Upwardly Mobile

Recipes For Opportunity For Everyone
The One-Nation Group of Conservative MPs

As One Nation Conservatives, we are united by our belief in the following values:

The United Kingdom
We believe in the United Kingdom as the embodiment of our shared values and as a force for good in defending our values in the world: we are patriotic Conservatives who reject narrow nationalism.

Active Global Leadership
We believe the UK must be a leader on the world stage through our aid, trade and security commitments to tackle global challenges as a global citizen, through a strong defence and soft power commitment.

Life Chances
We believe that everyone in our country – whoever and wherever they are from – has an equal right to a fair chance in life, and that bold reforms to welfare and vocational skills are central to tackling social injustice and creating an opportunity society.

Social Responsibility
We believe in a strong society, and a social contract between all of us as fellow citizens, supported in our tax and welfare system.

Public Services
We believe in our public services, properly funded by a growing economy, as fundamental to the wellbeing of our nation, in a mixed economy of public, private and third sector providers.

Localism
We believe in the importance of place and Conservatives supporting the local, civic and voluntary over the bureaucratic, statist and compulsory.

Environmental Stewardship
We believe that we all have a responsibly to act as stewards of our local and global environment, for the next generation, and a duty to show global leadership on climate change and biodiversity.

Markets and Values
We believe in free enterprise, business and the market economy with a framework of good regulation to enhance competition, support innovation, break monopolies, empower citizens and reflect our shared values.

Law and Human Rights
We believe in universal human rights and the rule of law and are proud of our country and Party’s record in promoting them through an independent judiciary, effective enforcement, community policing and policies to prevent crime and social breakdown.

Democratic Renewal
We believe that civilised, open respectful political debate in our Party, Parliament and free press, and a vibrant arts and cultural sector is fundamental to strengthening the health of our society and democracy.
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Chapter 1:

Summary
Summary

1. Levelling Up: A Big-Hearted Creed

Two Political Mistakes
When politicians talk about opportunity, life chances and how to escape poverty, they tend to make two particularly well-worn assumptions.

The first is that the best route to success is middle class white collar professional work; an office job that doesn’t involve overalls, oily rags or heavy lifting. Something like law, accountancy, teaching or IT.

It’s not a stupid assumption either; these are all well-paid, high-skill jobs which have international scope, open doors to huge networks of helpful contacts, and offer clear, well-understood career paths as well. But it leads most politicians, whether they are from the political left or right, to focus heavily on improving access to good academic teaching and qualifications at schools and universities, and less on the dozens of other routes to success in modern Britain.

The second presumption is that there’s a finite amount of opportunity, so that someone who starts with more must give up something for everyone else to succeed. It’s a zero-sum view of the world; the sense that what’s holding you or me back is obstruction by other people who don’t want to be leapfrogged on the ladder of life. This ‘opportunity hoarding’ is emotionally comforting because it gives us people to blame if we aren’t happy with the way our lives are turning out, but is the precise opposite of what both One-Nation Conservatism and ‘Levelling Up’ is all about.

Opportunity Should Be Infinite
We believe that opportunity is – or can and should be – unlimited, providing we organise ourselves properly. The answer to the advantages and better life-chances of one person’s excellent education isn’t to destroy the good school they went to, but to make every other school as good as theirs, or better. And the answer to spiralling house prices and generation rent isn’t to demonise private landlords, but to build lots more homes (in the right places) so everybody can afford to buy one if they want.

In other words, levelling up is generous, big hearted and open-handed. That’s why I’m really excited by the breadth of ideas in this collection of policy proposals. Of course education – particularly in academic subjects – matters hugely, but these ideas range far more widely than that. They acknowledge that, for many people, being good at academic exams isn’t the best or only route to happiness and success, and that other things matter too.

Character & Community
Like what? Well, let’s start with character traits and community attitudes towards people who are ambitious; do their families and friends build them up, or cut them down? And do they instil emotional resilience and encourage people to bounce back from failure, or tell them they shouldn’t have tried in the first place? How do we instil those attitudes in communities and families where they haven’t been strong for generations?
Then there’s independence and self-reliance. Whether it’s running your own business or owning your own home, having control over more parts of our lives makes us feel happier, more secure and more fulfilled than depending on the good opinion of a landlord, a boss or a bureaucrat. So what will help more people take the first steps towards either or both of these things?

