

Jane Boardman Presidential Speech – Annual Dinner May 2018

Good evening, I hope you are enjoying your evening so far at the 2018 Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce annual business dinner.

As President of this Chamber, it's fantastic to see such a terrific cross section of Greater Manchester's business community here this evening. This clearly shows the unique reach and depth of our Chamber network.

I am immensely proud to represent our Members, and for me, this Chamber epitomises the heart and soul of what a Chamber of Commerce - and indeed what a modern business - should be all about, and not just at a local level, here in the heart of one of the UK's most dynamic economies, but at a national and international level too – something recognised last year when we won, for the first time ever, the Chamber of the Year award and more recently were recognised as being IIP Gold standard.

In my various roles, I often talk to employers about the skills that businesses need. And being a Mum to 2 young children, I am also aware of the need for excellent careers advice and guidance, that helps young people make the right decisions, which result in the right career choices.

Those that know me will know that I am a huge Liverpool fan. And whilst, as a former Manchester City player, I have full respect for City's achievements in the league this year, in the Champions League the Liverpool team has shown, in my view, what it is possible to achieve with a blend of skills, hard work, and strong leadership. And of course a bit of luck along the way doesn't hurt. But what I'm trying to say is, it is a combination of factors that come together to maximise potential. Skills, endeavour, the right opportunities and clear guidance are the things that need to come together to ensure our young people succeed. And like – hopefully – Liverpool in 9 days' time – these are the things that will secure the UK's success on the global stage, and in turn secure the future growth and productivity of our local economy here in Greater Manchester.

This Chamber prides itself on being the champion for business in GM, campaigning relentlessly for things that you need, creating a business-friendly environment that is the bedrock of our economic prosperity. It's my job as President to represent your views fairly and passionately.

In talking to my Clients and to Chamber Members, I've learnt that, like me, you are concerned about how unprepared young people are when entering the world of work. We see these 'oven ready' young people, products of the education system with fantastic grades but who are poorly equipped for the workplace. We also see bright young people who have average grades and the aspiration and motivation to achieve more but no idea where to start. And then we see those that have no working role models, no grades, and frankly right now, no hope of changing their situation. We need mechanisms to help all of these people achieve their potential, whatever their background and wherever in Greater Manchester they are from.

You have told me you support and encourage the need for better links between schools and business. Let's be honest, we've been going on about this for several years, and we have to ask ourselves, what progress have we made? Education seems to be more and more about assessments and league tables rather than skills, and we've managed to rip the heart and soul out of career guidance. In times when our schools are facing severe budget cuts and are tasked with delivering one of the broadest curriculums, within the framework of one of the most rigorous inspection regimes in Europe, we need to improve our ability to work together with schools to develop a more effective education system for our young people.

Our colleges and training providers have the enormous task of using around 50% of their budgets to help correct the Maths and English problems emanating from many of our schools. There are large numbers of young people not getting the right support, right at the very start of their careers. And at the other end of the spectrum, people are working longer as the retirement age rises, which results in fewer and fewer openings for young people and graduates.

We are in the midst of the biggest set of political reforms affecting the skills system that the UK has ever faced. With 29 major skills reforms in the last 30 years, 6 Skills Ministers in the last decade alone and countless government departments with responsibility for the administration and implementation of these reforms, the system is incoherent and often ineffective.

So, hopefully we all agree that there is a very pressing and urgent need for public and private investment, to ensure we have the right people, with the right skills, to do the jobs we need.

What is certain is that we are now at a crossroads for skills and employment, both in Greater Manchester and nationally. Business is used to operating in a landscape that is often confusing. Schools, Colleges, Training Providers and Universities are constantly having to adapt and change their strategies to deliver the endless changes set out by

government. In the last survey sent out by the British Chambers of Commerce, nearly half of employers reported skills or labour shortages in the last 12 months, with 1 in 2 employers recruiting by word of mouth.

I'm an accountant, so forgive me but I'm going to share some numbers with you now, because numbers (when delivered by an auditor 😊) don't lie.

