementary roles.

As the flagship document of Ed's first year in office – the Children's Plan – indicated, schools are less places of teaching and learning and more community hubs from which a host of children's services can be delivered.

In that sense education has indeed been eclipsed – and the renaming of the Department is genuinely significant – we no longer have a single department of state charged with encouraging learning, supporting teaching and valuing education.

Instead we have one department which manages schools – and sees them as instruments to advance central government’s social agenda.

And we also now have another department – the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills – which manages universities – and sees them as instruments to advance central government’s economic agenda.

What we do not have – and what we desperately need – is a Department at the heart of Government championing the cause of education, the value of liberal learning, the wider spread of knowledge as an uncontested good in its own right.

THE DEMOCRATIC INTELLECT – EVERY CITIZEN'S RIGHT TO DRAW ON OUR STOCK OF INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL

Today I want to argue for just such an approach from the next Government. But such an argument provokes a crucial question – why? What is education for?

I believe that education is a good in itself – one of the central hallmarks of a civilized society – indeed the means by which societies ensure that everything which is best in our society is passed on to succeeding generations.

But the case I want to make today goes beyond that.

Education has an emancipatory, liberating, value. I regard education as the means by which individuals can gain access to all the other goods we value – cultural, social and economic – on their terms. I believe education allows individuals to become authors of their own life story.

I know from my own experience that the opportunities I have enjoyed are entirely the consequence of the education I have been given. Perhaps I value education so much because it has given me so much – but what it has given me most is the chance to shape my own destiny. For generations of my family before me, life was a matter of dealing with the choices others made, living by a pattern others set. I, and those members of my generation who were given the gift of knowledge by wonderful teachers, have been given the precious freedom to follow their own path.

And that relates directly to education’s second value – as a driver of real social justice. The very best means of helping all realise their potential – of making opportunity more equal – is guaranteeing the best possible education for as many as possible.

Education, properly understood, also has another value which I believe is much less appreciated, certainly by those guiding education policy today. As Michael Oakeshott once argued, every human being is born heir to an inheritance – “an inheritance of

human achievements; an inheritance of thoughts, beliefs, ideas, understandings, intellectual and practical enterprises, languages, canons, works of arts, books musical compositions and so on...”

Education should be a process of granting every individual their rights to that inheritance. Every child should have the chance to be introduced to the best that has been thought, and written. To deny children the opportunity to extend their knowledge so they can appreciate, enjoy, and become familiar with the best of our civilization is to perpetuate a very specific, and tragic, sort of deprivation.

There is a peculiar, and to my mind, quite indefensible assumption among some that the only cultural experiences to which the young are entitled, or even open, are those which have a direct, and contemporary, relevance to their lives. So Carol Ann Duffy and drum’n’bass are ok, but Austen and Eliot, Cicero and Wagner are out.

Schools should be a place where horizons are extended, and eyes opened. The greatest artists and thinkers are great precisely because their insights and achievements have the capacity to move, and influence, us all. And so we should not deny their influence to any child, on the basis of a lazy assumption about background, or potential.

Having grown up in Scotland I identify the principle that all should have access to the best with the Scottish Enlightenment ideal of the Democratic Intellect. It is an ideal which underpins everything I am arguing for

And ensuring every child does have access to the body of knowledge that makes up our intellectual inheritance as a society serves two other, crucial, purposes.

Shared access to the intellectual capital we have built up over the years helps bind society together. The American thinker E.D. Hirsch has highlighted this crucial aspect of educational policy in his work on Cultural Literacy. A society in which there is a widespread understanding of the nation’s past, a shared appreciation of cultural reference points, a common stock of knowledge on which all can draw, and trade, is a society in which we all understand each other better, one in which the ties that bind are stronger, and more resilient at times of strain.

Investment in education, in that sense, is an investment in democracy.