Confront The Tough Questions
Some of the things that matter most are difficult to discuss, because they ask hard questions that it would be easy to shy away from. Like why some places, or social classes, or races, are more or less successful than others in modern Britain? What is the secret sauce which makes London and the south-east so much more productive than almost every other part of Britain, and how do we apply it everywhere else as well? And, equally, why do so many Chinese and Indian children do so much better at school than their black, Bangladeshi or white working class male classmates, and how can we close the gaps?

The Squeezed Middle
And then there’s the ‘squeezed middle’. The middle-income, middle-class, mid-career families who will inevitably end up shoudering most of the costs of the covid-19 pandemic. Not because it’s their fault, or because they have the broadest shoulders, but because it happened on their watch. So the extra taxes to repay the – truly enormous – costs of protecting their grandparents from infection, and helping their children make up lost time on interrupted schooling, or the cuts to public services if taxes don’t increase, will inevitably fall mainly to them.

That isn’t fair or right, but it is happening nonetheless. So how do we help? How can we make things like housing more affordable, or retrain people with higher skills in mid-career, so they can earn more in a more productive economy and avoid a lifetime of grindingly high taxes or eroded public services instead?

These essays don’t pretend to provide all the answers – they aren’t a complete or rounded election manifesto – but they offer some thought-provoking ideas about how this One-Nation Conservative government should set about ‘Levelling Up’. They point towards a post-Covid and post-Brexit Britain that is hopeful, optimistic, energetic and positive: where people can succeed no matter where they started from, or who their parents were. Where your success doesn’t come at the expense of mine, so I can be generous and take pleasure in celebrating your achievements, rather than living a pinched or jealous life because you have something I don’t.

A happier, fairer, country, in other words. If you’re at all interested in how we could create it, then I hope you will read on........

John Penrose MP
Editor
1.2 Recommendations

Self-Employment – Stephen Crabb MP
1) Expand the New Enterprise Allowance scheme, to give more people who are unemployed because of coronavirus a chance to launch their own businesses.
2) Consolidate other new business schemes based on their track records and results, to provide targeted help for parts of the country with lower rates of new business start-ups (particularly outside London and the south-east) and for communities and groups with lower rates (eg young people, ex-offenders or those with disabilities) too.
3) Introduce a new Employment Bill to protect agency and ‘umbrella company’ staff in low-paid and insecure work from being exploited.

Home Ownership – Anthony Brown MP
1) Reform stamp duty, so owner-occupiers pay lower rates than landlords or second homeowners.
2) Make shared ownership schemes less bureaucratic and more flexible, so owners can increase their ownership share faster, with lower fees, and sell to new owners or investors more easily too.
3) Protect homebuyers from being ripped off by enforcing professional rules for estate agents properly.
4) Make the interim New Homes Ombudsman permanent, to protect people buying newly-built homes.
5) Abolish leaseholds

Why do some people get on, but their equally-able neighbours don’t? – Katherine Fletcher MP, Peter Gibson MP, Paul Howell MP
1) Create local networks of business ambassadors to mentor entrepreneurs.
2) Establish a sabbatical programme for teachers to spend time in business and enterprise.
3) Expand the New Enterprise Allowance scheme so people without access to private wealth can get started.
4) Create new community alumni schemes, where successful local people return to their home towns to take part in events showing what local people could achieve
5) Create new community identity schemes, so each town or area has its own coordinated slogan to define and instil local pride and belief (for example, “Made in Wythenshawe”)
6) Careers service revolution so every child has long-term, direct access (via social media) to careers advisors, and to panels of local post holders to ask questions as career plans evolve.
7) A national campaign for ambitious careers, for example “What do you want to be? You can…..”
8) Update NCS and Duke of Edinburgh Schemes to instil enterprise and entrepreneurship in young people as well as self-reliance and citizenship.
9) Create new entrepreneurship schemes to offer over-16s support, expertise, oversight and monitoring on starting their own firms, as an equal alternative route to existing education and training schemes.

