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Speech

Baroness Morgan's speech: how we can be the greatest place in the world to grow up

It was delivered at the BackYouth summit on 30 January 2020

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From: [Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport](#) and [The Rt Hon Baroness Nicky Morgan](#)

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Good morning everyone.

It is wonderful to be here with you all and I'm looking forward to hearing more about the great work you're doing to support our young people.

Nelson Mandela once said "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children."

And so one of the best ways to show our commitment to being a truly meritocratic society, and a one nation Government, is through the opportunities that we give to our young people.

That is why our manifesto contains so many commitments to help them prosper.

So as well as being the greatest place in the world to live, to own a home and to start a business...

We can also be the greatest place in the world to grow up.

That is our goal. DCMS is the department responsible for Government policy on young people outside school.

And today I wanted to set out the three principles that will drive my department's work in this policy area.

Levelling up

The first is that action to help young people can play a central part in this Government's agenda to transform communities who feel they have not seen the benefits of change in recent years.

As the Prime Minister has said, talent and genius are uniformly distributed throughout the country. And yet opportunity is not.

And that applies to our young people too.

Children from the poorest backgrounds are three times more likely to not take part in extra-curricular activities compared to those from the wealthiest backgrounds.

The most important duty of any Government is to create the conditions where everyone has the chance to fulfil their potential and succeed in life.

The youth agenda cannot be just about keeping young people out of trouble and away from harm. I do not see young people as a 'problem' to be 'solved'.

As the sentence in your letter said "we believe that if young people succeed, then our country succeeds". I agree.

I see young people as a positive force that we can unleash, through giving them the opportunities they need and want, so we can drive Britain forward.

There is nothing as inspiring as seeing young people getting stuck into something they really care about.

When I think about what gave me the skills I needed to stand as an MP - the confidence, the determination and the self-belief...

They were developed through having the opportunity to follow my passions.

By taking part in debating and public speaking competitions but also because I had a father who, because of his involvement in politics, was able to encourage me to get involved too.

And so I want everyone to have the same chance to develop and thrive through finding activities that they love, and to work with adults who believe in them.

Young people who take part in youth clubs at the age of 11 are around 40 per cent more likely to be happy two years later than those who have not.

And for areas in need of support and investment, a focus on young people can have transformative results.

I am proud that we continue to offer every young person across the country a place on the National Citizen Service programme.

And I am excited about our 500 million pound Youth Investment Fund, which is based on three key principles:

Offering somewhere safe to go.

Giving something to do.

And providing someone to talk to.

But this is just one step in a long-term plan.

This year we are working with colleagues across Government, and with young people, to build a bold and ambitious youth offer.

Working with the Home Office, we want to keep addressing serious youth violence and invest in the youth services sector.

And with the Department of Health and Social Care, we want to transform mental health support for children and young people through the NHS Long Term Plan - backed by an extra 2.3 billion pounds a year for mental health by 2023/24.

We are also working with the Department for Education to ensure all children have access to the arts and also high quality sport and PE, via cross-government projects like the School Sport and Activity Action Plan.

This is just the start of a big programme of investment and opportunity, that will offer greater opportunities and brighter futures to our next generation.

Community based approach

As we make this investment, we need to think carefully about how, and where, we can make the most effective change.

And this brings me onto my second point, the need for a community based approach.

Young people are spending increasing amounts of their time as part of online communities, and there are many benefits to this.

But although they are the most connected generation, they are in many ways the most isolated, experiencing the highest rate of loneliness of any age group.

So we, and they, need strong local communities, so we can forge the links that are vital in helping young people to feel a sense of belonging and place.

And my department has the important responsibility of supporting the sectors that are fundamental to creating vibrant communities where people - young and old - want to live, work and visit.

We help support these sectors and their work for young people through our arm's length bodies, who have broad networks and deep roots into nearly every community in England.

We want to build on these organisations' excellent work for young people, and take further advantage of their local expertise and networks.

So we can give young people a full range of opportunities, and connect them with the areas where they spend most of their time.

Rather than restricting provision to certain groups of young people, we must focus on the areas that need it most and look at solutions within the community.

Our Youth Accelerator Fund, supported by 7 million pounds of Government funding, is an immediate example of this.

Over 4.5 million pounds of direct grants have been awarded to programmes which deliver positive activities for young people.

Today, I am thrilled to announce that UK Youth will distribute over one million pounds of this funding, to deliver extra sessions in local youth clubs and youth groups across England.

