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Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential

**A plan for improving social mobility
through education**



Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential

A plan for improving social mobility through education

Presented to Parliament

by the Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities

by Command of Her Majesty

December 2017

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Foreword



Social mobility has characterised my own life. And so this matters to me personally as well as politically.

In our country today, where you start still all too often determines where you finish. And while talent is spread evenly across the country, opportunity is not. None of us should accept this. Everyone deserves a fair shot in life and a chance to go as far as their hard work and talent can take them.

The good news is that we don't need to accept the status quo, it can be changed. We can break down the barriers that hold people back at every stage in their life. I am under no illusion that this will be easy – there are no silver bullets. Nor can education tackle these challenges alone. But it can play a vital role – equality of opportunity starts with education.

This plan is about putting social mobility at the heart of education policy. We must raise standards for all. And to do so we are determined to leave no community behind and we will target our efforts and resources at the people and places that need it most.

I believe this is the smart thing to do for our country and our economy. But more importantly, it is the right thing to do. No one should be held back because of who they are or where they are born. This plan provides a framework for action that can empower everyone – whether educators, government, business or civil society – to help transform equality of opportunity in this country.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Justine Greening'.

Rt Hon Justine Greening

Introduction

Levelling up opportunity

We have a national mission to level up opportunity across this country and build a fairer society, one that will guarantee a better future for the next generation. Talent and hard work alone should determine how far people can go in life, whoever you are, wherever you are from.

We have made big strides forward already. Employment has grown. We have made record investments in transport and infrastructure. And in education, our ambitious reforms are transforming opportunities for young people. We have unleashed innovation and choice in our schools, raised standards through a rigorous new curriculum and a world class exam system, and introduced a new, fairer National Funding Formula.

There are now 1.9 million more children in good or outstanding schools since 2010;¹ more young people each year going to our world class universities than ever before; and we have the highest proportion of 16- to 17-year-olds participating in education since records began.² We should be proud of what this government has delivered so far.

However, we must now go further, building on these strong foundations. Because we still face a defining challenge: while talent is spread evenly across this country, opportunity is not. Where you live will affect where you get to in life – while in some areas opportunity can become self-perpetuating, in other communities, disadvantage can become entrenched. And, across the country, less-advantaged children fall behind their more affluent peers in the early years and the gaps widen throughout school and beyond.³ Opportunity breeds opportunity and, while early advantage accumulates, so too does early disadvantage.

The good news though is that we know this can change – we can reverse these negative spirals and generate a virtuous cycle to unlock talent and fulfil potential.

Government has a key role in achieving this, providing the additional support that can help to lift up everyone, irrespective of who they are or where they live. Where our reforms are already transforming standards – in particular in schools – the key task now is to spread their impact to the areas of the country that need it most. And we must apply this same drive to raise standards to other equally important parts of education that have not yet had the same focus – including the historically neglected area of technical education.

Throughout, we must put greater emphasis on supporting and developing the key agents of improvement across our system: our teachers, leaders and other education and care professionals.

A plan for improving social mobility through education

We are under no illusion that these issues can be tackled quickly. Nor, importantly, can they be tackled by education alone. It will require a long-term, sustained commitment across government and beyond. This plan – focusing on the role of education in improving social

mobility – will therefore sit at the core of the wider work of this government to spread equality of opportunity across the full range of its activity.

And it is important to begin with the recognition that there is no simple solution. The temptation can often be to search for a silver bullet – one idea, or one lever which if pulled would transform social mobility. But it is a myth that it can ever be that straightforward. And while of course money is important, if we could simply buy our way through these challenges we would have done so by now.

To make a real difference, we must align our work and relentlessly focus our energy and resources to where it can have the greatest impact. This plan is an important step forward – a targeted response to begin to direct effort and resource towards the **places** and **people** where it is most needed to unlock talent and fulfil potential.

The purpose of this plan is to bring together and give coherence to the steps we are taking and – building on recent reforms – to provide a platform for further action, injecting new urgency to our mission. To support this, the document is structured around a set of guiding ambitions for our work. These are intended to focus and drive our activity and to provide a framework that everyone – whether educators, government, business or civil society – can be empowered to support to help to transform equality of opportunity in this country.

The rest of this introduction will provide an overview of this structure. And the following chapters will identify a set of key challenges to achieving each ambition, setting out the actions we are taking to begin to overcome these. These actions will need to be built on consistently over time to have a transformative impact on what is, by definition, a generational challenge. But this plan marks a concerted approach to begin to level up opportunity right across the education system.

No community left behind

Firstly, we have an overarching ambition that spans the full plan: **no community left behind**. In Britain today, the community where you grow up will shape your chances of attending a good school and your wider educational and career outcomes. Education and skills outcomes vary significantly across the country and are, in turn, one of the biggest drivers of regional variations in productivity. Areas with better education outcomes develop a higher skill base, higher productivity, greater economic returns and become more attractive to both highly skilled people and investment, building a capacity to improve even further. For areas with lower education outcomes, the reverse is the case – they can become trapped in a low skills cycle.

We want a race to the top instead. And we need to achieve that in communities with very different day to day challenges. We therefore need to put real emphasis on the places that are not yet fulfilling their potential and where resources and additional support are needed the most. In doing so, education can play an integral role in delivering our Industrial Strategy, helping to boost long-term prosperity and earning power in Britain after we exit the European Union. Because while tackling this challenge is – first and foremost – a moral imperative, it is also an economic one. If disadvantaged pupils in all regions of this country performed as well as disadvantaged pupils in London, this would lead to an overall benefit to the UK economy of over £20 billion.⁴

This core focus on ‘place’ means a different way of approaching policy. Our national reforms to date have been fundamental to raising standards, but we now need to reflect that their impact has as yet been unevenly felt. And, due in part to their demand-led nature, they have meant that at times, resource and capacity has tended to flow to areas that are already ahead and able to push for more. We will continue these reforms, building on their success. But we must now also look at how they can be effectively targeted to have maximum impact in the areas that have yet to feel their full benefit.

This plan sets out how our broad place-based targeting runs throughout all of our activity. This will sit alongside more intensive and coordinated support for a limited number of areas with entrenched challenges, through the Opportunity Areas programme.

Tackling the injustices that hold people back at each life stage

To complement this overarching ambition, we are setting out four key life-stage ambitions, helping to direct support in the most effective way. These link closely to the influence of ‘place’, but also reflect the fact that – right across the country – less advantaged children are more likely to fall behind and struggle to catch-up. Even in good schools, disadvantaged pupils underperform; and even when they succeed in education, they achieve poorer career outcomes than their more affluent peers with the same qualifications.⁵

- **Ambition 1 – Close the ‘word gap’ in the early years.** Good early years education is the cornerstone of social mobility – and we are making record investment in this area. Children with strong foundations will start school in a position to progress, but too many children still fall behind early, and it is hard to close the gaps that emerge. We need to tackle these development gaps at the earliest opportunity, particularly focused on the key early language and literacy skills, so that all children can begin school ready to thrive.
- **Ambition 2 – Close the attainment gap in school while continuing to raise standards for all.** Thanks to our reforms, the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their more affluent peers is now closing.⁶ However, these pupils still remain behind their peers at each key stage at school. And there remain unacceptable differences in outcomes in different areas of the country. We need to build on the many more good school places and the innovation unleashed by recent reforms, and focus on raising standards in the areas of the country where it is now most needed.
- **Ambition 3 – High quality post-16 education choices for all young people.** We now have more people going to university than ever before, including from disadvantaged backgrounds.⁷ However, we want to go further in creating opportunity. Our technical education system has yet to fully benefit from our wider determination to drive up standards. This disproportionately affects young people in more challenging areas and from disadvantaged backgrounds.⁸ We need a skills revolution for them and for British business, and we need to expand access to the best universities for young people from less advantaged backgrounds.
- **Ambition 4 – Everyone achieving their full potential in rewarding careers.** The proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) has dropped substantially.⁹ However, young people from lower income backgrounds are less likely to have access to the networks of advice, information and experiences of work to

enable them to turn aspiration into reality – it is very hard to aim for an opportunity that you do not know exists. We need to ensure that everyone can build a rewarding career, and provide far better opportunities for adults who want to retrain and upskill.

These ambitions build on other vital work to tackle key challenges throughout the life stages. Our ambitions for looked after children are as high as for anyone else and we are investing in the additional support to meet their needs through the pupil premium plus, virtual schools heads, and designated teachers, as well as commissioning the National Fostering Stocktake to assess what more we can do. We are also committed to delivering sustainable improvements to the children’s social care system – supporting the social work profession through our workforce reforms and establishing a ‘what works’ centre to disseminate best practice. We are continuing to support disadvantaged families with complex problems by expanding the Troubled Families Programme. To unlock talent, we are taking forward the biggest changes to special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision in a generation, providing tailored support from 0-25. And, we have recently published bold new proposals on children’s mental health to ensure all children can develop into confident adults.

We want the highest quality provision for all children, in all settings, and so our focus on these challenges will remain undiminished. The detail of the crucial action we are taking, which is equally important to anything in this plan, is set out in a series of other key documents.¹⁰

Ways of working

Alongside these ambitions, we will also adopt two key shifts in our approach and ways of working that will underpin all of our actions.

