

## **Education for social mobility and social inclusion**

*Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP, Prime Minister of Britain, 23 June 2008*

Even decades on, I remember the names of every one of my primary school teachers. You never forget a good teacher. Teachers open our eyes to the world, they give us curiosity and confidence, they connect us to the past, help us prepare for the future. They are the guardians of our social heritage, influencing a child for life and standing right at the heart of the community.

My wife Sarah wrote a book for charity and asked people round the country who, in addition to their parents, had been the most inspirational figure in their lives. To take one example, Sir Alex Ferguson, the Manager of Manchester United, you might have thought he would have chosen a footballing hero, a manager that he had admired, a motivator in football training. But he chose a school teacher, the person who other than his father and mother had been his great motivating force and he wanted to celebrate that fact. And when the book was written we found that the majority interviewed for the book chose teachers as the people who had inspired them most.

And across this country there are great examples of teachers making a difference - many of you here today who have given outstanding leadership not just to their own schools, but these people are now making a difference to the education service at every level across Britain.

And what I find about good schools, and you can spot a good school as you go into the school and talk to the first people you meet, good schools have great aspiration and ambition, the desire to encourage upward mobility, it is written into their very essence of being.

My school motto was 'I will strive my utmost'. Next door, because we lived in a mining community, the next door school's motto recalled miners coming out of the shaft into the day, and it was "Rise to the Light", the ambition that the miners had for their own children to rise by education.

And I have looked at some of the most recently founded schools and their mottos: No goal is beyond our reach; achievement for all; aiming for excellence - all schools that are crucibles of hope, drivers of ambition, a mission for upward mobility showing that through leaders and teachers with dedication, skill and a deep belief in the value of public service, as I know you all share, the life chances of our children can be transformed.

And let us now seek therefore to build on the excellence you have achieved and let us aim to give every child in Britain a world class education to liberate the potential of all by using the most powerful weapon mankind has ever invented, and that is knowledge and its application.

In the last 12 months we have announced a series of reforms: the growth of one-to-one tuition and the importance of personal learning; the national challenge to improve low attaining schools so that every child can go to a good school; an expansion of apprenticeships and then grants for university so that every teenager has the chance of an apprenticeship or a higher education place or a place in further education; and action on the under-5s and child poverty so that every child, virtually from the cradle onwards, has more opportunity and no-one is left out or left behind.

And what I want to talk about today is the bigger ideas that I believe lie behind these reforms and then chart the next stage, to make good the founding idea of what I believe. It is a mission of social mobility that the next generation, whatever their background, should have the opportunity to do better than the last.

And I am interested in a new wave of social mobility, starting now, because I am a child of the first great wave of post-war social mobility. I grew up in an ordinary industrial town, I went to the local school, I benefited as I remember from great and dedicated teachers. I was fortunate enough to get to university as part of the social changes taking place at that time and I saw at first hand the power of opportunity to change lives.

But as a teenager, even then, I also saw close friends of mine who might have gone on to college or an apprenticeship or university, but who never did. University or college was, they thought, or their parents thought, not for people like them. And often what were invisible barriers, the backgrounds that they came from, the assumptions they had made, the encouragement perhaps they never had, held them back to their permanent disadvantage.

And the reason I do what I do, the abiding reason for my interest in public service, is because I want their children and their grandchildren to have all the chances that were not available to my school friends when they were growing up.

So my own experience doesn't just lead me to celebrate the chances I had to learn to get on, to be helped when I was in trouble - they lead me to a commitment, having seen the power of opportunity, to change lives and how the denial of opportunity can hold young people back. I want the opportunity to rise from the place where they are to the place where they can be, to be there for everybody. For every child we can say that their destiny is not written for them, but written by them.

And it is a Britain therefore where what counts is not where you come from but what you aspire to become, not who you know but what you know. And it is a Britain where everyone, no matter what their background, should be able to rise as far as their talents can take them, where everyone can make the most of the potential they have. And that is what I mean when I say I want Britain to be far more upwardly mobile as a country.

At its core I think this is a great moral endeavour, it is a belief that everyone has something to contribute, no-one should be written off before they have even had the chance. Social mobility usually starts with parents wanting their children to do better than they did themselves, but it cannot be achieved without the young people themselves adopting over time the work ethic, the learning ethic and aiming high, and it also as we know depends on schools, on education, on government giving people the capacity to participate fully in shaping their future.