Opportunity for BAME Youth Post Covid-19 – Felicity Buchan MP
1) Provide urgent, targeted catch-up schooling for specific BAME groups most affected by Covid-19 school closures, particularly those where English is not their first language.
2) Ask arts & cultural sectors to help level up extracurricular opportunities for low income BAME families, because university entrance and later career opportunities aren’t judged on exam grades alone.

3) Ask local and national charities and institutions to help level up BAME alumni and mentoring networks, particularly for the most left-behind groups like Muslim women, so the next generation can be supported and inspired when they see what is possible.

The Overlooked Underachievers – Rt Hon Sir David Evennett MP
1) Recruit more men into teaching, and establish better pathways for mid-career switching into teaching from other sectors, to broaden the profession’s contact with, and understanding of, other careers and opportunities.

2) Work with local businesses to establish local career mentoring schemes and to improve the teaching profession’s understanding of local career opportunities.

3) Identify and organize successful former students as role models so white working class boys can see what could be possible for them as well.

4) Allow more flexibility beyond the basic curriculum, so local schools can tailor lessons to have more relevance to their pupils’ future life chances

Rural Opportunity – John Lamont MP
1) Roll out proven schemes like Transport to Employment (T2E) or Wheels to Work (W2W) across rural Britain, to create a new inter-urban public transport network with links to local walking, cycling, taxi services and other transport options

2) Use more ‘non-standard’ approach like community-led schemes, satellite broadband and future 5G licensing spectrum sales to ‘level up’ rural broadband coverage and speed to match urban performance.

A Fair Recovery For Young & Old? – Chloe Smith MP
1. Help young learners get back to their school, college or university as quickly as possible by: implementing the safety guidelines to minimise risk for students and staff; with contingency plans for any local lockdowns.

2. Use the Covid Catch-up Fund to help disadvantaged students catch up lost learning time by using proven schemes like Opportunity Areas (such as the one in Norwich).

3. Ensure qualifications are not undermined, by using each student’s prior work to justify and prove their grades, so universities, colleges and employers have confidence that this summer’s grades have the same status as before.

4. Return the public finances to stability by confirming a ‘sound money’ set of fiscal rules quickly, and then justifying them to the electorate so there is a democratic consensus to underpin them when economic or political pressures are high.

5. Use the Prime Minister’s Opportunity Guarantee to back young people’s chances of jobs by implementing the July Plan for Jobs quickly, and using local recovery plans (like the successful Norwich For Jobs project) so public, private and community partners work together to deliver it.

6. Build more homes, to boost the economy and back the dreams of the young for affording a home of their own, by implementing the recently-announced post-covid homes programmes rapidly.
Power To The Pupils – John Penrose MP

1) Give ‘power to the pupils’ by publishing employment rates and average salaries for every course from every university and college every year, so pupils can see which HE and FE courses lead to the best jobs, and choose where to apply based on accurate, up to date information instead of hearsay or snobbery.

2) As pupils start making well-informed choices about where and what to study, allow popular courses to grow, and unpopular ones to change or close. If this provokes students to switch from higher-cost HE to lower-cost FE courses, reinvest the savings in scholarships for students from less well-off families, or in grants for older career-switchers.

3) Require universities to make degree qualifications worth the same in each subject, like medicine does already, no matter which institution is teaching the pupils. Publish the average A level grades of arriving students, and the average degree grade they’ve achieved as they leave, for every course from every institution every year, so it is clear where students are learning most, no matter what level they started from.
Chapter 2:

Every Person – Ambition & Self Reliance
2.1 Can self-employment provide a route out of poverty?

Stephen Crabb is MP for Preseli Pembrokeshire. He was raised on a council estate and attended the local state school. He is the former Secretary of State for Wales and former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

The Self-Employed: More Numerous & More Varied

With the UK now facing a sharp and sustained increase in unemployment, expanding opportunities among disadvantaged communities for self-employment and entrepreneurship becomes even more important. As both the party of enterprise and of working people, Conservatives have a special responsibility for defending the status of the self-employed and for improving conditions and outcomes for those self-employed on low incomes.

For generations, social mobility has been supported by the growth of better paying jobs and career paths in the economy - crudely, ‘middle class’ jobs. But, as companies restructure in response to COVID-19 and the disruptive forces of AI, there is no guarantee we will see the economy creating anything like the number of skilled and managerial jobs it once did.