Firstly, we will put a central focus on **identifying and spreading ‘what works’**, putting evidence at the heart of everything we do. The key challenge is now to spread what is working right here in this country to the areas and people that can benefit most. To achieve this, we will embed a clear focus on evidence-based practice – directly informed by ‘what works’ centres such as the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) – into our programmes and activity. And in turn, we will ensure rigorous evaluation of our approaches, helping to build the evidence base further and allowing us to monitor progress and adjust accordingly.

Secondly, we will seek throughout to **build lasting success through partnership**. Government has a key role in helping to break the cycles of disadvantage that can restrict opportunity based on background and geography. But it cannot drive forward these actions alone. We need everyone to lift their sights and work collectively – from our partners in education to business and civil society more broadly – to deliver real change on the ground. In particular, the role of business is vital to offer young people the direct experience of work, inform their choices about what to study and help educators to understand the needs of the local labour market. We will work closely with our partners in taking this plan forward – including exactly how best to measure and drive progress in relation to each ambition.

This plan is a call to arms: we want to ensure our education system truly makes our country one where – for the first time – there is equality of opportunity for all. Improving opportunity for the next generation of young people is one of the great challenges of our time; everyone must play their part. But the prize is huge: a country in which talent and potential are what matters. A country where everyone can be at their best.

Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential

A plan for improving social mobility through education

Overarching Ambition

No community left behind. Putting real emphasis on the range of places where resources and additional targeting are needed the most, with our Opportunity Areas at the sharp end to tackle the most entrenched disadvantage.



Life Stage Ambitions

Ambition 1. Close the word gap in the early years.



Children with strong foundations start school in a position to progress, but too many children fall behind early. We need to tackle development gaps, especially key early language and literacy skills.

Ambition 2. Close the attainment gap in school while continuing to raise standards for all.



The attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their more affluent peers at school is closing. But, these pupils still remain behind. We will build on recent reforms, and raise standards in the areas where it is now most needed.

Ambition 3. High quality post-16 education choices for all young people.

We need a skills revolution with business to make technical education world class. More people go to university than ever before, including more disadvantaged young people, but we need to expand access further to the best universities.



Ambition 4. Everyone achieving their full potential in rewarding careers.

We need to improve access for young people from lower income backgrounds to networks of advice, information and experiences of work. Working with employers, we will support adults to retrain/upskill during their careers.



Ways of Working

Identifying and spreading what works



Putting evidence at the heart of our approach; embedding and extending successful reforms; developing our evidence base further; and spreading best practice to where it is needed.

Building lasting success through partnership



Asking key partners - whether employers, business, educators, or civil society - to step up and join a united coalition which will rally behind this plan and these ambitions to unlock potential for all.

Ambition 1: Close the ‘word gap’ in the early years

A good early years education is the cornerstone of improving social mobility and is therefore the focus of our first life-stage ambition in this plan. These key years are the opportunity to make sure that all children develop the strong cognitive, social and emotional foundations on which future success is built.¹¹

This is why we are making a record investment of around £6 billion per year in early education and childcare support by 2019-20. This includes: a new Early Years National Funding Formula that increases the funding rate for children and areas that need it most; the early years pupil premium to support disadvantaged three- and four-year-olds; and 15 hours of free childcare a week for disadvantaged two-year-olds. To support families, we are offering 15 hours of free childcare per week for all three- and four-year-olds, and a further 15 hours for working parents.

Our best quality early years settings are proof that prevention is better than cure, putting children from all backgrounds on the right track from the very beginning and enabling them to begin school in a position to thrive. For too many children, however, gaps do arise early and then prove stubbornly hard to close:

- **Development gap** – On average, 40% of the overall gap between disadvantaged 16-year-olds and their peers has already emerged by the age of five.¹² And there is significant variation across the country: while 71% of disadvantaged five-year-olds in Lewisham achieve a good level of development, in York it is only 46%.¹³
- **‘Word gap’** – These gaps are particularly pronounced in early language and literacy. By the age of three, more disadvantaged children are – on average – already almost a full year and a half behind their more affluent peers in their early language development.¹⁴ And around two fifths of disadvantaged five-year-olds are not meeting the expected literacy standard for their age.¹⁵

We know that these gaps have a lasting detrimental impact on social mobility. Children who are behind in language development at age five are six times less likely to reach the expected standard in English at age eleven, and 11 times less likely to achieve the expected level in maths.¹⁶ Children who arrive at school in a strong position will find it easier to learn, while those already behind will face a growing challenge: early advantage accumulates, but so too does early disadvantage.

What we will do next

We must continue to support all aspects of children’s rounded early development, including social, emotional and numeracy skills, which are all vital to later success.¹⁷ But – because of its broader impact – we also now want to place a particular emphasis on this pronounced ‘word gap’ often faced by disadvantaged children, focusing on improving early language and literacy as the key enabling skills when children enter school.

To improve early literacy specifically, we have introduced a central focus on phonics. As the recent international PIRLS results have shown, this is having a transformative impact.¹⁸ The proportion of six-year-olds passing the phonics screening check has risen dramatically from

58% in 2012 to 81% in 2017.¹⁹ As a result, 154,000 more six-year-olds are on track to be fluent readers this year than in 2012.²⁰ This goes to show what it is possible to achieve early in a child's education.²¹

We will build on this success. And we must now do more to improve the other fundamental building blocks of early literacy. We know that vocabulary at age five is a key predictor of whether a child from a disadvantaged background is likely to 'buck the trend', succeed at school and become socially mobile in later life.²² And yet on average, by this age, disadvantaged children are significantly further behind in vocabulary than in any other area of cognitive development.²³

This means that more affluent children, often with extensive support at home, can benefit from an in-built head start. The early years provide the one chance to ensure disadvantaged children can enter school with the skills and language development they need to thrive, without immediately having to play catch-up. We are determined to tackle this issue head on, and in this chapter we set out the actions we will take to begin to overcome three key challenges that can hold these children back.

Challenge 1: Ensuring more disadvantaged children are able to experience a language rich early environment

One of the biggest influences on a child's early development is what happens in the home. And in supporting this, it is what parents and carers do that is more important than who they are.²⁴ But disadvantaged children are less likely to experience a home environment that can best support their early development, particularly with regard to early language.

A significant predictor of a child's early outcomes is the education level of their parents.²⁵ Parents with less education are no less committed, caring, or concerned about their children's prospects. But they can be less likely to have the right information and tools to support their children's development. Three-year-olds from more disadvantaged families are 37 percentage points less likely to be read to every day than their most advantaged peers.²⁶ And there is evidence from the Social Mobility Commission to suggest the gap in developmental time investment by parents has actually grown significantly since the 1970s.²⁷

But while these findings are very clear, there is a much more limited evidence base on how we can help parents to shape the right environment at home. Sometimes in the past, government investment in this area has been ineffective or has gone disproportionately to the families in less need of additional support. Our approach will be characterised by greater rigour; and will expand as we learn more from the early steps we describe in this plan.

To improve the information and support available to parents to enable them to ensure their children are ready to thrive when they start school, we will:

- **Identify and spread evidence-based home learning environment programmes that support early language development.** To identify the most promising and well-evidenced approaches, and those that can be scaled rapidly, we will invest £5 million to trial 'what works' in this area in the North of England, working closely with external partners. And we will launch an evidence review on how family learning and adult literacy

approaches can be used to involve actively parents in supporting their children's early language development.

- **Form a partnership with Public Health England to enable health visitors and early years practitioners to identify and support children's early speech, language and communication needs.** We will develop training and guidance to support these professionals in targeted areas. And we will also develop an effective early language assessment tool for health visitors and early years practitioners to help to check children's early language development – including as part of the two-year-old check – ensuring that any delays can be picked up and the right early support put in place.

Challenge 2: Improving the availability and take-up of high quality early years provision by disadvantaged children and in challenging areas

Building on this additional support for families, we need to ensure that all children can attend high quality early years education. We know that this matters most for children from disadvantaged backgrounds – giving an additional boost to their outcomes.²⁸ And yet these children can often be less likely to have access to quality early years education.^{29/30} There is also significant variation in take-up across the country: while 100% of eligible children in Warrington take-up the two-year-old offer, in Tower Hamlets it is only 39%.³¹

To create more high quality early education places for disadvantaged children, we will:

- **Provide £50 million funding to create more high quality school-based nursery provision for disadvantaged children.** Early years settings with higher qualified staff benefit all children, but disadvantaged children stand to gain the most.³² As graduate teachers and leaders are a requirement in school-based settings, we will focus on ensuring more new schools include nursery provision and on introducing and expanding nursery provision in good existing schools, both with a focus on disadvantaged children. We will also work with external partners to understand better 'what works' to improve the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils via school-based provision, spreading best practice across the country to ensure these children have greater access to high quality early years education. Alongside this, we will continue with supplementary funding for maintained nursery schools until 2019-20, and work with the sector to develop our plans for the long term.