I believe we already know enough from our educational history to discard some of the old ideas that intelligence can be reduced to a single number in an IQ test, that we need to rank people in a single hierarchy, that talent is somehow fixed and immutable. And what we must now do is act on the consequences of recognising these realities, that young people have a richness of potential that is there to be tapped, that their talents can take many forms and not just one - practical, creative, communication abilities, analytical intelligence as well. And to get the best results for the individual and the best economy we need to get the best out of people's potential at every step and at every age.

To take one example: in 1997 barely two in 10 from unskilled backgrounds were applying to university. Today the majority of the poorest young people, 55%, have said

for the first time - and that is a majority - that they want to apply for university. And if social mobility with its ever closer connection to education is to mean anything in the next generation then everyone should be participating in education and training in some form or another after 18.

And look at all the talent we do have in Britain, the genius of our scientists, the creativity of our artists, the skills of our physicians, the dynamism of our entrepreneurs, our engineers, our world class leading universities, our world beating businesses, the City of London at the heart of the world's greatest metropolis, the best Health Service, the best media. And imagine what Britain could be if all of the talents of all of the British people, and not just some, could flourish.

And what is clear is that as we look ahead it will be the countries where there is hope and ambition for all that will be the great success stories of the global age. Indeed I would go further, globalisation will create new opportunities for a new wave of social mobility that Britain must seize.

Let's look back to the first big phase of post-war social mobility. It was brought about by fundamental changes in the occupational and industrial structure of the British economy, and we saw then the growth of new occupations and new professions, the rise of a salaried middle class and a skilled working class, a whole generation. My generation was given opportunities their parents had never dreamed of. It was the chance to become teachers and doctors and engineers and civil servants for the first time because of the 1944 Education Act, secondary education guaranteed to all. And as the children of the 50s became students in the 60s there were new grants for studies and of course new universities to study at. And this was the generation of room at the top, the children of Butler's Education Act, of Bevan's Health Service, of all the other reforms of the post-war social patriots.

But in the 1970s and 80s this rise in social mobility stalled as the restructuring of our economy took place. Remember just how many skilled manufacturing jobs were lost. As a result the opportunities for social mobility seemed to narrow, inequality and child poverty did worsen, unemployment rose to three million, the sons and daughters of working class families missed out on many of the new educational opportunities that were being created. And at a time when many of their fathers were being hit by unemployment, and I saw it in my own constituency in Scotland, many of the generation that some have called Thatcher's children, the lost generation, were sadly denied the chance to progress. And the result was, as detailed survey evidence has now shown, that someone born in 1970 and at secondary school in the 1980s had much less chance of moving up the social class ladder than someone born in 1958.

Now in the last 10 years we have been determined to reverse the decline. Employment has risen, investment in education has undoubtedly grown and we have made some progress. The sharp drop in social mobility has been stalled and rapid improvements in school results since the late 1990s give us a platform for a new era that can be one of accelerating social mobility.

The proportion of young people getting five or more GCSEs has risen by as much as a third. We have started to close the gap in achievement, thanks to many of you here, between school classes in both primary and secondary schools. A record 1.6 million young people aged 16 - 18 - the highest number ever - are now taking part in education, workplace learning or in training. And between 2002 and 2006, the last year for which figures are available, the gap in university participation for young people from higher and lower social and economic groups has narrowed by three and a half percentage points.

Too often and for too many decades people said there was nothing we could do to raise the performance, the skills, the ambition of the lower skilled members of our community. Now everyone I think understands that with good pre-school support, with good schools and with great teachers we can make a transformational difference.

So the highest priority for us now as a country is that building on this improvement in educational performance we make the right decisions to accelerate educational performance and social mobility in the years ahead.

And there are still urgent inequalities we know it is our duty to address. In education it is true the family you are born into is still the best predictor of the exam results you will achieve. In employment millions of adults still do not have the skills they need to make progress in their working lives. In health, the place where you were born still seems to determine how long you will live. In housing your parents' wealth still makes a great difference to your chances of getting on to the housing ladder.

And there should be no excuses, and no alibis, and no glib explanations for these injustices. The waste of any talent and the inequalities that result are never a price worth paying for economic success. In fact social mobility and economic dynamism in my view go hand in hand and we will succeed best when we liberate the talents of each and every person in this country, and not just those of the few.

So the question we must address is: what will become of this generation's children? And I can tell you today I am optimistic about the prospects for the future. I believe that if we take together as a country the right long term decisions then we, Britain, can benefit from a new wave of social mobility and thus extended opportunities.