One of the defining features of the remarkable performance of the UK labour market between 2010 and the onset of COVID-19 was the growth in self-employment. The UK now has more than 5 million self-employed, around 15% of the workforce. This growth was fuelled in part by the proliferation of tech platforms aggregating individual suppliers in the service economy and matching them to work in response to consumer demand signals - the rise of the so-called gig economy of Uber, Deliveroo and many more.

But the multifarious ranks of the new self-employed also included freelancers and contractors in the creative industries, IT, finance and in many skilled roles. When we talk of the self-employed today, we are talking about sound engineers, interior designers, video game programmers, beauticians, fitness instructors, child minders, dog groomers as well as workers in the traditional ‘white van’ trades.

Mixed Messages

As part of their efforts to deny and downplay the jobs recovery after 2010, the Left sought to caricature the increase in self-employment as a return to Dickensian work practices. They refused to believe that the majority of self-employed could be making a positive choice based on freedom, flexibility and a spirit of entrepreneurship.

In contrast, Conservatives have pitched strongly to the self-employed in recent elections, especially those working in what were once regarded as ‘blue collar’ roles.

Unfortunately we have also been guilty of sending out mixed signals: the offensive suggestion in 2012 that the use of cash payments is immoral; the clumsy approach in the 2017 Budget to increasing NICs; and most recently the decision to deny COVID-19 assistance to the self-employed who draw their income through dividends.
The common theme in all these was the in-house view of HM Treasury that self-employment almost always involves lost tax revenue and exists far too much in the shadows. Rather than simply become a mouthpiece for this view, Conservatives should defend the status of self-employment as a legitimate choice in a diverse and flexible labour market.

Furthermore, to try to maintain overall employment levels during a period when companies are shedding workers, we should strengthen the incentives and support available to become self-employed.

A Good Model: The New Enterprise Allowance

In 2011, as part of the Coalition government’s package of post-crash employment and welfare reforms, we launched the New Enterprise Allowance (NEA) to provide unemployed people with financial and practical support to become their own boss. The NEA proved popular especially among disadvantaged groups.

Although still in operation ten years on, new starts have declined steadily as the numbers of those requiring Job Centre assistance have fallen overall. But with the sudden turnaround in the labour market, it is likely we will need to support many more people into self-employment in the months and years ahead. The NEA provides a good model to build on.

Even more tailored support should be developed for specific groups facing significant barriers into self-employment – included young people, workers with disabilities and ex-offenders. Numerous self-employment and entrepreneurship programmes have been launched by government and the voluntary sector over the years. If data has been collected and monitored, there should now be a body of evidence pointing to what works and what doesn’t.

This has a regional dimension too, which our levelling-up mission should recognise. There are significant disparities between the regions in terms of self-employment rates, earnings and the skills levels of those moving into self-employment. A strategy for supporting self-employment in London and the South East, for example, will look quite different from what is required in the North West.

The Achilles Heel: In-Work Poverty

It is not enough to talk-up self-employment and provide a helping hand to those starting out. Conservatives should champion fair incomes for the self-employed every bit as much as we do for those who are employed on low wages. In-work poverty has been the Achilles’ Heel of our message on employment in recent years. The tight labour market did not deliver the wage increases we would expect and, while the Living Wage has been a crucial intervention for those in low paying jobs, the self-employed are not protected by any similar statutory floor.

Almost half of all self-employed are estimated to be earning less than the minimum wage. That should trouble Conservatives. Self-employment has given many people a route out of poverty and a pathway to social mobility. But too many others have yet to see any improvement in their circumstances.

The need to provide urgent financial support to households affected by the pandemic has shone a revealing spotlight on the sheer diversity of Britain’s labour market and the disparities in pay and protection available to different types of worker.
The Government pulled off a herculean task in getting the support schemes off the ground so quickly and deserves enormous credit for the way it has adapted the schemes in response to a clearer understanding of the needs of different workers including the self-employed. One of the legacies of this crisis, however, must be a renewed effort to improve working conditions for Britain’s self-employed.