We must also go much further to support parents to access the significant early education offer we have put in place. To increase take-up of quality provision in challenging areas and by less advantaged families, we will:

- **Identify communities with low take-up of early education – particularly for disadvantaged children – and provide bespoke support to improve this.** We will develop performance dashboards to show what is happening in each local authority and work with the areas where additional support is needed. These dashboards will include the take-up of early education and care (including the two-year-old offer) and the outcomes children go on to achieve at the end of reception, including a specific measure for

disadvantaged children. We will also support families of three- and four-year-olds with disabilities to access their free childcare entitlements through the £12.5 million Disability Access Fund.

Challenge 3: Improving the quality of early years provision in challenging areas by spreading best practice

Alongside improving access to high quality settings for children that need it most, we also want to improve further the quality of early years provision, especially in more challenging areas. And – as with schools – an enhanced professional development offer for early years practitioners must be at the heart of this. In particular, we want all children to be able to benefit from a language-rich early years environment, where children learn vital social and communication skills, where they are read to regularly, where they develop a love of words, rhymes and stories, and take their first steps towards becoming readers, supported by evidence-based phonics approaches in reception year.

Reception year in particular presents a clear window of opportunity to improve social mobility, given the near universal take-up and the chance to address key development gaps before they have the chance to widen. However, as Ofsted’s recent review has shown, there can be variation in provision, particularly with regard to the key goal of early language and literacy development.³³ And in its position as a bridging year between different phases, reception has at times not been given the focus it deserves. As such, we will do more to support the professionals that work there to improve outcomes.

To improve the quality across the full range of early years practice we will place a central focus on identifying and spreading evidence-based approaches, evaluating ‘what works’ and making this readily available to practitioners. We will:

- **Develop and deliver a comprehensive offer of support to improve early language and literacy – especially for disadvantaged pupils.** We will make a dedicated new £50 million investment, targeted in areas of weak early language and literacy. This will create a new national network of school-led English Hubs to promote and share excellence – drawing on and developing the evidence base – with a particular focus on reception year.³⁴ And this will also create a significant new £20 million offer of school-led professional development for early years practitioners in pre-reception nursery settings (both private and school-based) to support early language and numeracy development. To complement this, we will ensure that the next round of the £75 million Teaching and Leadership Innovation Fund (TLIF) has a themed focus on professional development programmes to support early language and literacy teaching in reception year. And we will also include within the £280 million Strategic School Improvement Fund (SSIF) a specific focus on boosting early literacy and numeracy, spreading the best practice that currently exists to where it can make the biggest difference.
- **Spread best practice to where it is needed, including from high performing local authorities to underperforming areas.** We will launch a new £8.5 million ‘system leadership’ programme of sector-led peer support and challenge, where high performing local authorities will help others to develop effective strategies to improve outcomes, including through the effective use of children’s centres and alignment with local troubled families programmes. These high performing local authorities will support and help to build the capacity in similar areas that have not yet been successful, demonstrating what can be

achieved and how it can be done. And alongside and informed by all of these approaches, we will work with the EEF, Early Intervention Foundation (EIF), Nuffield Foundation and others to further enhance the evidence-based professional development opportunities in the early years and ensure practitioners can identify and make the best use of proven interventions to support disadvantaged children – including through a new dedicated ‘what works’ fund.

To further improve the quality of provision in reception year and provide additional support for the professionals that work there, we will also:

- **Improve the outcome goals in reception, with a particular focus on reducing burdens and strengthening literacy and numeracy in the early years.** Following the consultation on primary assessment, we will work closely with teachers and experts to revise the Early Learning Goals (ELGs), reflecting the latest evidence on rounded child development. We want the ELGs to support teachers in delivering the best outcomes for their pupils, without driving unnecessary workload. This means ensuring the outcomes described by the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile better align with the starting point of year one teaching, with particular regard to strengthening literacy and numeracy in the early years. This will include an enhanced focus on vocabulary development.
- **Identify and share best practice on what should be taught in reception year.** Ofsted’s recent review of the reception year highlighted that many teachers were uncertain about what should most effectively be covered in the reception year, leading to uneven provision.³⁵ We will therefore establish expert groups – drawn from the profession – to identify examples of best practice and help develop guidance on what strong reception year practice can look like.

Partnership for change

Achieving this ambition begins, of course, with a child’s parents, carers and wider family. And it also requires a wide range of supporting actors. Local authorities, schools, health visitors and early years practitioners all have a vital role to play. To close both the early ‘word gap’ and the broader development gap, we will bring together a coalition of these actors, as well as those expert organisations who can help us share ‘what works’ in the early years – such as the EEF and the EIF. It is only with the combined efforts of this coalition that we can give the children that need it most the strong, early foundations to succeed in life.

Ambition 2: Close the attainment gap in school while continuing to raise standards for all

The actions set out in the previous chapter will help to ensure all children can arrive at school in a position to fulfil their potential. Our second ambition focuses on schools and the crucial role they play in levelling up opportunity. Great teaching changes lives, and securing the knowledge and skills needed to succeed should be the right of every child.

We start from the strongest position we have ever had. Our reforms have transformed the education system, raising standards and unleashing innovation – 1.9 million more pupils are in good or outstanding schools since 2010.³⁶ At the heart of this, we have: empowered professionals through the free schools and academies programme; strengthened the curriculum and introduced the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) to allow all pupils to benefit from the knowledge that will open doors; and reformed GCSEs and A levels to compete with the rest of the world. We have introduced the pupil premium, £11 billion of additional funding over six years to support the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, embedding a core focus on ‘what works’ by establishing the EEF. And we have now also introduced the historic new, fairer National Funding Formula, ensuring schools with the most demanding intakes will receive the extra funding they need.

We must now build on these firm foundations. Because we still face key challenges and unacceptable inequalities:

- **More challenging areas are at risk of falling behind**, with significant regional variation in both school outcomes and the existing capacity for improvement. At present, a child in one of England’s most deprived areas is 10 times more likely to go to a requires improvement or inadequate secondary school than a child in one of the least deprived areas.³⁷ And while nearly nine in ten children in London attend a good or outstanding secondary school, in Blackpool and Knowsley it is only one in five.³⁸
- **Disadvantaged pupils** across the country are behind their more advantaged peers at every key stage. Although the attainment gap is now closing, disadvantaged children remain – on average – four months behind at the end of reception year, 11 months behind at the end of primary school and 19 months behind at key stage 4.³⁹

Overcoming these obstacles is, first and foremost, a moral imperative. But it is also an economic one. In the North West of England alone, improving the attainment of disadvantaged pupils to the same level as in London would increase the lifetime productivity of 38,000 children by £110,000 each, providing an overall gain to Britain of over £3.5 billion.⁴⁰

What we will do next

Crucially, we can now see just what it is possible to achieve in some of our most disadvantaged communities. Our best primary and secondary schools – including many of our leading academies and free schools – are a visible rebuke to the idea that we should be lowering our expectations of what a child can achieve based on their background.

Our reforms since 2010 have been the right ones to drive up standards, and we are proud of the achievements delivered by professionals across the country. But we also recognise that it has been a period of significant change. The key task now is to see through these reforms, providing the space and stability to enable them to embed and – crucially – spread their impact to where it is needed most. To achieve this, we will put an increased emphasis on two factors.

Firstly, we will place a core focus on recognising and supporting the teaching profession as the key agent for improvement in the school system. School improvement and professional development for teachers and leaders are one and the same thing. We will therefore prioritise and invest in improving the support and career development offer for all teachers – with an enhanced offer to support those working with the children who can benefit the most.

Secondly, we will put a focus on ‘place’ and community at the heart of our approach, properly recognising that the benefits of our reforms have not yet been felt evenly. Empowering school leaders and driving improvement through our best schools must remain the touchstone. But there is also an important, active role for government to target relentlessly its capacity-building efforts towards the parts of the country at risk of falling behind.

We will therefore prioritise support for a wide range of more challenging areas, including a specific focus on the third of the country – around 108 local authority districts – with the weakest educational performance and capacity to improve.⁴¹ This broad place-based approach will be combined with a more intensive focus in a much more limited number of areas facing entrenched challenges through the Opportunity Areas programme. However, this increased focus on ‘place’ will be necessary but not sufficient – we know that vulnerable children and disadvantaged pupils of all abilities are likely to underperform wherever they live. And so this approach cannot be exhaustive, nor will it be crudely applied in terms of directing resource. But it is a growing issue that must be tackled head on.

The actions set out below are the first steps in what will be a long-term commitment – they will need to be built on consistently over time to have a transformative impact.

Challenge 1: Improving the quality of teaching in challenging areas and schools

The single biggest factor in improving outcomes at school is the quality of teaching – and this matters most for children from more disadvantaged backgrounds.⁴² However, at present, these pupils are less likely to receive high quality teaching. In the wealthiest quintile of areas, 93% of secondary schools are rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted for the quality of teaching; in the most disadvantaged quintile it is 67%.⁴³

This is driven by various systemic factors. Many of our best teachers are already working in the toughest environments. However, overall, schools in more challenging areas can find it harder to recruit and retain high quality teachers and leaders, often facing greater challenges with behaviour management and workload.⁴⁴ And, while we will rightly continue to demand high standards for every pupil, we recognise that the accountability system can sometimes have the unintended consequence of making a tough school less attractive to the best professionals. As a result, teachers and leaders in challenging schools are likely to be less

experienced, less likely to be teaching the subject in which they are qualified,⁴⁵ and less likely to have the necessary time to invest in their own professional development.