As it is in another sense. The more knowledgeable, intellectually self-confident and adept at distinguishing good arguments from bad our children become, the more healthy all our democratic institutions. De Tocqueville pointed out that democracy is stronger when individual citizens have a stock of knowledge on which to draw which

allows them to stand out against tides of opinion which are driven by passing fashions and populist rages.

Whether on GM, or MMR, fighting terrorism or fighting climate change, the better informed our citizens, the better the chance of having a public debate which is rooted in fact, testable propositions and good sense.

My case for education doesn't just rest on the pillars I've outlined. It springs, as I mentioned right at the beginning of my remarks, from a deep belief in the value of learning as a good in itself. But at a time when even the most obvious virtues have to defend themselves in an ever more competitive marketplace of ideas I feel it's worth asserting the crucial importance of education when it comes to giving individuals control over their lives, access to their proper inheritance, a more secure place in a more civilized society and the clearest, strongest, voice in the decisions of our time.

And one of the reasons why I feel the need to make that case is because I feel the crucial importance of education – as a good in itself – and as the parent of all these other virtues – is being overlooked and undermined.

THE DRIFT FROM 'EDUCATION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION' TO 'EVERYTHING ELSE MATTERS'

I worry that our schools are being asked to do more and more which, while it might appear desirable, dilutes the importance of teaching and learning.

I fear that duties on schools, and teachers, to fulfil a variety of noble purposes - everything from promoting community cohesion to developing relationships with other public bodies, trusts, committees and panels gets in the way of their core purpose – education.

I am concerned that the focus we need to have, as a society, on spreading knowledge and driving up levels of educational attainment, has been lost recently. When Ofsted – the body which should be concerned with educational standards above all – is given 18 areas on which to judge a school and only a handful of them relate explicitly to educational attainment – then we are clearly not concentrating our energies and resources on education, education, education.

I am also concerned that our curriculum and examination system is not oriented as it should be – towards asserting the importance of liberal learning and rigorous educational achievement.

The body responsible for our national curriculum – the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority – the QCA – now rebadged as the QCDA – the Qualification and Curriculum Development Agency – does not make its principal aim a guarantee – entitlement if you prefer – that each pupil will have access to a body of knowledge.

Instead it outlines its hope that schools will produce “successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens” who “are physically competent and confident”, who “sustain and improve the environment locally and globally” and are “willing to try new things”

I am sure all these goals are admirable, in their own way, but they reflect my underlying concern – that in making schools institutions which seek to cure every social ill and inculcate every possible worthwhile virtue – we are losing sight of the core purpose, and unique value, of education.

And that drift away from passing on knowledge, that flight from educational excellence, is also driven by the way our examination system works, and the way our schools are held accountable.

THE TARGET CULTURE DISTORTS

At the moment the central educational accountability mechanism for secondary schools is their performance at GCSE. And the accountability is all one way – up towards the minister – not down towards the parents.

Schools have to clear a very specific hurdle – they have to make sure 30% of their pupils get 5 Cs or better at GCSE, including English and Maths. Those schools which do not clear that hurdle are branded “failing” by the Prime Minister and are faced with closure by the Secretary of State.

This very narrow definition, and particular kind of accountability, has a tragic skewing effect on the education many children enjoy. Weaker schools, desperate to avoid being branded failing, concentrate their efforts on a narrow band of pupils – those on the borderline of a C grade – and they lead those pupils towards the sort of qualifications which may be easier to pass – but which do not serve those pupils’ interests best.

Recently a group of headteachers explained to me the popularity of one particular course – called Performing Engineering Operations. This course - which requires just one day's study on day release to college - is worth six good GCSE passes. Get your students to take it, and get them to pass the GCSE maths exam - with a pass mark of 20% - lets remember, and the GCSE English exam, and they become statistical success stories.

Across the educational landscape, qualifications which promise easier routes to a pass mark are growing in popularity. Media Studies GCSE entries have increased by 43% in just two years - from 41,027 candidates in 2004/5 to 59,071 in 2006/7.

At A-level the rise over time has also been significant. In 1997 just 8,954 students took media studies A-level. By 2006 the number had risen by 157%.