Today in Britain it is a fact that we have six million unskilled workers. By 2020, as a result of the changes in the global economy, a country like ours may need only half a million of these unskilled men and women. Today we have nine million highly skilled jobs, by 2020 we will need 14 million - five million more - with the skills that are necessary to meet the occupational opportunities available.

And this is as fast an expansion of occupational change as we have seen in our history, a 50% rise in less than two decades in professional jobs for which we need skilled people, a 90% decline in unskilled jobs, the biggest we have ever seen.

And change may be even faster than this and opportunities may be even greater than this, because while the post-'45 wave of social mobility came from the changes wrought by the opening up of our national economy, the new wave of social mobility comes from changes that are wrought by opening up the whole global economy. It is estimated that even taking into account the present difficulties of national economies in the world economy, that world economic output will actually double over the next 20 years. That means the world economy will be twice the size in 2030 than it is today, and it is estimated that as part of that change a billion - one thousand million - new skilled jobs will be created round the world.

And in this new economic environment of global expansion and job creation, as China, India and Asia become consumers as well as producers, there will be major opportunities for those countries that are willing and able to seize these chances. And the issue therefore is not whether there will be change - change will be massive. The issue is who is going to benefit from this great transformation? How can we ensure that increased social mobility means that the benefits of change are widely shared?

And it is all the more important a question because more than ever, while the prizes for success for the individual are great, the consequences of failure are much greater still.

In this new world many unskilled workers will become not only poor, but virtually unemployable. But in this new wave also there need be no ceiling on your ability to rise if you can make the effort. Indeed as the global economy expands, Britain can attract companies to Britain because of the skills that we have to offer, and if you have skills, educated in Britain, you can work almost anywhere in any part of the world.

So instead of opportunities limited by the old sheltered national economy that needed a certain number of people for particular jobs, there will be potentially unlimited opportunities for the forward march of social mobility, opened up by the changes in the wider global economy.

And I believe therefore that if we make the right choices, not just building on the achievements of the last 10 years but thinking anew about new ways to help people rise and benefit from a global economy, this could herald a new era of rising social mobility in Britain.

And as the possibilities open up once again we must set a national priority to aggressively, relentlessly develop all the potential of all the young people of our country. And it is a commitment that goes beyond education to employment, to the ownership of assets, to enterprise, to culture, and one which is designed to benefit our society as a whole, all of us gaining from each of us having a greater chance to progress.

And social justice in future years may be best expressed as something more than social protection, compensating people with a safety net for what they do not have. Instead it may be better expressed by social mobility, not compensating people for what they don't have, but helping people develop what they do have, their talents, their potential and their ability.

And I think now is the time for us here in Britain to make the choice to invest in education and social mobility so that both individuals and our country can benefit from these vast unprecedented changes in the global environment.

And it must be a social mobility that we aspire to that is aspirational as well as universal in its approach, a relentless focus on raising the sights of every individual child through world class early learning and day care, strong support for parents, high quality teaching, more young people given the chance in education beyond school, at university, college or apprenticeships, and then second, third and fourth chances if necessary that mean that as a community we never give up on anyone at any stage if they are prepared as adults to make the effort.

And this is the only route to success: we cannot achieve the greater social mobility we seek with a narrow or elitist view of potential that believes you pluck out a small minority of kids at an early age and downgrade the rest; that is hard-wired to believe that the old prejudice that more in education means lower standards, which is wrong; and that emphasises only one form of achievement and doesn't invest in others. And we reject the one-off judgment that leaves you on your own with no further chances in life after 16, and we should take on all the vested interests that hold aspiration back.

So what do the policies look like for the next stage of this endeavour? First, I think the pre-5 route to greater social mobility is very important, expanding early learning and high quality childcare. And having already created nursery places for three as well as four year olds, we are now moving to offer for the first time nursery places to two year olds in the most disadvantaged areas. And we are on course to have a children's centre, not just in some communities but every community, by 2010 as we deliver on the ambitions that Ed Balls set out in our Children's Plan.

And these are themselves major steps, but they are not the final destination. My ambition and our strategic priority for the next decade will be to match the world's best in pre-school services. These are services that in some cases never existed for 50 years after 1945. Now the provision for the under-fives is a new frontier of a changing welfare state.

And later this year we will publish our new plan for the future of childcare and early learning and for reforming how we fund it, and to show what the future can hold we will set up demonstration projects of new world-class children's centres, free childcare and nursery places for low income families, highly trained staff and state of the art facilities that encourage the early learning and development of all the children.