Tackling this challenge has to begin with developing home-grown talent – the teachers and leaders already working in our more challenging areas, who will often have the closest connection with these communities and provide a tangible example to encourage local children to aim high. But we must also do more to attract more good professionals to work with the children who need it most, working with the vocational grain of teachers who enter the profession to do just that.

We know that there is no single initiative that will address this – instead we must do more to ensure the underlying incentives and support point in the right direction throughout a teacher's career. We will therefore begin by taking action to remove the deterrents to teachers working in more challenging schools. We will:

- **Ensure the accountability regime gives full credit to what teachers and leaders achieve in challenging schools.** Ofsted has committed to ensure it is not a barrier to professionals working in challenging circumstances where children need them the most, carrying out further work to prevent their judgements from being a deterrent. In particular, it will ensure that leaders who step up to work in these schools will get full recognition in the Leadership and Management judgement. We will continue to prioritise progress measures at both primary and secondary, providing a fairer assessment of what schools achieve rather than the pupils they have. And to support this further, we will work with Ofsted as a united front to bear down on unnecessary workload, working together to remove avoidable burdens.
- **Ensure that the consequences of accountability are about securing the right support at the right time, rather than simply imposing punitive sanctions or structural change.** High standards in school accountability are vital: children only get one shot at their education. However, we must also ensure that the consequences of this accountability are as clear and effective in driving improvement as they can be. We will continue to adopt a robust approach to failure. But schools identified as 'Coasting' and needing support will now receive that co-ordinated support from an accredited school-led system leader, with enforced leadership change only in the rarest of cases. And we are clear that data will only ever be the starting point for a conversation and not used in isolation to make decisions about a school. We will also make sure that schools can be clear on the function of key actors in the accountability system – particularly the distinct roles of Regional Schools Commissioners and Ofsted – clarifying when the department has an active role in tackling underperformance and, importantly, when it does not.

However, removing the deterrents alone will not be enough – it will need to be matched with an increasing shift in the positive incentives. At present, both the supply and quality of initial teacher training (ITT) providers is unevenly distributed across the country. And we know that schools in more challenging areas often attract more inexperienced teachers who, without the additional support needed to thrive in a tougher environment, they are unable to retain just as these teachers become more experienced.⁴⁶ We will therefore:

- **Introduce smarter incentives to train, attract and retain the best teachers in challenging areas.** We will pilot a new targeted student loan reimbursement scheme in

key shortage subjects: modern foreign languages, biology, chemistry, computer science and physics. We will also introduce higher retention payments of £7,500 for maths teachers working in challenging areas in their third and fifth years, as part of the phased bursaries pilot. And we will actively increase high quality ITT provision in areas that can benefit the most, including incentivising our very best providers to set up and expand in these parts of the country. As part of this, Teach First will increase its focus on more challenging areas – and will also deepen efforts to encourage and support more of their ambassadors into these areas to take on leadership positions, including head teacher roles, where they can continue to have a significant impact.

- **Provide £30 million in tailored support to schools with disadvantaged intakes that are facing significant recruitment and retention challenges.** We will invest in bespoke packages of support – including help with recruitment and additional professional development – evaluating what is effective. We will look to spread this best practice more widely. And to help reduce the cost of recruitment to schools more broadly, we are also creating a free national teacher vacancy service. We are currently developing a prototype and testing to ensure we design a service that best meets user needs – and will bring forward further plans on this in the new year.

However, to genuinely shift the dial on both retention and school improvement, we need to create a step change in the support for and investment in teachers' professional development throughout their careers. And while our broader goal is to raise the status and support the improvement of the teaching profession as a whole, we also want to invest disproportionately in the development of professionals working in more challenging areas. This will directly improve the schools in these areas. But it will also help to create a virtuous circle, whereby teachers and leaders know that the support and opportunities to develop and progress in their career are strongest when working with the children and communities that need them most. We will therefore:

- **Provide an enhanced offer of early career support by strengthening qualified teacher status (QTS), and support clearer career pathways and improved professional development for all teachers.** We will consult on plans to strengthen QTS by introducing a universal entitlement to an extended programme of early career support and development across core areas of practice, with plans for additional support in more challenging schools and areas. We will also consult on how we can support clearer career pathways for teachers – including those who want to remain as subject or specialist experts in the classroom. As part of this, we are exploring the option to develop an effective accreditation scheme to ensure teachers and leaders can identify evidence-based professional development. And more broadly, we will help to transform flexible working in schools, working in partnership with school leaders, unions and others to tackle this key barrier to retaining good teachers.
- **Transform the quality of professional development available in challenging areas, by investing over £115 million in evidence-based approaches.** We are investing £75 million from the TLIF to stimulate high quality, evidence-based professional development for teachers and leaders in a broad range of challenging areas. £10 million of this funding has been set aside to incentivise take-up in these areas of the new, gold-standard leadership National Professional Qualifications. And to extend further this strengthened offer in challenging areas, we are investing £42 million to pilot a Teacher Development

Premium – providing a £1,000 per teacher budget for evidence-based professional development.

Challenge 2: Improving the school improvement offer in more challenging areas

Wider school improvement support is also critical, not least to deliver this enhanced professional development offer. We have made great strides forward, building the core of a national network of high quality school-led improvement providers through Teaching Schools and National Leaders of Education (NLEs). And to see the impact of our reforms for pupils in some of the most disadvantaged areas, it is only necessary to look at multi-academy trusts (MATs) like Outwood Grange, Ark, Harris and Inspiration Trust or pioneering free schools like Reach Academy Feltham and Dixons Trinity in Bradford. But a key challenge remains: these core drivers of school improvement are not available equally around the country.

London and the South East have benefited disproportionately from the free schools and academies programmes. Similarly, because NLEs and Teaching Schools are drawn from existing good and outstanding schools, coverage can be weakest in more disadvantaged areas. For example, outside London, while 43% of our secondary Teaching Schools are in the wealthiest quintile of areas, only 6% are in the most deprived areas.⁴⁷ This means that the capacity for self-improvement can be weakest where the need is most pressing. We must now therefore make a concerted effort to ensure our most powerful tools to improve schools are targeted where the challenge is greatest. We will therefore:

- **Prioritise the growth and coverage of high quality MATs and Teaching Schools in challenging areas.** We will target the £53 million MAT Development and Improvement Fund on areas of weak capacity, growing MATs with a proven track record of supporting schools to improve, including raising the performance of disadvantaged pupils. And we will prioritise growing coverage of Teaching Schools and NLEs in challenging areas, taking active steps to grow this network where it is most needed. We will also revise the performance metrics for these key system leaders to ensure greater support is provided to underperforming schools.
- **Provide £300 million of targeted, evidence-based school improvement support for underperforming schools across the country.** The SSIF will provide £280 million for high quality school-led improvement projects. This will embed evidence-based practice at its heart, linking directly to the work of the EEF, who have committed an additional £20 million investment to align with this work. Underperforming schools across the country will be eligible for this support, including those with weaker performance for disadvantaged pupils.
- **Increase access to the most effective curriculum support in more challenging areas and schools.** We will invest £33 million to expand the Teaching for Mastery maths programme to 3,000 more primary and secondary schools, targeting take-up in more challenging areas and schools. This will include extending the successful Maths Hub network, creating up to 10 additional expert hubs where capacity is currently weakest. We will complement this with a £26 million national network of English Hubs, targeted in areas of weak early language and literacy development (see Ambition 1). We will also introduce

a Curriculum Fund to encourage leading cultural institutions to develop knowledge-rich materials, targeted to spread the benefits of a knowledge-rich curriculum to pupils that can benefit the most.

To unleash innovation where it is needed, we will make sure the areas of the country that most need good new schools are able to benefit from the free schools programme, which serves to challenge the status quo and kick-start wider improvement. We will increase the number of good school places by:

- **Extending the reach of the free school programme to benefit more areas of educational underperformance.** We will invite a new wave of mainstream free school applications in early 2018, with a particular focus on enabling more challenging areas to feel the full benefit of the programme.
- **Make sure our system can benefit from the full range of expertise from across the education sector.** We want to see independent schools and universities doing more to support the state sector, in particular by formally sponsoring academies and setting up free schools. We will take a targeted approach to encouraging such partnerships based on local need for good school places, and we are clear that these partnerships should lead to measurable and sustained improvement. The two existing specialist maths schools are excellent examples of such partnerships, and the Budget announced £18 million of funding to open more of these schools across the country.