There is unfinished business with the Good Work Plan initiated by the Theresa May government. Some Conservatives remain distinctly uncomfortable with the regulatory instinct behind it, but this has the potential to become a litmus test of our commitment to fairness in the workplace. The forthcoming Employment Bill will be an important opportunity for us to demonstrate our support for all workers including the self-employed.

Self-employment is the wellspring of Britain’s enterprise culture and the most dynamic part of our labour market. We need it to remain so as the economy enters this new and far more challenging phase.

**Summary of Recommendations**

1) **Expand the New Enterprise Allowance scheme**, to give more people who are unemployed because of coronavirus a chance to launch their own businesses.

2) **Consolidate other new business schemes** based on their track records and results, to provide targeted help for parts of the country with lower rates of new business start-ups (particularly outside London and the south-east) and for communities and groups with lower rates (eg young people, ex-offenders or those with disabilities) too.

3) **Introduce a new Employment Bill** to protect agency and ‘umbrella company’ staff in low-paid and insecure work from being exploited.
2.1 Home ownership as an engine of opportunity

Anthony Browne is MP for South Cambridgeshire. He was state educated before studying mathematics at Cambridge University. He was previously a journalist, having worked for the BBC, The Observer and The Times.

Homeowning: Not Just For An Elite
The British are famously attached to their homes – and they want to own where they live. We jest that an “Englishman’s home is his castle”, while being a “homeowner” is seen as an unquestionably worthy status in the media. In decades of opinions shifting around on most issues, one of the few constants has been that the overwhelming majority of British people want to own their own home. The British Social Attitudes Survey puts it at around 85% of adults want to own the roof over their head, with a clear majority in every age group and social background. Even the majority of those who rent social housing would prefer to own their home – for them, social housing is not their first choice. For young people, buying their first home is one of the biggest steps to adulthood. For the socially aspirational, buying your own home is often seen as the biggest proof that they have “made it.” It gives people a stake in society and a stake in the future. Social mobility and homeownership are deeply intertwined. Homeownership cannot be the preserve of the middle classes and professionals, but should be achievable by people from all backgrounds, including manual workers, unskilled workers, key workers and employees across the public sector.

There are very good emotional, financial and social reasons for people wanting to be owners rather than renters. Owning your own home enables you to turn your domestic wishes into reality - those who own their own homes are far happier with them than those who rent. It gives freedom from the whims of landlords, both private and public sector. It makes you independent rather than dependent, instilling a sense of self-worth. It provides a much more secure environment, making it easier to raise a family confident in the knowledge you can plan and provide for the long term. It also reduces poverty and increases security in old age, with a usually appreciating asset giving a more solid financial basis for retirement than a working life paying someone else’s mortgage.

It was only in the 20th century that the UK became a nation of homeowners. In 1900, it was the privilege of the elite, with only 10% owning their own home, with the rest renting privately. Successive governments promoted homeownership, from Lloyd George’s “Home for Heroes” to Margaret Thatcher’s very popular Right to Buy. By the start of the 20th century, 70% owned their own home.

Generation Rent: Home Ownership In Decline
However, homeownership peaked in 2002, and then went into sharp decline under the last Labour government, dropping to levels last seen in the 1980s. The Labour government focussed on social housing rather than homeownership, and the decline continued. The shortage of housing and rising house prices were key drivers, leading to a deposit gap that meant few aspiring homeowners could
save enough. It was the young who were particularly badly hit, with a whole generation losing out on their dream to own their own home, and too often having to return to live with their parents. The homeownership “gap” was around 5 million people, wanting to own their home who couldn’t. The Conservative lead coalition government elected in 2010 prioritised homeownership, with a range of policies such as Help to Buy and stamp duty reforms helping first time buyers in particular. It started rising again in 2015, and has risen steadily since.

But there are still millions of people who aspire to own their own home who aren’t able to. Generation Rent is still the reality for most people under 40, whose thwarted aspirations are threatening to blight their future. It is also obviously the less affluent who have suffered from the decline of homeownership more than the affluent. What more can be done to help them? Clearly as a country we need to build more houses to accommodate the burgeoning population, but how do we ensure more people can own those houses rather than have to rent them?