And we are boosting successful DCMS ALB programmes in sport, the arts, film and heritage to deliver a diverse range of positive activities for young people.

We are also allocating 2.25 million pounds as part of the Youth Accelerator Fund to pilot a place based approach to local youth provision.

This will involve funding new Local Partnerships to bring together existing providers, statutory partners and the private sector.

To create an understandable and accessible local youth offer, especially for those who would otherwise find it difficult to access those opportunities.

We want these to be true partnerships, with the backing of the private sector and civil society, and shaped by the needs and aspirations of young people.

And of course local authorities play a crucial part in this too.

It is clear however that the majority of young people, and those who work with them value the role that local authorities play in youth provision. And so do I.

But not enough local authorities, in my view, go that extra mile to engage communities, business and young people in the design, delivery and funding of these services.

We have been reviewing the guidance on the statutory duty for local authorities to provide services and programmes for young people.

Our consultation ended last month and got a huge response not least from many in this room but also from a great many young people. Thank

you to all of you who responded.

We are still analysing that feedback and the Department will issue a response later this year.

Involving young people

And young people's voices will be heard as we develop this policy, and indeed all of our policies.

So my third point is that we must have a shared vision, and one that is developed together with young people across the country.

This generation, more than any that has come before it, has used the force of new technologies to build relationships, both within their communities and beyond.

And it has been really inspiring to me to see how they have used this transforming power to make their voices heard on the issues they care about, like climate change.

Young people, more than ever, have been organising in their communities, leading marches, and even appearing on the front cover of TIME magazine.

And so it'd be patronising to insist that young people must look to central Government to create all of their opportunities.

We can have the greatest impact if we give young people the tools needed to lead change at a local level.

And if we design programmes according to the needs and wishes of young people, then there is a far better chance they will reflect the issues that are important to young people in their communities.

Leadership opportunities like these are fundamental in building character, a whole set of things that I care about deeply.

In fact I care about it so much that I wrote a book about it. You can buy it for three pounds on eBay...

If we can promote the attributes that enhance us as people; persistence, the ability to work with others and resilience, then young people will benefit, and we will too.

I was in Wakefield last week and I saw how their youth services have built this into their measurement framework.

So young people feel they have the skills and confidence they need to play active roles in their communities.

As part of this work, Defra has been demonstrating how it is possible to bring the voice of young people into the heart of Whitehall policy making.

They have been asking young people to conduct formal reviews of policy and to put forward their views to improve it.

And at DCMS, we are piloting three new youth projects, to put young people at the heart of the conversations that impact them.

One of these is the Youth Steering Group, which was formed to get young people's voices heard in central government.

I joined one of their online meetings last week and I was thrilled by their energy, and I was inspired by their knowledge and passion for the issues they care about.

This ethos of empowering young people is at the heart of our "I will" fund, a 40 million pound joint investment between DCMS and the National Lottery Community Fund.

In partnerships with 25 match funders, the Fund has created a combined investment of 73.5 million pounds.

It will reach over 500,000 young people over the lifetime of the Fund, to take action on issues that affect their community.

In October we announced that we would increase the funding for the iwill Fund for a year, investing an additional 5 million pounds.

And today I can announce that this will be matched by an additional 5 million pounds by the National Lottery Community Fund, taking the joint investment to 50 million pounds.

This youth voice work is so important and I know there are some brilliant examples in this room, like the Guides' Future Girl Manifesto and the Scouts' Million Hands social action project.

It is also great to be joined today by Saeed and Gabrielle today - two 'i will' ambassadors.

They, along with 300 other ambassadors are doing amazing work through their commitment to helping others.

It is Saeed's and Gabrielle's generation that will carry the torch and take forward our work in these areas.

So let's help them all to get their voice heard.

And make sure they are in the room and an active part of the conversation when decisions that impact them are made.

Conclusion

I see these three areas as vital if we are to unleash the potential of our nation's young people.

And we are well placed to play our part in this mission at DCMS.

Not just through our youth programmes but through all the diverse and incredible areas that make up our department.

The music, the sport, the arts, and the technology, that are able to inspire and transform our young people.

Our continued success and prosperity as a nation rests on the shoulders of this next generation, a generation which inspires me every single day.

So let's give them the best chances in life. No matter where they come from, and no matter what path they wish to follow.

Thank you very much.

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