Challenge 3: Supporting pupils from less advantaged backgrounds of all abilities to fulfil their potential

An increased focus on 'place' is important, but it is clearly not sufficient. Disadvantaged pupils of all abilities are more likely to underperform even in otherwise strong areas and strong schools. The Race Disparity Audit also highlighted that certain ethnic pupil groups can be more likely to under-perform or face exclusion. And the challenge is especially acute for the most vulnerable groups, such as looked after children, Children in Need, or children with SEND. Wherever they are growing up, these children will have multiple, overlapping needs – but taken together, they are significantly more likely to leave school without a single valuable qualification. To improve the outcomes for pupils with these specific disadvantages, we will:

- **Prioritise work to understand the needs of the most vulnerable children and how best to improve their outcomes.** We will undertake a review into Children in Need, to understand the challenges these pupils face and the support available to meet best these through schools and children's social care. We will also carry out an externally-led review into school exclusion, to support schools to use exclusion appropriately and ensure permanent exclusion is a last resort. This will also look at why some groups of children are more likely to be excluded from school, including Children in Need, children from certain ethnic groups and children with SEND.
- **Transform the quality of Alternative Provision (AP) and special provision.** We will bring forward proposals to ensure that the crucial area of AP is the best it can be, to support those pupils unable to receive suitable education in mainstream schools. We will identify evidence on the most effective interventions in these settings and spread this

nationally, ensuring that the best practice already in the field becomes the norm. We will also make it easier for children with SEND to access good school places by providing £215 million in capital funding for local authorities to increase school capacity. This work will be supported by our 4.6% increase to high-needs funding to local authorities.

More broadly, our historic investment to support the attainment of disadvantaged children through the pupil premium – coupled with the step change in the quality of evidence that schools can draw on through the EEF – is increasingly showing real reward. However, there remains further to go to embed best practice across the system, with some schools not yet using this funding effectively. This can be especially true for their more able disadvantaged pupils, who fall back compared to their more affluent peers, even after a promising start.⁴⁸ And crucially, disadvantaged pupils of all abilities are less likely to be entered for the core EBacc subjects that can open doors to later opportunity,⁴⁹ despite evidence from the Sutton Trust that this can help to close the attainment gap.⁵⁰ We will therefore:

- **Ensure that disadvantaged pupils can access the core academic subjects that unlock opportunity.** We have committed to an ambition of 75% EBacc take-up by 2022, on route to 90% by 2025. To reach this, we will be introducing targeted support for schools to encourage take-up and increase the supply of EBacc subject teachers where it is most needed, spreading access to these core enabling subjects to the pupils and areas that have been denied these opportunities for too long. In particular, we will make it our mission to improve access to high quality modern foreign languages subject teaching, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, drawing on the findings of the Teaching Schools Council review by Ian Bauckham – building expert hubs to share best practice, targeted in disadvantaged areas.
- **Spread evidence-based approaches to supporting disadvantaged pupils.** We will continue to work with the EEF to drive up the effectiveness of pupil premium spending – including through a new approach to specialist NLE led pupil premium reviews. And we will introduce a new £23 million Future Talent Programme to trial approaches and present clear recommendations on ‘what works’ to support the most able disadvantaged children, particularly during key stage 3 when they so often fall behind.

Partnership for change

Achieving this ambition will involve working closely with a full range of partners, including schools and groups of schools, higher education institutions (in their important role in ITT and beyond) and the EEF (as the ‘what works’ centre for education). Most importantly of all, however, it will involve working in partnership with the teaching profession itself – including through the new professional body, the College of Teaching. At the heart of our approach is a recognition that our teachers and leaders are the key agents for improvement in the school system, and government must do more to support this. As such, as we take forward and build on the actions in this plan, we will do so in close dialogue with the profession. And nowhere will this be more the case than in the consultation on strengthening QTS and supporting clearer career pathways for teachers, which must rightly be shaped, and ultimately owned, by the profession itself.

Ambition 3: High quality post-16 education choices for all young people

Our schools reforms focus on raising education standards for all. Alongside, we must ensure our world class academic and technical qualifications at post-16 act as a passport to opportunity.

We should start by recognising that we are at a record level of participation amongst 16- to 18-year-olds. The proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds who were NEET at the end of 2016 was 6.0%, the lowest since consistent records began in 1994.⁵¹ But participating is only the start; we owe it to every single young person to provide a **real choice**, and that is not currently the case especially for those from low productivity areas of the country or less advantaged backgrounds:

- **Young people who currently choose a technical route face a fragmented and confusing system.** The technical option must be a distinctive, prestigious, high quality offer in its own right. However, quality is inconsistent and this offer is yet to fully benefit from our wider determination to drive up standards. This especially affects young people in low productivity areas where take-up of technical education is much higher: for instance 74% of people in Barnsley go to college compared with 20% in Kensington.⁵²
- **Young people who have fallen behind their peers by age 16 then find it harder to catch up and have options shut off.** We know that employers routinely use GCSE English and maths qualifications as a sifting device, so without them young people struggle to get an interview for a good job. But 40.7% do not achieve good passes in English and maths by age 16, rising to 56.9% for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.⁵³ And of those that do not achieve this, only 13.9% go on to do so by age 19.⁵⁴
- **Young people from less advantaged backgrounds are less likely to enter high quality higher education.** The academic option provides a high quality path to employment in many skilled professions. Graduates earn, on average, at least £100,000 more over their lifetimes than those without a degree but with two or more A levels.⁵⁵ However, 18-year-olds from advantaged backgrounds are about two and half times more likely to enter higher education compared with those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, and six times more likely to go to the most selective institutions.⁵⁶

We are part way along the journey to fixing these problems. We have made huge strides in widening participation into higher education. In 2016, disadvantaged English 18-year-olds were 52% more likely to gain a place at the most selective universities than in 2009, though overall entry rates remain low.⁵⁷ We are reforming technical education, and we are investing to support further education colleges to be centres of excellence in English and maths. We have introduced the Apprenticeships Levy to encourage large employers to provide apprenticeships, and introduced degree apprenticeships that allow apprentices to earn while studying for a full degree. But, to level up opportunity more fully, we need to do much more.

From an economic perspective, investing in skills has never been more important as we prepare to leave the European Union, and need to ensure we meet the increasing demand for advanced skills. Only 10% of adults in this country hold a technical qualification as their highest educational achievement, compared with approximately twice that amount in Germany.⁵⁸ To meet the skills demands of employers, both now and in the future, especially in those areas left behind by economic change, we need a skills revolution.

What we will do next

Firstly, we must ensure the post-16 education system continues to do everything possible to encourage all young people to participate. We will therefore continue to prioritise our support programmes to help young people stay in education whatever their financial situation, such as the 16-19 Bursary Fund. We will keep targeting resource at specific groups of young people who need it most, for instance continuing Care to Learn. We will support young people with SEND, for instance through the recently announced local supported internship forums to create work placements for young people with SEND to provide them with the skills and confidence they need to move into paid work.

But we will now do much more to ensure all post-16 education routes are accessible to all, and deliver high quality paths to skilled employment.

We have already committed half a billion pounds to tackle the historic underinvestment in technical education. However, we know that fundamental reform is needed following the Sainsbury review – otherwise too many young people in technical education will be left behind as their peers on the academic track race ahead. To deliver real change for young people, we need a genuine partnership with both employers and colleges, backed by real investment and capacity building from government.

And alongside this we will make sure the academic route remains world class and is accessible to all. We have: reformed A levels; introduced new academically focused post-16 free schools; passed the Higher Education and Research Act to improve choice and offer information on outcomes for students; and implemented the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF). We will improve access to high quality higher education, encouraging more young people from areas of the country with low participation to apply to high quality institutions and courses, including the most selective universities.

We are also taking forward a major review of post-18 funding across tertiary education to ensure a joined up system that incentivises choice and competition, provides value for money, develops the skills we need, and crucially works for everyone by being accessible to all.

Challenge 1: Creating high quality technical education options to improve the choice for young people at age 16

It is all too easy for technical education to drift away from what employers want and towards what it is easy to deliver. When that happens young people are led down a path to nowhere, unable to unlock their talent and fulfil their potential. Creating high quality technical education disproportionately benefits people from disadvantaged backgrounds: only 36% of young

people from disadvantaged backgrounds take A levels compared to 61% of those from more affluent backgrounds.⁵⁹

Ultimately, it is employers who know which skills, knowledge and behaviours they need now and will need in the future. This is why we are making sure that employers are in the driving seat in setting standards for both apprenticeships and technical qualifications. Only then will young people following the technical option have a direct line of sight to skilled employment and leave with qualifications that are well understood and valued by employers in the real world. Within this employer-led system, government has a critical role in setting the right framework, ensuring robust assessment, holding training providers to account, and providing the right information to students to enable them to choose the right options for them.

Following the 2011 Wolf review, we removed over 3,000 low-value qualifications from the list that counts towards performance outcomes for schools and colleges. The next step in our skills revolution is to introduce technical qualifications that will be as rigorous and respected as A levels, their academic counterparts, and will therefore lift up the young people who would otherwise have been held back by a poorer quality offer, and support parts of the country that are furthest behind. To offer better quality technical qualifications we will:

- **Introduce the first T levels from 2020.** T levels are two-year, full-time level 3 study programmes, and will be designed primarily to support entry to skilled employment. T levels will be based on employer-designed standards and content, which will prepare students for skilled jobs and enable them to adapt to meet the skills needs of the future. Students achieving T levels will be able to progress to skilled employment or higher and degree level apprenticeships or higher technical education, including technical degrees. T levels will include a substantial work placement with an employer, which will last at least 45 days, to develop the skills for work.
- **Review higher technical education at level 4 and 5.** This review is focusing on how higher technical education can address the needs of learners and employers, meet the skills needs of the economy, and support social mobility both for young people and for adults upskilling or retraining. We want to make sure we build the technical education route at the higher levels as well, as Lord Sainsbury's review recommended as a crucial next step.