Reforms Required

There are some further reforms the government could make to promote homeownership:

Reform the stamp duty system to tilt the market towards those buying homes as a primary residence rather than as second homes or investments. The government has already done this through the Higher Rate for Additional Dwellings of 3% stamp duty surcharge, and the 2% non-UK resident’s surcharge. Both surcharges apply on top of the basic stamp duty rates, so for example someone buying an investment property for less than £125,000 will pay 3% stamp duty, but someone buying a home to live in for £250,001 is paying it at 5%. But the only reason that stamp duty is progressive (i.e. set at lower rates for lower value properties) is to help people onto, and then up, the property ladder. There is no economic or social argument for having a progressive stamp duty for those buying properties to rent or as second homes. So for anyone not buying a home as a primary residence, stamp duty should be flat rated – and preferably in line with VAT at 20%. There is no reason why someone buying a luxury car for £100,000 or a yacht for £500,000 pays VAT at 20%, but if they buy a pied-a-terre for £900,000 they pay tax at just 5%.

Radically reform shared ownership schemes, so they can genuinely help first time buyers by making them cheaper, open to the secondary market, and are far more flexible. This will help many people overcome the deposit barrier, enabling them to get their foot on the property ladder. Under existing shared ownership schemes, homebuyers buy a small share in a property from a property developer, but if they save up and want to increase their share, they have heavy costs to pay in terms of lawyers and surveyors fees. A sign of success of shared ownership schemes is that people actually use them to staircase up, but very few people do. The government has announced many welcome reforms to improve shared ownership, including the right to shared ownership for housing association tenants, and reducing the staircasing threshold to 1% of the property. The legal framework and stamp duty treatment for shared ownership needs to changed so that:

- there are minimal costs associated with owners increasing their share. This could be done using automatic paper valuations (rather than surveyors), and the property being owned by a single legal entity so that change of share of ownership does not need a new contract.
- shared owners only pay their proportionate share of maintenance, not 100%
• it can be used in the secondary market (ie pre-owned properties), rather than just for new build
• investors other than property developers can share ownership with the owner-occupiers, giving them appropriate consumer protection including the right to staircase

Regulation of estate agents, to provide better consumer protection for inexperienced homebuyers. While there are laws stipulating what estate agents can and can’t do, there is no requirement for estate agents to actually have knowledge of those laws and enforcement is very lax. Estate agents should be required to be licenced, with an enhanced regulator and stronger property ombudsman. The government has consulted on such reforms but not yet implemented them.

Stronger protection for buyers of new build – first time buyers are disproportionately likely to buy new build homes, but often lose out as a result of low standards and weak regulation. Housebuilders have huge incentives to cut costs, leading to work being regularly substandard. Consumer protection for buyers is incredibly weak, making it difficult for them to get repairs or any meaningful redress. It is welcome the government has set up an interim New Homes Ombudsman, but it needs to be set up in legislation. The government should introduce snagging retentions of 5% of the value of the properties for one year, giving buyers far stronger protection.

Abolition of leasehold, which is a complex and expensive hangover from feudal land ownership. It is a major hindrance to homebuyers, and essentially means they often only become long term tenants rather than actual owners. All new property tenures should be required to be either freehold or indefinite commonhold with zero ground rent, with very few exceptions. The ground rents for existing leaseholds and the charge for buying out a leasehold should both be capped as a percentage of the value of the property. The government has made some extremely welcome reforms to leasehold, such as banning leasehold houses, but it has not yet set a path to the abolition of leasehold.

Summary Of Recommendations
1) Reform stamp duty, so owner-occupiers pay lower rates than landlords or second homeowners.
2) Make shared ownership schemes less bureaucratic and more flexible, so owners can increase their ownership share faster, with lower fees, and sell to new owners or investors more easily too.
3) Protect homebuyers from being ripped off by enforcing professional rules for estate agents properly.
4) Make the interim New Homes Ombudsman permanent, to protect people buying newly-built homes.
5) Abolish leaseholds
2.3 Why do some people get on but their equally-able neighbours don’t?