Now I have no particular prejudice against media studies – or any other subject per se - as part of a truly rounded education. But my views aren't the one that matter. The views of admissions tutors at Cambridge University, however, do.

Cambridge has published a list of 20 subjects which don't count as hard A-levels for the purpose of entry - including art and design, dance, film studies and media studies. The Russell Group has also warned that "students must not disadvantage themselves by choosing a combination of subjects at A-level which will not equip them as well as other subjects."

THE WIDENING GAP

And it is striking that while there has been a precipitate increase in the number of students opting for media studies that increase has been almost entirely in state schools.

Last year, just 479 pupils took media studies GCSE in independent schools, compared to 55,060 in comprehensives. Overall, the number of media studies GCSEs taken in comprehensives and secondary moderns accounts for 98% of the total number of entries. While the numbers taking media studies overall have risen by 17,000 in the last three years the additional number taking the exam in independent schools amounts to just 49 additional candidates.

And at the same time as independent schools are shunning subjects like media studies their students are pursuing the hard academic subjects universities and employers value. Whether it's the individual physics, chemistry and biology GCSEs or Modern Languages at A level, opportunity is certainly not equal.

Only one state school pupil in 20 is entered for GCSEs in physics, chemistry and biology. More than 2,000 comprehensives - 68 per cent of the total - can't offer their students the three science GCSEs

And, as the Russell Group has pointed out, pupils in independent schools are three times more likely to be doing further Maths A-levels and two and a half times more likely to be doing modern languages A levels than state school pupils who're also sitting A levels.

When access to academic excellence is rationed so tightly, it is a standing affront to any notion of social justice.

But wherever one looks at the education system today the denial of poor children's rights to their intellectual inheritance is everywhere apparent.

Of the 75,000 children on free school meals each year (about 1 in 8 of all pupils), four out of ten fail to get even a single 'C' grade GCSE.

Only 189 of these 75,000 go on to get three As at A Level – compared with the 175 three A's pupils produced by just one school, Eton.

Independent schools, which educate just 7% of pupils, produce more pupils who get three A's at A Level than every comprehensive school put together.

These statistics don't just show the impoverishing effect of the Government's target culture on state education, they also underline how restricted is the access our children currently enjoy to the inheritance which is theirs by right – access to the knowledge which previous generations fought to acquire – the stock of intellectual capital which is their real entitlement.

A CULTURE OF RELATIVISM STARVES THE CURIOUS

And the impoverished nature of the education our children are granted is only underlined by a close attention to the syllabus in each of these areas.

In Science GCSEs students are asked if they sweat through the liver or the skin, if we look at the stars with a synthesiser or a telescope, if battered sausages are healthier than grilled fish and if generating waste or creating jobs is a better argument for nuclear energy.

The new 21st century science curriculum has replaced hard scientific reasoning with discussion of science's impact on society. So students debate the merits of stem cell therapies or climate change mitigation without the deep biological knowledge that allows a profound understanding of how cord blood cells work or the comprehensive knowledge of physics which enables different theses to be properly tested.

The Royal Society of Chemistry has described the changes to the science curriculum as "a catastrophe" and Martin Stephen, the High Master of St Paul's, has argued that the new exams have a "terrifying" absence of real science.

Even the Government's own appointees, such as Kathleen Tattersall, of the exams watchdog Ofqual, have said that revisions to the science criteria have led to a fall in the quality of science assessments.

In history we fail to give our children a connected sense of the narrative of our islands. Ofsted has reported that "pupils knowledge and understanding of key historical facts is not good enough; their knowledge is fragmented. Young people's knowledge is very often patchy and specific, they are unable to sufficiently link discrete historical events to answer big

questions, form overviews and demonstrate strong conceptual understanding. Young people's sense of chronology is relatively weak and they are generally unable to relate a longer narrative of the story of Britain."

A recent survey of students entering a Russell Group university to read history asked them to name the British general at Waterloo, the monarch during the Armada, Brunel's profession, a single 19th century Prime Minister and the location of the Boer War.