So that is the first route to social mobility. The second, the family route to social mobility, is doing more to strengthen family life, to help those parents who struggle to do the best by their children and take the next steps to eradicate child poverty.

We all need I think to do more to help those hardest to reach young people who are disaffected by school, who disrupt lessons, who take up a disproportionate amount of your time as head teachers, who require a combination of interventions to even up their life chances. And we know of course that so much of this starts in the home, we need to break that cycle in families where generation after generation have under-achieved.

And although we have already lifted hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty with our children's tax credits, with more people going into work and better public services, the latest figures show that we have not yet made enough progress. And we will not retreat from our commitment or resign those children to that fate, we will not deny or explain away the figures. We will take them as a spur to action and a call to conscience. For the plans we have announced in recent budgets will lift a further half a million children out of poverty. And we will learn the lessons of recent years to give new focus and purpose to our cause, more support for families where the children are very young, when we can make the most difference to their lives, by introducing a £200 child development grant as an incentive for parents to attend and take up services in children's centres. We want to boost family budgets by having two wages coming into the house when children are older, we want to ensure that parents exercise responsibilities as well as have rights, and we will extend the family intervention projects to another 10 local authority areas, creating what we call Contracts out of Poverty, help given but in return for responsibilities to discharge your duties as parents being accepted.

And then the third, the route that is directly of concern to this group, the primary and secondary school route to greater social mobility, to give every child in Britain a world class education, putting our country not at the average, but at the top of the international education league tables. And that means for every child who can, mastering the basics in primary school, with more specialist English and maths teachers and more one to one tuition, such as Every Child a Reader. It means no school achieving less than 30% of pupils getting five A\* to C grades at GCSE, including in English and maths, with more schools able to join together in federations; support for the best head teachers to work in challenging schools, an expansion of academies, 300 open by 2010. It means pathways through education that engage all students with the introduction of diplomas, supported by our leading universities and leading commercial businesses, providing a new route to high status, high standard qualifications for young people who want a mix of academic and practical learning. And it means parents more engaged and encouraged to be more involved in their children's education: more choice, more information, where standards are too low the right to demand an Ofsted inspection or to trigger the creation of a new school.

And most importantly of all it means having world class teachers at all levels of our education system because all the international evidence is what you know and practise every day: that no education system can be better than the calibre of its teachers and no school will have higher aspirations than those of its teachers and its head teachers.

In the 80s and 90s we didn't attract enough of the most able graduates into teaching. Schools in our challenging areas in particular suffered. So it is an essential part of our social and economic endeavour for this country that we root out poor teachers and encourage the top graduates and professionals to go into teaching.

It is interesting this year that 12 per cent of Yale University graduates, and nine per cent of Harvard University graduates have applied for the programme, Teach for America, taking them to the most difficult and challenging schools. And here in Britain too we want to make our teaching profession so attractive that the best graduates from all our universities want to join and rise to and meet some of education's greatest challenges.

Teach First, recruiting and training the most able graduates, is already making a difference that is transformational in the schools in which it operates. And more than that, it is instilling a new passion, as I saw when I met some of them this morning, in our most talented graduates for public service and for promoting opportunity and social mobility.

So I can say today that the number of Teach First places will double over the next five years so that each year we can recruit more than 800 top class graduates into teaching.

And as we strive to increase social mobility in our country, let us set a new ambition that every year thousands of our best newly qualified and serving teachers can go to work in our most challenging secondary schools and teach some of the most disadvantaged children so that children for whom education will be the only route out of poverty get the very best education we can give them. And in the coming months the Secretary for Children, Schools and Families will be drawing up plans to make this ambition a reality.

Now the fourth element of our strategy is also one that concerns you greatly - the 16 plus route to social mobility, ensuring a pathway for all from school, to college, to university or an apprenticeship or training for one. In the past for too many people, as everybody knows, education stopped at 16. Now we are legislating to raise the participation age to 18 and year on year more and more young people are indeed staying on in education and training. This is a big debate with our opponents who are challenging our new legislation that everyone at 16 and 17 should spend at least one day a week in education or training under the new proposals. But I don't believe we can advance social mobility to the level we want, or build a successful modern economy, or provide the opportunities that we want every young person to have, unless we take this bold step to offer all young people after 16 the education, the training and the skills that they will need. And I find the argument ranged against us rooted in out-dated attitudes of the past when we should be thinking of these great global challenges and the opportunities they can bring to young people for the future.