Moving on to apprenticeships, we have made huge strides forward because we know apprenticeships can transform the lives of young people who secure them, including through the clear increase in lifetime earnings.⁶⁰ As well as significantly expanding the number since 2010, we are focused on improving quality as well and increasing the number of higher-level apprenticeships, including degree apprenticeships. To drive up the quality of apprenticeships further we will:

- **Incentivise more employers to provide quality apprenticeships through the apprenticeship levy.** We expect apprenticeships to offer a structured and substantial transition for young people from education to work. We have established the Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA) to quality assure apprenticeship provision and provide advice to government on future funding provision for apprenticeship training. This builds on the

apprenticeship standards we have developed in partnership with employers across 17 areas of employment, which describe what an apprentice will be doing and the skills required of them.

- **Develop and increase the take-up of degree apprenticeships.** Using the £10 million Degree Apprenticeship Development Fund, we will encourage widening participation in disadvantaged areas to under-represented groups and will also expand Degree Apprenticeship provision in science, technology, engineering and maths occupations (STEM) and gender diversity in STEM.

Challenge 2: Investing in the further education sector

Historically we have not done enough to invest in further education, which is the sector responsible for delivering training from basic skills to postgraduate degrees, including the bulk of technical education. The hard work and dedication of teachers and college leaders has not been matched by successive governments who have overlooked further education. This is a major problem given that the sector disproportionately serves students from disadvantaged backgrounds and challenging areas.⁶¹

We want genuine partnership with the further education sector: a self-confident sector with autonomy to use its own professionalism and expertise, alongside the proper investment and capacity building from government to raise quality and ensure best practice is identified and shared. To invest in colleges and above all the professionals who work in them, we will:

- **Develop a further education improvement support structure.** We are introducing a Strategic College Improvement Fund, worth £15 million over the next two years, to provide focused support programmes to help weaker colleges to improve, including in the most challenging areas. The pilot phase of the fund was launched in October 2017. We are also investing an extra £20 million to help colleges and teachers prepare for the introduction of T levels.
- **Invest in further education college leaders to raise standards.** We will appoint the best college leaders as National Leaders of Further Education to support other colleges in their local areas to raise standards by sharing best practice and expertise. We are also funding a new Strategic Leadership Programme for further education principals offered by the Education and Training Foundation (ETF), in partnership with the prestigious Saïd Business School at Oxford University. The programme is designed to support principals to develop the advanced skillset they need to be effective leaders of large and increasingly complex organisations.
- **Establish new Institutes of Technology.** Supported by a £170 million fund, we expect the new Institutes of Technology to open from 2019 and act as a beacon of quality provision across all regions of England. These high quality and prestigious institutions will develop the higher-level technical skills that employers need.

One of the reasons this investment is critical is because no sector does more than the further education sector to support young people who have fallen behind to catch up including in

English and maths, which we know is associated with higher earnings and high productivity.⁶² Young people who did not achieve good passes at age 16 now continue study of English and maths and we are reforming Functional Skills to provide a genuine alternative to GCSEs which are highly valued by employers. We will support the sector to go further and will:

- **Invest the resources and capacity needed to make further education colleges centres of excellence for maths and English.** We are investing £40 million in the centres of excellence programme for the further education sector. Building on the successes of the Maths Hub model in schools, the programme will support institutions to design, deliver and disseminate best practice – investing in the research, development and evaluation of new, high quality teaching methods – and fill the evidence gap standing in the way of success. The programme will begin in areas facing specific challenges such as areas of lower education attainment. It will support the sector to use diagnostic tools – helping teachers to target teaching more effectively. We will also launch an £8.5 million pilot to test innovative approaches to improve outcomes in basic maths for those aged 16 and over. And we will run a £16 million level 3 (equivalent to A level) Maths Support Programme to raise the quality of further education teaching in maths, and increase student maths take-up.
- **Introduce a new transition year, with English and maths as a key component, for 16-year-olds who are not ready for more advanced academic or technical study or employment.** This transition year will be flexible and tailored to the student’s prior attainment and aspirations, but with a sharp focus on basic skills and progression. Crucially, introducing this transition year will help ensure that all young people who have the capability to access T levels or A levels can do so, after having received the right support, rather than being locked into lower level courses which will not maximise their potential. We will pilot the transition year to test different offers to make sure we are providing the best possible options to all young people.

Challenge 3: Ensuring young people from disadvantaged backgrounds access the highest quality provision

There are a range of ways in which young people can progress into rewarding careers, including through degree apprenticeships and advanced level 4 and 5 technical education. A key track which many thousands of young people choose every year is higher education, but we know a serious issue is that despite recent progress too few young people from low-income backgrounds and low-participation areas apply to universities, especially the most selective.⁶³ And we also know that certain ethnic minority backgrounds are substantially underrepresented at these institutions.⁶⁴

This is why working through the newly established Office for Students (OfS) we will encourage the over £860 million spent on outreach in 2018/19 to be targeted as effectively as possible to widen participation. And we will encourage far greater transparency by universities on what they expect from their applicants, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds so they are aware of the subject choices, experiences and qualifications required to pursue different career options.

The proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who are applying to higher education is rising. However, there is more to do to maximise the benefits of higher education for young people from all backgrounds, and we will apply this same drive to ensure fair access across all of the highest quality post-16 courses. To do this we will:

- **Ensure higher education providers spend their access and participation funding effectively, targeting low participation areas.** The Director of Fair Access, whose functions will move to the OfS, has written to higher education institutions asking them to target outreach and widening participation activities on low participation areas. This will be supported by an innovative Evidence and Impact Exchange for Widening Participation, recommended by Universities UK's Social Mobility Advisory Group, which will be linked to the OfS. The Exchange will provide evidence on the impact of outreach activity to ensure it is spent as effectively as possible. A £120 million National Collaborative Outreach Programme is already targeting those areas of the country with low levels of higher education participation and lower than expected levels given typical attainment.
- **Improve transparency of widening participation practices to encourage applications to the most selective higher education institutions.** We will use the transparency duty in the Higher Education and Research Act to shine a stronger light on the universities who need to go further in improving equality of opportunity for students from under-represented and disadvantaged groups. We expect the most selective universities to be more transparent about the use of contextual data to inform undergraduate admissions decisions, after the Sutton Trust found that one in five students from higher participation areas are being admitted with reduced grade offers.⁶⁵ We will also commission new behavioural insights trials to identify how to encourage applications to the highest quality institutions and courses, including the most selective universities.

Partnership for Change

This ambition, like the others, needs us to build a substantial coalition for change. In the past, we have failed to engage sufficiently employers in technical education; and we have inadequately supported institutions of further education in improvement. Higher education institutions, who have a high degree of autonomy, are vital partners too and we need more of them to show the lead in widening participation. The actions in this plan represent the next phase of our work and we will be working with all of these partners to build on it.

Ambition 4: Everyone achieving their potential in rewarding careers

Ambitions 1, 2, and 3 are about ensuring that young people from all backgrounds have the knowledge and the skills to prepare for a rewarding career. This fourth ambition is about ensuring that time, effort and investment in nurturing talent and potential does not just stop when someone leaves our formal education system. We want to ensure that all young people enter a rewarding role that maximises their potential, and where they want to, or need to they have the opportunities to retrain and change career.

Our education and welfare reforms have already contributed to a decline in the proportion of young people that are NEET in recent years.⁶⁶ And the skills revolution across technical education will help create an army of skilled young people for British business. But we have a lot to do to level up opportunity beyond the formal education system, as some young people are held back because they are:

- **Less likely to have the right advice and guidance** that can help to make the course choices to unlock their potential; this might be due to poor in-school careers provision⁶⁷; or it might be because they do not have the same family and peer networks that can offer knowledge and experience of how to access the most rewarding careers as those from more affluent backgrounds.⁶⁸
- **Less likely to live in an area with high concentration of employers** that can help provide crucial work experience opportunities and secure employment; in London nearly half of employers offer work experience, compared to less than a third in North Yorkshire and the Humber – where there is also a far smaller concentration of employers and high skilled and professional jobs.⁶⁹

This means that when some people enter the labour market they too often find themselves trapped in lower paying jobs – of all those low paid in 2006, by 2016 only one in six made a sustained progression onto higher wages over the ten year period.⁷⁰

Tellingly, even those from disadvantaged backgrounds that graduate from university do relatively less well. Graduates may have far higher lifetime earnings than non-graduates, but graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds still earn £2,000 less per year than counterparts with the same level of experience and qualifications from more privileged backgrounds.⁷¹ This means that we are not making the most of our investment in education.