The survey found that just over one question in five was answered correctly.

Almost twice as many students thought Nelson was in charge at the Battle of Waterloo as named the Iron Duke, while nine students thought it was Napoleon (or Napolian or Napolium). Almost 90% of the students could not name a single British prime minister from the nineteenth century.

The academic responsible for the survey reported that:

"The students (37% of whom came from fee-paying schools and a further 15% from selective schools) were studying at one of the Russell group of universities, on courses where the entry requirement is an A and two Bs at A level, which probably places them in the top 15% of their generation in terms of educational qualifications. This implies that, all things being equal, 85% of my undergraduates' age group know even less than they do. In other words, we are looking at a whole generation that knows almost nothing about the history of their (or anyone else's) country. And this collapse in historical knowledge is a relatively new phenomenon. A recent survey by the BBC found that while 71% of over 65 year olds knew the significance of the battle of the Boyne only 18% of 16-24 year olds did so."

As that academic has pointed out "history as it is still taught at university today – relatively comprehensive coverage lasting several centuries taken in chronological order - has completely disappeared in our schools. It has been replaced by the study of topics, narrow in subject matter and/or limited in time period - the innovation of the advocates of the so called 'New History' which started to gain the upper hand in the 1970s."

"History teaching by topic now starts in primary school where, typically, 5-11 year olds are taught for example the Romans, the Tudors and either the Victorians or the post-1930 period; but not necessarily in that order. So 'Britain since 1930' can be followed by 'Ancient Egypt'. At 11-14, pupils can be taught a bewildering array of topics. The National Curriculum website suggests an apparently random series of 22 topics, including titles such as: 'Images of an age what can we learn from portraits 1500-1750?'; or 'Snapshot 1900 what was British middle class life like?' And the topics continue through GCSE. Candidates taking the AQA History A (Schools History Project) option, for example, would study medicine and public health from

10,000BC to the present day, the American West 1840-1895 and do two assignments on multicultural Britain and on local history, and that would be the sum total of their coverage of history in two years' study."

It's not an approach other countries follow. In America they concluded that a great deal was sacrificed when the historical overview is abandoned.

'Students are left without the historical sense that comes only from a familiarity with the broad sweep of history. Large gaps exist in a student's knowledge of the cultural markers that glue society together and provide a common basis of experience, understanding and communication. Without an "historical frame of reference," we will have lost, in the words of David Lowenthal, the optimism that history is assimilable, "that the story of humanity had a length and a form within which one could find one's bearings. With no such prop, students today are wholly at sea. History has no shape, no pattern, no consensually fixed guideposts ... Past scrutinized mainly in terms of fragmentary set topics cannot be viewed in their historical fullness, as many-sided, multifarious, often self-contradictory realms.'"

And at the same time as the discipline of chronology has been abandoned, so has the discipline of essay writing. The crucial historical skill of marshalling facts in a coherent argument has been supplanted by a range of other, less rigorous, activities.

As the academic I quoted earlier has pointed out:

"... it's worth noting what has replaced essay writing in history teaching. A typical activity in a GCSE textbook, for example, would be asking the pupils to draw a copy of a bonfire and label the sticks with factors that made the first world war possible. In A level textbooks ..., students are asked to draw up lists, fill in tables, or, as a group, 'brainstorm' ideas to justify a proposition. In ... Weimar & Nazi Germany, students have variously to draw spider diagrams, or draw a 'left wing' caricature of an SA man; while group activities include one based on the radio programme, Just a Minute, where pupils are asked to talk for 30 seconds without deviation, hesitation or repetition on, for example, why the Nazis came to power; or they play a board game invented by the authors called 'Germanopoly' ; or they have to stage a mock trial on - 'Who killed Weimar democracy?' - and play the roles of judge, defendants, prosecutors and jury."

I have spent some time on science and history because they are the twin neglected giants of subject-based teaching - but the concerns I have apply across the board.

