

**DCSF Conference: Social Mobility Imperative**  
**Kingsford School, 22 January 2010**

Let me bid everyone a very warm welcome to the London Borough of Newham – home of West Ham Football Club, London City Airport – these days of the Boat Show up the road at the Excel Centre and of London’s emerging Olympic Stadium.

And let me thank Joan, our host today, and Richard Cairns of Brighton College. The creative and generous partnership between Brighton College and Kingsford Community School is of course at the heart of this event, and it illuminates exactly the kind of initiative we need to unleash aspiration and to secure what Alan Milburn, the author of the recent Government report, described as a “*great wave of social mobility*”.

Social mobility is, at heart, an economic issue. We benefit economically from having a workforce where those with power, or in the top professions, deserve to be there. Social mobility will give us a society which is better for everybody, not just for those who end up at the top of it. As we pull out of the global economic downturn, we need to make best use of the abilities of all of our citizens.

I've lived in Newham for thirty years. It is full of lively, smart, talented people. In the past few years, we've seen schools like Kingsford rising to the challenge of enabling more of them to reach their potential. We have seen that across inner city London. Nationally we have seen a 7% drop in the gap in higher education participation between those from the lowest income backgrounds and those from the highest. That is welcome progress.

Alan Milburn wrote that "*it is the aspiration that people have to better themselves that drives social progress*". This is an area where – certainly since the Second World War – people have equated bettering themselves with moving out – usually to the east. Thousands of people descend on Upton Park from Barking and Romford and Basildon and Southend when West Ham play at home. One for me very heartening change since Tony Blair's triumph in Singapore five years ago, and the choice of London for the Olympics, is the change in how young people think about the area.

People were used to thinking about this as the poor part of London. But now it turns out that – in two years time – the whole world will be coming here. The world's most exciting

events will be taking place here. And I think that is having a big impact on the aspirations of young people in the area.

We are a diverse borough, often described – and probably accurately – as the most ethnically diverse community on the planet. But, with the youthful exuberance which I expect us to get a taste of today, we work as a community. That was what the bid team managed successfully to convey to the International Olympic Committee in Singapore – taking several dozen young people from East London to Singapore to show what our community is really like. And for this community, it's vital that we succeed in promoting mobility, raising aspiration, and ensuring fair access to jobs and to opportunities.

I am proud of this community. But we have a great deal to do. Initiatives like the Hundred Club, that promote sharing of knowledge and networks, reflect the kind of unselfish responsibility that we need. The result will be a stronger society that can make the most of the new opportunities ahead – in the digital transformation where I have a ministerial responsibility; in the deployment of green technologies. And we'll have a workforce that isn't held back by limitations of birth or background.

I am delighted to be able to introduce a video message this morning from the Prime Minister. He strongly supports the ambition which this conference reflects. He made a major speech on Saturday to the Fabian Society arguing that the defining mission of his party and mine in the coming decade should be to unleash a wave of social mobility. The Government then announced on Monday the decision to implement nearly all of the recommendations in Alan Milburn's report – including for example a National Internship Service to help young people without top level connections to get the kind of working experience which can allow those who want to take up a professional career; and a report to be published annually on progress with social mobility.

We have a very good day ahead to look forward to, and now here is the Prime Minister.

Thank you.