What we will do next

Government needs to take urgent action and crucially to draw on the support of partners – in the private sector and civil society – to deliver the change that is needed. Without the support of employers, schools and colleges cannot offer experiences of work, guidance on different types of work, or fully understand the skills needs of the labour market. We want young people increasingly to gain experiences of work while in education, and to keep getting education and training while in work. The task of unlocking talent and fulfilling potential is not complete when young people leave the classroom. That means we need education institutions to make it their

business to care about employment, and employers to make it their business to care about education.

The move from education to employment should not be a blind leap but a guided journey, with the support of both education and employers. This is the principle which should be reflected in all of our reforms. For instance, based on the research of ‘what works’, as part of our new careers strategy we are committing for every young person to have at least seven meaningful encounters with employers during their secondary education, with at least one encounter taking place each year from years 7 to 13. Similarly, the introduction of the TEF in higher education – which measures career destinations – is encouraging universities to place a premium on careers support for students, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds and areas with low higher education participation.

This chapter sets out the challenges we need to overcome to ensure people from all backgrounds and everywhere in the country have the knowledge, the skills, the experiences and – crucially – the opportunity to build a rewarding career. This includes supporting the transition into work for young people as well as improving the education and training offer for those in work. We set out what we will do to tackle these challenges.

Challenge 1: Collaborating with businesses large and small to widen opportunity, and drive up local skills and productivity

To achieve this ambition, we must inspire, incentivise but also insist that businesses of all sizes reach out to support skills development in their local communities and – for those with the greatest capacity – to reach out to the places that need the most support. Too many people and places in the country are not benefitting from the opportunities that business can bring. And too many employers are missing out by not reaching out to those that need more support to access these opportunities. This is not only harming the sense of fairness and equal opportunity in Britain, but only accessing a smaller pool of talent is hurting business’ bottom line. We want to support employers to find untapped talent everywhere to drive greater competitiveness across the UK economy.

To do this we need a call to arms to our ‘opportunity makers’ in business to connect up education and employment, which has been separate for too long, bringing opportunity to all places. We need to drive culture change across business in our country to see driving up skills as something that all companies must be part of and engage in, not just some because of their ethos, or those that are large enough.

We recognise that we need a new approach to business to ensure our ask of employers is coherent across careers provision, technical education, apprenticeships and retraining, and a clear ask for firms of all sizes on how they can play their part. Our partnership with business cuts across five key strands of activity, which will:

1. Provide millions of career encounters for all young people

We know that when employers recruit, the attribute they value most highly in candidates is previous work experience.⁷² We will encourage all employers to offer work experience as a meaningful activity for pupils and students so that young people will benefit from being work-ready, as will employers. The Careers & Enterprise Company (CEC) has built up a network to connect employers with schools and provide the crucial encounters

pupils need to improve their career outcomes, prioritising provision in areas they identify as 'careers cold spots'.⁷³

2. Provide thousands more work placements and plug local skills gaps

We will work with employers to develop T levels, so that they provide young people with the knowledge and skills to succeed in their careers – including a work placement of at least 45 days. We will support the delivery of work placements with over £70 million of funding every year. Employers will take part in regional Skills Advisory Panels, which will help ensure that the local provision of skills, and the delivery of skills policy in local areas, responds to local employer needs.

3. Create three million quality apprenticeship starts by 2020

Employers are key partners in meeting our target for creating three million apprenticeships by 2020 (from 2015), and through the apprenticeship levy employers can access funding to train their future workforce. The apprenticeship levy ensures that employers all across the country are expanding apprenticeship provision, and the IfA will put employers at the centre of the system. We want to see employers investing the ring-fenced money they have for skills. And to support apprentices from deprived areas, we have made about £60 million available to providers to recruit and train apprentices who can benefit most from this provision.

4. Allow adults to retrain to meet our skills needs

We want to ensure Britain's workforce is prepared for the opportunities and challenges that economic and technological change present. In the new economy, we want lifelong learning accompanied by retraining to become the norm, so that as jobs are affected by technological change people can adapt. We want employers to ensure that all their staff have access to quality training – including through apprenticeships – so that they may upskill throughout their working lives. To support this we will trial new approaches to encourage and support career learning through a new National Retraining Scheme.

5. Improve access and progression into high profile professions

We want more employers to follow the example of pioneers such as the Social Mobility Business Compact Champions, to adopt the best practices that both increase the diversity of new recruits but also better enable progression to the top of their organisations. Independent initiatives such as the Social Mobility Employer Index celebrate the work of those employers taking the most effective action and shine a spotlight on the sectors and regions that lag behind. We will engage with professional bodies to understand what more can be done to widen the opportunities available to progress to the highest levels of the professions.

Large businesses will be an important partner for us across all of these five strands. But there will also be a crucial role for Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in delivering the skills revolution that we need. We know it can be difficult for SMEs to provide opportunities or engage in education, which is why we will work with SMEs in targeted areas to make it easier for them to offer apprenticeships, traineeships, and work placements. We will review what government can do to make this simpler and easier and we will meet with a wide range of SMEs to understand how we can make sure the system works for them.

Challenge 2: Improving the quality and availability of good careers guidance and experiences, targeting ‘career cold spots’

To ensure every person, no matter their background or where they are from, is able to build a rewarding career we need to ensure that everyone has access to high quality advice and guidance about the pathways to work. However, as Ofsted has identified, the quality of careers provision across the country is far too variable.⁷⁴ Where the quality of careers provision in school is poor, young people will often be reliant on their parents for advice and guidance.⁷⁵ Parents cannot be expected to have a complete understanding of the different education, training and career options available. But – those young people from more affluent places and circumstances – will typically have more powerful networks of advice and information and experience of different careers that their children can benefit from.

This is why we will prioritise people from lower income backgrounds and ‘career cold spots’ (areas that CEC has identified with weaker careers support) for quality careers provision in order to level up opportunity. To encourage the best career practices and connect schools to employers we will:

- **Ensure every young person has at least seven encounters with employers during their education.** We are developing a network of employers through CEC, which will help make sure all pupils get a chance to engage with a wide range of employers, exceeding the four encounters demonstrated to have an impact on employment and earnings.⁷⁶ This will be supported by collaborative ‘careers hubs’ in 20 areas, which will link schools, colleges, universities and others together to pool resources, improve careers services and identify the best provision.
- **Improve the quality of careers advice in school.** We will expect schools and colleges to use the Gatsby Benchmarks of good careers guidance, which were developed by the Gatsby Charitable Foundation to identify quality careers provision. We are providing £4 million to fund the development of new training programmes to improve provision, and support at least 500 schools and colleges in areas that need the most support to develop their own Careers Leaders. In particular, we will expect all disadvantaged pupils to be offered support so they are aware of the subject choices, experience and qualifications required to pursue different career options.
- **Improve the advice available outside of education to young people and adults, including those who need the most support.** We will improve the National Careers Service’s online resources, by making sure all government careers information is available in one place, allowing people to more easily find out about the different ways to pursue a career or change career. Over the past year, the website has received 20 million visits, 474,000 individuals received face-to-face careers advice, and the call centre has carried out over 200,000 calls, web chats and emails. More widely, we are taking forward a range of other programmes such as: funding the ETF to provide professional development for career advisers working with people with SEND; delivering traineeships which provide great opportunities for thousands of young people to get the skills and experience they need to get apprenticeships and other jobs; and improving support to care leavers for instance through Social Impact Bonds to help care leavers into education employment or training.

As well as access to the right advice, we want all young people regardless of their background or where they grow up to have the opportunity to develop life skills such as leadership, teamwork, problem solving that employers are looking for. This is especially important in areas with entrenched disadvantage. To improve the essential life skills that employers look for in young people we will:

- **Provide an Essential Life Skills programme in targeted areas, alongside a national mentoring programme.** We are investing £22 million in our Essential Life Skills programme across the 12 Opportunity Areas. The programme will provide extra-curricular activities to young people who would normally struggle to access them, such as enterprise activities, volunteering and social action projects. National Citizen Service (NCS) advisers are also supporting every secondary school in each Opportunity Area to drive up participation in their voluntary and social development programmes, which builds skills for work and life such as communication and leadership. Alongside this, we are funding 39 mentoring programmes across the country – through CEC – to work with over 25,000 young people who are at risk of leaving education to ensure they re-engage and stay on track to finish their education and move into work.

Challenge 3: Ensuring those in lower paid work are able to re-train to move into more rewarding careers

Economic change can be an opportunity to unlock talent and fulfil potential if we can support smoother transitions between different roles and different careers, and make it easier for people to escape low paid work.