In Modern Language A levels it is possible to secure a top pass without reading any literature in a foreign language. In French that means no Racine, No Zola, no Hugo, not even Le Petit Nicolas or Tintin et Milou.

In English literature at GCSE contemporary authors predominate and even at A level it's possible to answer a majority of questions on authors from after 1900. The tyranny of relevance once again restricts access to the very best of what has been thought and written.

Faced with this deterioration in standards top private schools are abandoning normal GCSEs. The number of pupils in independent schools taking the, more rigorous, international GCSE more than doubled from 2007 to 2008, from just over 15,000 to over 40,000. 46% of independent schools entered at least one pupil for an iGCSE in 2008 (iGCSE Maths is particularly popular). However, the Government does not allow these exams to count in its league tables, hence about 250 independent schools, including Eton and St. Paul's, came bottom of the Government's official league tables for 5 A*-C grade GCSES (including English and Maths) in 2009.

Further, the Government does not let state schools do the iGCSE so there is a growing gap between opportunities for richer children and the rest. Ed Balls recently refused to give state schools funding for the iGCSE, continues to refuse to let the iGCSE count in the league tables, and recently attacked it, extraordinarily, as not being of a "sufficiently high standard" and claimed private schools are only offering them as a "marketing gimmick"

But, whatever one may say about the existing GCSE and A level syllabuses, at least the subject disciplines help direct the curious, and the fortunate, towards their real inheritance of learning – the knowledge accumulated over generations which makes sense of our world and lends it both beauty and meaning.

One of the other concerns I have about the drift of educational thinking at the moment is the movement away from subject disciplines and towards cross-cutting, thematic, multi-disciplinary learning.

Now I have no worries about using the insights of one subject to illuminate another – of allowing an understanding of Victorian history to help with a reading of Dickens or using an appreciation of the laws of physics to understand why geographical features take the shape they do.

And I know that many traditional academic subjects are changing. Many subjects are being invaded by evolutionary biology, cognitive science, and neuroscience. Economics is being changed not only by these but also by physics, computer science, and game theory. New subjects are being created and generating extraordinary new ideas, just as new subjects and ideas were born in Renaissance Italy.

(For example, from cell biology to computer science we are re-learning the old lesson that decentralised networks and local decision-making beat centralised hierarchies - a lesson we are incorporating in our school reform plans as I show below.)

However, these new hybrids depend upon very able students mastering the fundamentals of maths and the natural sciences, of classical economics, of history. I worry when the AQA specification for 2010 says, extraordinarily, that 'the study of mathematics does not easily lend itself to developing the key skill of problem solving,' and this is used as an excuse to introduce things like a new Use of Maths A Level which supposedly teaches 'key skills' better than Maths itself. That is the wrong path. Children should be learning proper maths, not a Bluffer's Guide to Maths, if they are ever to be able to explore the new interdisciplinary fields.

What specifically concerns me is an approach that denies children access to knowledge because time, and effort, is spent on cultivating abstract thinking skills rather than deepening the knowledge base which is the best foundation for reasoning.

It is through deepening knowledge – through subject disciplines – that real understanding and thinking skills are embedded. Critical engagement with literary texts, for example, works by having as wide a range of reference points, as rich a stock of allusions, as deep a knowledge of other works which will have influenced the author, as possible.

In history, trends, causes and effects are best understood when one has the knowledge to provide context and depth. Knowing how the French revolution began, and ended, helps students understand the dynamics of other revolutions – from the Russian revolution of 1917 to the Velvet Revolution of 1990.

One of the reasons why we have such concerns about the Rose review of primary education is because it presages a further abandonment of subject disciplines and a retreat into the fuzzy and abstract learning we descended into in the past.

Ofsted itself has recently warned that efforts to promote so-called general learning skills in the curriculum, in place of traditional subject disciplines, was leading to, “less rigour and challenge”. In some schools which have adopted this approach standards have plummeted and Ofsted gave warning of the “uneven” teaching quality which marked this approach as well as the creation of “artificial” links between subjects.