The arguments against resemble those used in the mid-19th century against compulsory primary education, and then used in the 1960s against raising the school leaving age to 16. And I put the question another way: if none of us would find it acceptable for our teenage children to leave education entirely at 16 or 17, why should we fail to promote these opportunities for all? And with over half a million young people now receiving educational maintenance allowances to allow them to stay on at school, with credits of at least £3,000 to help employers cover the cost of an apprenticeship, and with 354,000 students receiving full or partial grants for university - indeed by 2010 more people will be receiving grants than ever before in our history - we can make this universal promise

to every 18 year old that the funding is available to help them carry on improving their skills.

And because we believe that everyone in every area should have the opportunity to develop their talents to the full, we are giving the larger towns in our country which do not have universities, or sometimes even further education or higher education colleges at the moment, the chance to bid for one. We will help also link comprehensive schools to universities, making sure that it is an expectation in every school that young people can go on into higher education. We will promote more open learning with university course materials put on the internet, free of charge to all, and over time we must give more students the chance to study at least for part of their degree in another country, ensuring for many the opportunities that today only sometimes the few can afford.

And a government like ours must always be clear, more does mean better not worse, more university places will mean more aspiration, more opportunity, more achievement, more social mobility and more fulfilment in work, and for our country a higher skilled and more globally competitive economy. That is why aspiration must be set free and why far more of our young people should be given the chance to study and achieve at the highest level.

And then finally in our routes to social mobility we must focus on the post-18 route. At whatever time in your life, everyone must have the chance to develop new skills and move up the career ladder. So we want workplace skills training to become routine, part of a new bargain in the workplace for flexibility and for security with the right to free education for adults to get their first NVQ at Level 2, and for those under 25 the right to free tuition to achieve their first Level 3, and in the future the right for everyone to request time at work for training, removing previous barriers and giving all the opportunity to succeed, whatever their race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief.

And we will take the next steps also to boost enterprise and innovation in our country, helping young people and adults start up their own businesses, become self-employed, take their ideas and inventions and test them in the market place. I want to make Britain the place where people of talent, creativity and ideas from all over the world want to come to study and start their professional lives, not just the world's best footballers coming here, but the best scientists, the best innovators and the best entrepreneurs.

So I know that the challenge we face is great. It is a challenge which has been with us for decades but it is the great test of this time, our time, to build a fairer, more prosperous, upwardly mobile Britain, to tackle injustice, to remove prejudice and discrimination wherever we find it, and most important to raise aspirations for the future, a better Britain for our children, a better life for themselves than we had, every generation doing better than the last.

And I believe, as I have said, that as a nation we can be optimistic about the prospects ahead. A decade ago there was an overriding sense that calls for change would come and go but somehow Britain's decline in the face of the rest of the world was inevitable. And we have worked hard to ensure that that is no longer the case and we have seen how working together things can change, particularly in education, and how we can now all sense there are great possibilities as well as great insecurities, great opportunities for the coming decades.

And that is why at the end of this year we will publish a White Paper to bring together all the proposals for greater social mobility in our country that go right across the different departments of government. And what is clear is that unless as a government we are willing to play our part in developing the new frontiers of public services, the new

frontiers in early years education, the new frontiers in getting the best teachers into the most difficult schools, the new frontiers in post-school education and giving people second, third or fourth chances as adults, if we don't do this we cannot tackle not just the social problems but the economic problems that challenge us.

But equally, raising social mobility in our country is a national crusade to which everyone can join and play their part. It cannot be achieved without extraordinary individuals and organisations such as those that you represent this evening playing their part, from the universities who we want playing a role in schools, to the voluntary sector playing its role in childcare and parenting and help for all who need it. We must understand and draw on the full range of civil society in our country. And we should call forth and summon into action the very real public spirit of young people, the spirit that probably makes me most optimistic about the future, the hundreds who have already chosen to join Teach First, tens of thousands, indeed hundreds of thousands of young people whose talents and skills could be deployed, from childcare and teaching to youth work and to volunteering and in other public services up and down our country.

And just as many of you have transformed aspirations among staff, among pupils, among parents at your own schools, I hope that all of us can now enlist in an historic effort to transform aspirations across the education system and right across our country. I do believe that together we can make a difference, that together we can create a Britain where instead of talent wasted, effort unrewarded, enterprise stifled, potential unfulfilled, we see effort praised, ambition fulfilled, potential realised. That would bring about a new era of social cohesion, opportunity and prosperity for Britain. It could be shared by all of us, it could be inherited by our children, it is a great task and it is also a great opportunity and challenge and I hope we can work at it together.