Our current government's apprenticeship target of 3 million apprenticeship starts is looking more likely to be 1.7 million, achieving only 53% of what it set out to do.

A year after the implementation of the apprenticeship levy, £1.4 billion has been paid by businesses in tax, but only £108m spent on apprenticeship training to date. Nearly a quarter of levy payers have told us they don't understand what the apprenticeship levy is all about. And 15% don't expect to spend any of the funds they have paid into the system.

The catastrophic dip in apprenticeship starts and the huge levy underspend has damaged apprenticeships. They are becoming devalued as a viable route to quality employment, not just in the minds of our young people, but also in the minds of parents and business leaders. This lose, lose, lose result is another example where well-meant policy is badly implemented and causes huge disruption.

The real question we need to ask ourselves now is: what do we want apprenticeships to be? Are they a vehicle to upskill our existing workforce, at any age, at any level? Or are they by their very definition: a way of training a new generation of young people, providing them with a trade or profession?

In Greater Manchester alone, we have around 15,000 young people (aged 16-24) who are who are not in education, employment or training. They are not receiving any welfare support. We also have some 16/17 year olds who cannot afford to travel to access education, employment and training opportunities. Subsidised travel for 16/17 year olds is absolutely the right thing to do, but we have to work together to find a solution for how this can work in practice and how it is paid for.

You've heard from Andy Burnham, earlier this evening, about his vision and ambitions for Greater Manchester. We continue to work closely with the Mayor to help shape a realistic and achievable 'Good Employer Charter' for GM, across an incredibly complex range of issues. One of these, which we fully support, is Andy's vision of a UCAS style system. Through this system, young people, from the age of 15, will apply for education, training and apprenticeship opportunities.

Clearly, this is a good idea. As employers, we need to be involved in the design and delivery of careers advice, employability training, and quality work experience for our young people. Giving a young person a clear progression route for their career is essential. And providing them with a system to help them achieve their potential is critical. Our focus must be on getting the policies right to support this system, not on the politics which surround it.

All of this requires your help and input. This evening, I am pleased to launch our 'Future of Skills 2028' campaign, the focus of which will be to work with you to establish the skills that are needed to drive Greater Manchester businesses in the next decade. On Monday, we will launch our latest Quarterly Economic Survey, which will focus on these key questions and help set the starting point for what we believe is the most ambitious attempt yet to finally tackle one of the biggest recurring issues for business.

By working collaboratively, we want to create a system in Greater Manchester that helps businesses to define and access the skills they require in a simple and transparent manner. Attracting young people to good careers, with pay progression and top class training is absolutely where the future of skills must sit. These things are never easy, but as Mr Manchester, Tony Wilson, once said – "This is Manchester. We do things differently.". We must deliver the step changes that industry needs to drive productivity, and that our young people need to improve their life chances.

Thank-you all for coming along this evening and for listening. Enjoy the occasion and I hope to see you all on the dancefloor later. Thank-you.

PAUSE & APPLAUSE

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And now we move on to a brilliant example of how an employer in Greater Manchester has gone above and beyond to support young people aged 18-24. For the first time ever, we are proud to present the first Greater Manchester Talent Match Employer Award, as voted for by the Youth Panel and Talent Match Coaches.

Greater Manchester Talent Match is a Big Lottery-funded programme led by Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisations. This important programme helps young people who have not been in education, training or employment for over 12 months, by sourcing opportunities to support them on their pathway to work.

Without further ado, I am extremely pleased to announce that the winner of the 2018 Greater Manchester Talent Match Employer Award is Window Creations Ltd from Salford. If I can please welcome to the stage Jonathan Mills, from Window Creations to accept the award.

PAUSE & APPLAUSE (ANDREW HANDS EMPLOYER AWARDS TO WINDOW CREATIONS, JANE SHAKES HANDS/PAUSE FOR PHOTOS.

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JANE AND EMPLOYER LEAVES STAGE. Andrew to continue agenda.