In this respect I can do no better than quote from one of the very best teachers in state education today – Sir Michael Wilshaw – who has given Mossbourne Community Academy in Hackney some of the very best value added results in the country.

“My concern” he argued recently, “is that the growing abandonment of subject discipline will lead to many of our most disadvantaged children losing out... The Times Educational Supplement... reported that those comprehensive schools which most enthusiastically abandoned specific subject teaching for a more flexible, porous curriculum have seen their standards drop. My concern is that parents who can afford it can access specific subject teaching earlier rather than later, with the most

successful prep schools introducing discrete subjects taught by subject specialists before pupils go on to secondary education.”

“It is not unreasonable to use the argument that [with] a loosening of the curriculum, where breadth is more important than depth, where skills are seen as a substitute for knowledge, outcomes will deteriorate. As a nation we need to worry about the concern over grade inflation, we need to worry that in the latest PISA studies of advanced economies and their educational performance, we have dropped from fourth to fourteenth place in science, seventh to seventeenth place in literacy and eighth to twenty-fourth in mathematics. This drop is not just a consequence of other countries improving at a faster rate, the absolute performance of our students has also dropped.”

And Sir Michael went on to warn that he feared an “educational apartheid – where independent schools, grammar schools and perhaps the top comps treat the whole modular, thematic, non-subject based curriculum with disdain and opt for the IGCSE and the International Baccalaureate.”

I entirely share Sir Michael’s concerns – we cannot make opportunity more equal when access to the stocks of knowledge contained within traditional subject disciplines is blocked, or rendered practically impossible, to so many...

So what is to be done?

INSTANT ACTION TO SECURE RAPID IMPROVEMENT AND A LONG TERM PLAN TO INSTAL COMMON SENSE IN THE CLASSROOM

Firstly we need to ensure that every tool at our disposal is oriented towards educational excellence and promoting rigour.

And secondly, we need to create a virtuous dynamic in education where parents in the state sector exercise the sort of power and control currently enjoyed by those in the private sector – so all children can have access to the excellence currently restricted to too few...

If we are fortunate enough to be entrusted with public office after the next election we will take a series of steps in our first few weeks to drive rapid improvement in educational standards.

We will give teachers the powers they need to keep order in classrooms so teaching and learning can be the centrepiece of every school's life.

We will, specifically, give teachers powers over exclusion, detention, searching, restraining and disciplining children that this Government has denied them.

And we will ensure troubled children are placed in the sort of alternative environments - from boarding academies to reformed pupil referral units - which give them the chance to get back on to a track which will secure them qualifications.

We will ensure that the independent exams regulator Ofqual guarantees that exams in Britain are as rigorous as the world's best and, unlike the Government, we will give all state schools the right to do the same high quality international exams, such as the iGCSE, that now only private schools have access to.

We will reform our SATs to sharpen accountability and drive up standards by ensuring the risks of teaching to the test and gaming the system are reduced to a minimum. We will replace the Key Stage 1 tests with a simple reading test at the end of the second year of primary so that parents know whether their child has been taught to read properly or not.

We will reform the exam system to reduce the number of modules and the reliance on coursework which has adversely affected standards.

We will reform league tables so that positions are fixed by points allocated for every exam pass - giving schools an incentive to stretch the brightest and support the weakest - because every pass will count and A stars will count most of all in determining a school's ranking.

We will completely overhaul the curriculum - to ensure that the acquisition of knowledge within rigorous subject disciplines is properly valued and cherished.

And we will redirect the energies of non-departmental public bodies - from Ofsted to the National College of School Leadership - so they know their aim is the promotion of educational excellence and academic attainment for all.

Crucially these changes will depend on recruiting, and retaining, the very best and most talented professionals. That means raising the esteem of teaching - saying as a society that we value education more.

That's why we've argued that we must give heads much more power over budgets so they can reward great teachers better. Academies already have more freedom over pay and conditions - we should extend such freedoms to all schools. Schools should be able to pay bonuses and attract and keep specialists - especially in maths and science and especially in the poorest areas with the worst problems.