Through the adult entitlement, we already support people to improve their English and maths skills and fund this provision fully up to level 2 (equivalent to GCSE) for adults who wish to take it up. However, to meet our skills needs, we need to do more to provide the opportunities for those already in work to upskill and retrain across all levels of skills. To do this we will:

- **Introduce a National Retraining Scheme.** By the end of this Parliament we will have in place a National Retraining Scheme, which will give individuals the skills they need to progress in work, redirect their careers and secure the high-paid, high-skilled jobs of the future. The design and delivery of the Scheme will be informed by £40 million Career Learning Pilots starting this year. We will launch a Flexible Learning Fund as part of this programme. This will provide a total of up to £10 million in grant support to projects that develop methods of delivering learning that are flexible and easy to access for adults who are in work, or returning to work, with either low or intermediate level skills. Following the recent Budget, we will work through our National Retraining Partnership – which includes the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and the Trades Union Congress (TUC) – to commit to develop retraining opportunities in both construction and digital skills, backed by new investment.
- **Improve adult basic skill provision.** We will introduce an entitlement to full funding for basic digital courses, mirroring our approach to maths and English. This will ensure adults are entitled to study for specified qualifications in basic digital skills, as well as maths and English, free of charge. We are reforming the maths and English qualifications that many young people and adults take to ensure they give people the skills employers tell us they

need. These reformed functional skills qualifications will be launched in 2019. We will also test whether reducing course costs encourages adults in low-skilled jobs to do economically valuable learning, matched to local economic need, through a £10 million pilot in up to five Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) areas.

- **Provide more flexible provision to develop advanced skills.** We are introducing maintenance loans for part-time undergraduate students and to help with the cost of postgraduate doctoral study, from 2018/19. This will allow adults to access part-time higher education. We are consulting on introducing accelerated degrees from 2019/20, an intense undergraduate degree qualification typically completed within two years and with fees 20% less than a three-year course. Accelerated degrees will be particularly attractive for mature students who are looking to change their skills and adapt to changes in the economy – and who might want to go through higher education at a faster pace.

Partnership for Change

As we have set out, achieving this ambition will only be possible through an unprecedented partnership with business. We have kicked this off already through the first Department for Education Skills Summit in November 2017, delivered alongside the most senior leaders of industry, and 100 of the biggest firms in the UK. At that summit we announced a new type of partnership between employers and government. This partnership will take forward our skills revolution and spread opportunity to more communities. The Skills Partner Statement of Action, signed up to at the summit, committed partners to working together to create a strong skills programme that gives every individual the opportunity to succeed – whatever their background – and employers the skills they need to prosper.

Opportunity Areas – bringing together our approach to tackle entrenched disadvantage

The Opportunity Areas programme encapsulates and is at the very sharp end of our entire approach across each of our ambitions and our shifts in ways of working.

Throughout this plan we have set out how we are recalibrating our efforts to target support towards a wide range of challenging areas to meet our overarching ambition – no community left behind. However, some areas of the country where disadvantage is most entrenched will need additional support and impetus. Opportunity Areas provide this, pulling together our approach across each of our life stage ambitions to tackle underperformance at every phase of education across a diverse range of challenging places. We have committed an additional £72 million over three financial years to provide tailored interventions that aim to address stubborn local challenges and begin sustainable, long-term change.

Our commitment to spreading and identifying ‘what works’ sits at the very heart of the Opportunity Area programme. In each area we are prioritising proven approaches by working in close partnership with the EEF – which has designated a school in each area as an EEF Research School to spread the use and effective implementation of evidence-based approaches (see Ambition 2). And importantly, we are also using the programme to help build our evidence base further. We will identify approaches and lessons that can be spread much more widely by running evidence-led trials and also ensuring every Opportunity Area benefits from rigorously evaluated programmes, including the £22 million Essential Life Skills initiative (see Ambition 4).

The Opportunity Areas programme is also proof of our central commitment to partnership. We are using the convening power of government to bring together key local and national partners to develop one agreed, collectively owned delivery plan to transform outcomes – the first six of which have been published and we will publish the next six in January. We have established local partnership boards in each area to drive delivery of this plan, made up of local leaders from education, the voluntary sector, business and local government. They each have independent chairs and work locally with a designated Department for Education team. We have also forged partnerships with national organisations in every area, including CEC and the NCS. And through the programme we have partnered with national businesses to spread opportunity, contributing to our careers strategy and skills plans, with the support of the CBI and other employer groups.

The places in the first wave of the programme are diverse, including rural areas such as West Somerset, Fenland and East Cambridgeshire, historic market towns such as Norwich and Ipswich, coastal areas like Blackpool, Hastings and the North Yorkshire Coast, and post-industrial areas like Derby, Doncaster, Bradford, Oldham and Stoke-on-Trent. Across each of these places, our collaborative approach has helped to create a step change in the level of enthusiasm and support for our shared mission – by drawing on and empowering local leaders, local educators and local talent.

We want more areas that need it to benefit from this approach. So in the coming months we will bring forward plans for how we will go further and extend the impact of our Opportunity Areas to other parts of the country.

Conclusion

For the first time, we have a plan which puts improving social mobility at the heart of education policy, and brings together a coherent, concerted approach to begin to level up opportunity right across the education system. This plan is a call to arms to join our national mission to unlock talent and fulfil potential for all.

We have set out the ambitions which will guide our work, and enable us to direct our effort and resource towards the places and people that need it most. Firstly, there is the overarching ambition to prioritise parts of the country that need additional support, ensuring that no community is left behind. Then, there are the four life stage ambitions, where we set out how we will overcome challenges that can hold people back throughout their lives. And underpinning these ambitions, we are shifting our ways of working: identifying and spreading 'what works' by putting evidence at the heart of everything we do; and building lasting success through partnership to deliver real change on the ground.

This plan provides a framework that everyone – whether educators, government, business or civil society – can be empowered to support to help to transform equality of opportunity in this country. We will now use this framework to galvanise activity, helping to convene our key partners right across the country, and bringing together a united coalition to support change. We want to support our key agents for change: our teachers, our leaders, our social workers, and all our other education and care professionals. And to do so, we need everyone to step up and play their part in partnership – in particular, businesses large and small.

And we now need to make sure we deliver against this framework. We will manage rigorously against it, working with our partners to identify exactly how best to measure and drive progress in relation to each ambition. To support this, we will establish a national Social Mobility Partnership Board with external experts - including the new Chair of the Social Mobility Commission. The Board will provide robust challenge and advice as we deliver on our ambitions, including how we target resource and effort on 'what works', and where it is needed.

Crucially, this plan is only an important step in a long-term process to improve social mobility and spread equality of opportunity. It is intended to provide a platform for further action and to inject new urgency to our mission. This applies across government and the wide-ranging work by other Departments to level up opportunity, for example through the introduction of the National Living Wage, taking forward the Industrial Strategy to boost long-term national prosperity, and investing in affordable housing.

And it also applies to education. The actions brought together and set out here will need to be built on over time if we are to transform what is a generational challenge. Britain will only succeed if we unlock talent and fulfil potential for all, ensuring everyone has the chance to be the best version of themselves. To achieve this will take time, it will take an incredible amount of determination and focus, and it will take an unprecedented partnership. But, together, it is possible.

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³ Department for Education (2016) *National curriculum assessments: key stage 2: 2016 (revised)*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-curriculum-assessments-key-stage-2-2016-revised>

⁴ Figure refers to the projected lifetime productivity benefits of individuals achieving more GCSEs. Wider economic benefits such as positive health effects have not been monetised. For full methodology, please see: Department for Education (2017) *Economic Returns to GCSEs: Region and Disadvantage*. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/666899/Economic returns to GCSEs region and disadvantage.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/666899/Economic_returns_to_GCSEs_region_and_disadvantage.pdf)

⁵ Social Mobility Commission (2017) *Social Mobility, the Class Pay Gap and Intergenerational Worklessness: New Insights from The Labour Force Survey*. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/596945/The class pay gap and intergenerational worklessness.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/596945/The_class_pay_gap_and_intergenerational_worklessness.pdf)

⁶ Department for Education (2016) *National curriculum assessments: key stage 2, 2016 (revised)*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-curriculum-assessments-key-stage-2-2016-revised>
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⁸ Department for Education (2017) *Level 2 and 3 attainment in England: Attainment by age 19 in 2016*. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/603921/Tables 6 - 15_2017SFR_V2.xlsx](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/603921/Tables_6_-_15_2017SFR_V2.xlsx)

⁹ Department for Education (2017) *Participation in Education, Training and Employment by 16- to 18-year-olds in England: End 2016*. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/623310/SFR29_2017_Main_text.pdf

¹⁰ Department for Education (2016) *Putting Children First: Delivering our vision for excellent children's social care*. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/554573/Putting children first delivering vision excellent childrens social care.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/554573/Putting_children_first_delivering_vision_excellent_childrens_social_care.pdf)

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²⁰ Department for Education (2017) *Phonics screening check and key stage 1 assessments: England 2017*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/phonics-screening-check-and-key-stage-1-assessments-england-2017>

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³⁷ Matching the lower super output area based IDACI score to the Ofsted school level data (using the school location from edubase) we have identified the 50 most and 50 least deprived secondary schools based on their location. From this data we have calculated that 37.5% of pupils in the 50 most deprived secondary schools that have a valid Ofsted rating go to an inadequate or must improve secondary school compared to 3.9% in the 50 least deprived school areas. Sources: Ofsted (2017) *Maintained schools and academies and inspections and outcomes as at 31 August 2017*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/maintained-schools-and-academies-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-august-2017>; Department for Communities and Local Government (2015) *English indices of deprivation 2015*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015>.

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