Teachers should be given the opportunity to deepen their subject knowledge and stay abreast of academic developments in their field with proper programmes of rigorous professional development. That's why organisations which celebrate not just the craft of teaching but the joy of deep engagement with subjects - like the Prince's Teaching Institute - are so vital.

And in our efforts to ensure that more talented people join the already hugely impressive cohort of those currently in teaching, we would expand Teach First and pioneer a new Teach Next programme to help those who have already succeeded in one profession transfer their talents to teaching. We have also announced plans to help the very best ex military personnel with a background in training come into education through a UK Troops to Teachers programme. And we would support the expansion of schemes like the Future Leaders programme which helps attract high performing professionals from other fields into teaching with a view to accelerating their progress into senior positions in our schools.

And we know that many of those schools which have been most successful in attracting new talent and in helping raise the prestige of teaching have been those schools - whether old CTCs or new academies - that have flourished outside both local and central bureaucratic control.

Which is just one of the reasons why we favour a radical programme of long-term school reform to open up the state sector to more talent, more investment and more innovation.

We have already outlined plans to take the very weakest schools in the state system, where local authorities have failed to improve results, and transform them automatically into academies, handing them over to organisations with a proven track record of educational excellence to drive improvements as quickly as possible.

We have also outlined proposals to allow every secondary school which is good with outstanding features to acquire academy freedoms, provided they team up with another educational institution to ensure their additional freedoms help drive up standards more widely.

And we have outlined proposals to allow new organisations - charities, parents and voluntary groups, organisations such as the Steiner and Montessori movements, social entrepreneurs and others to open new schools - as in Sweden - by allowing parents to transfer the money the state currently spends on their children to these new state schools.

These schools would also enjoy full academy freedoms - and they would help drive up standards here - as they have in Sweden.

We have also announced proposals to extend academy freedoms to primary schools - plans which have been welcomed by thinkers across the board - from Tony Blair's former education adviser Conor Ryan to the Lib Dems most influential think tank - Centreforum.

And we have made it clear that we would reform school funding - through a pupil premium for poorer children - to ensure new schools and further innovation are most effectively concentrated in the areas of greatest disadvantage.

And shortly we will be going further in outlining how the next stage of our programme of reform will unfold...

Parental choice, pluralism of supply, a diversity of schools with different ways of harnessing talent and resources has helped secure improvements - from Sweden to America. And improvements have not been restricted just to those schools which exercise the new freedoms which have been granted - they have been seen in all schools as they all work to keep pace with the innovations being pioneered in the best.

Of course, with greater freedoms comes experimentation. But one thing stands out in all the most successful schools which are free from bureaucratic control - they opt for an approach towards education which rests on traditional subject disciplines, rigour, an expectation that every child, whatever their background can follow a basic academic curriculum and a belief that a college education is the destiny of the overwhelming majority.

Whether it's the schools of the Harris Academy chain in South London, Mossbourne Community Academy, the International English Schools of Sweden or the Knowledge is Power Programme Schools of America every group of schools which has made a triumphant success of freedom from bureaucratic control has done so by embracing an approach to education which has been - in the very best sense - traditional.

And it is my firm belief that is the education parents want. When they have the resources to, they buy it in the private sector. When they have access to it, they beat a path to its door in the state sector.

One of the central goals of David Cameron's Conservative Party is the breaking up of bureaucratic control, and establishment power, when bureaucracies and establishments are thwarting the common sense of the people. And nowhere is common sense more flouted than among the education establishment and by education bureaucracies.

And I use the term common sense in the way Tom Paine would have understood - the widely shared and democratically expressed feelings of free citizens. The British people's common sense inclines them towards schools in which the principal activity is teaching and learning, the principal goal is academic attainment, the principle guiding every action is the wider spread of excellence, the initiation of new generations into the amazing achievements of humankind.

Because that is what education is for....

ENDS