**Katherine Fletcher is MP for South Ribble. Born and raised in Manchester’s Wythenshawe, she was state school educated, and was the first in her family to go to university.**

**Peter Gibson is MP for Darlington. Born in Middlesbrough and raised in Redcar and Saltburn, he is the son of an NHS Midwife and a shipwright who worked at Smiths Dock.**

**Paul Howell is MP for Sedgefield. The son of a firefighter, he was born in Bishop Auckland, and grew up in Ferryhill, Newton Aycliffe and Darlington.**

**Opportunity Starts With Ambition**

We believe that the 2019 General Election was in part an endorsement of a One Nation vision for this country. Not just a slogan, but a tangible commitment that everyone in our country, whoever and wherever they come from is entitled to an equal chance in life.

We want to instil a new ambition. Not only that the North can and should rival London economically, just as it once did, but that the people that make up our communities believe they can improve their lives. Opportunity begins by not being constrained by what you see in your immediate environment.

We all grew up in communities where academic success was uncool and often discouraged. We have friends who were told “education isn’t for the likes of us”, “don’t listen to teachers they lie to you”, “don’t bother there aren’t any jobs”. We all know people who are called “snobby” or “posh” for having A levels, often by their own relatives or neighbours. Why is it that ambition is so frowned on in some communities, especially in the north? Why are we self-limiting in this way?

If you grow up in a neighbourhood where everyone works in low paid manual jobs, understanding the doors that will open if you study A levels, go to University or do a five year apprenticeship can be hard; not just for you, but for your parents and your friends as well.

If you grow up in a community where almost no one has ever moved more than a few miles down the road, relocating to a different county – to say nothing of a foreign country - seems like an incredible risk. And the loss of your familiar support network can be disorientingly scary too.
If you grow up in a family where everyone has only ever had paid employment, the risks of starting your own business will often seem absurd to everyone around you. And if your family has seen 2, 3 or 4 generations without work, it’s hard to believe you’re going to be the one that’s different.

In the past, if you were healthy, it used to be seen as shameful to need the support of the state rather than supporting yourself. Somehow, since then, we have changed and now too many people ask “is it worth my while to work?”. If we make decisions purely on a narrow, short-term, financial trade-off about our immediate hourly rate of pay, we abandon pride in ourselves, our families or our communities, and we ignore opportunities that could grow into a career or a business that’s much bigger and better in a few years time. We have to stop conditioning ourselves and our children that our world can’t be changed, and that opportunities are what someone else has.

**Pride & Self-Belief**

So the question is: how do we instil ambition? How can the feed-back-loop, where children grow up in families and communities that believe they have been forgotten or condemned, be broken?

Each of our constituencies have proud traditions, in Darlington and Sedgefield a history built on heavy industry, railways and engineering and this legacy can still be seen at Hitachi and Cleveland Bridge. South Ribble is no different, as the birthplace of the mighty Leyland Motors and its successor Leyland Trucks. These industries were built on hard work and lofty ambition and transformed the communities in which they were located into thriving centres of enterprise. It is this sense of entrepreneurial spirit that we must recapture. It is not that we want to roll back the clock but rather, that in our communities’ history we see inspiration for their future. We should celebrate these legacies, and they can help to spur on the young people of today to become the best they can be.

It won’t be enough just to create new opportunities. We’ve got to motivate and persuade people so they believe they can take them too. That is why, alongside celebrating our history, we believe there must be more focus on attitudes and visible role models. We want every community to be able to list the business owners, professionals, academics and yes famous people, who come from their towns. There can be the best provision and support in the world, but if people don’t believe in their own abilities then it will remain unused. People don’t see enough of others doing something different, achieving something more. Between us we represent three Northern powerhouses with a heritage of ambitious men and women whose actions and inventions have had a global impact and we know that with the right support, and the right attitude they can do so again.

The teaching profession is already doing a lot to change attitudes and instil ambition and self-belief, but they only engage with children for a small window of their lives. If your teacher is saying “you can do this” and your community and family is saying “don’t bother” who would you expect to have more influence? We have discussed with teachers across our constituencies the challenging home environments that some children start in. The first challenge is that, when they arrive in school, they have to leave some of the home ‘baggage’ at the door before they can even contemplate learning or understanding their opportunities and their abilities. That’s particularly important as we emerge from the Covid pandemic, where children have been stuck at home with much less exposure to environments where ambitions and aspirations can be developed and nurtured.
Summary Of Recommendations
As things return to normal, we want to spark ambition across the North, and reinvigorate our region.
To achieve this, we propose the following policy ideas:

1) Create local networks of business ambassadors to mentor entrepreneurs.
2) Establish a sabbatical programme for teachers to spend time in business and enterprise.
3) Expand the New Enterprise Allowance scheme so people without access to private wealth can get started.
4) Create new community alumni schemes, where successful local people return to their home towns to take part in events showing what local people could achieve.
5) Create new community identity schemes, so each town or area has its own coordinated slogan to define and instil local pride and belief (for example, “Made in Wythenshawe”)
6) Careers service revolution so every child has long-term, direct access (via social media) to careers advisors, and to panels of local post holders to ask questions as career plans evolve.
7) A national campaign for ambitious careers, for example “What do you want to be? You can…..”
8) Update NCS and Duke of Edinburgh Schemes to instil enterprise and entrepreneurship in young people as well as self-reliance and citizenship.
9) Create new entrepreneurship schemes to offer over-16s support, expertise, oversight and monitoring on starting their own firms, as an equal alternative route to existing education and training schemes.
Chapter 3:
Every Community – Race, Class & Place
Felicity Buchan is MP for Kensington. Born and raised in Aberdeenshire, she went to the local comprehensive school and won a scholarship to Oxford University.

No-one Left Behind
As we emerge from lockdown, it is imperative that no ethnic or faith group is left behind on the path to economic recovery. It is imperative that we address the disproportionate impact of Covid19 on BAME communities, and understand the structural reasons behind this. And it is imperative that we implement urgent measures to improve social mobility, with a specific focus on addressing the educational disparities which have emerged due to school closure.

While in no way seeking to disregard or minimise the difficulties faced by white youth from disadvantaged backgrounds, now is the moment to address the specific barriers to social mobility faced by BAME youth.

Britain Today
The 10 June report by the Social Mobility Commission has highlighted the stagnation of social mobility across the UK. The protests following George Floyd’s murder in the US have heightened our awareness of racial inequalities and injustices in the UK. Now is the moment to address the specific barriers to opportunity experienced by BAME communities, especially in the wake of a pandemic which did in fact discriminate.

Levelling Up is often talked about exclusively in the context of the North versus the South, but huge inequalities also exist within our cities, especially our inner cities. For example, in my constituency of Kensington, there is a sixteen-year gap in male life expectancy between the poorest ward and the wealthiest ward.

Current Career Outcomes
BAME students are more likely to come from working class backgrounds. But, as the table below demonstrates, a gap remains between professional outcomes for white individuals and BAME individuals, even when socio-economic background is taken into account:
Of course there are significant differences in levels of socio-economic success between different BAME communities in the UK. This is reflected in the 2018 ONS survey on pay gaps, which looks at differences in hourly earnings as a percentage of white British hourly earnings. A positive percentage represents lower income versus white British counterparts, while a negative percentage represents a higher income compared to white British counterparts. As can be seen those from Chinese and Indian backgrounds actually outperform white British.

Source: Office for National Statistics - Annual Population Survey
It is important, therefore, that when we discuss inequalities of educational and professional outcomes, we focus not exclusively on Levelling Up between white and BAME populations, but recognise the different barriers to social mobility experienced by different BAME communities. There are clear disparities across the board, which are stronger for older workers beyond the 16-30 age group.

**Schooling**

The key to improving social mobility is levelling up educational opportunities and giving targeted support to disadvantaged students. Closing schools, while necessary to halt the spread of Covid19, has exacerbated inequalities in educational progress between different groups in our BAME communities, particularly for families where English is not their first language. For them, the challenges of home-schooling have been even more pronounced. In my constituency of Kensington, I have witnessed first-hand how targeted support can help to close the gap between students who speak English at home and those who do not. Rugby Portobello’s homework club (where I have volunteered) and the Council-run ‘English as a Second Language’ classes are vital services.

On 19th June the Education Secretary announced £1 billion of extra funding, to allow students to catch up, of which £350 million will be allocated to smaller tuition groups for those most disadvantaged by lockdown. It is imperative that we work extremely closely with schools, with organisations such as the Educational Endowment Foundation, and with Children’s Commissioners, to ensure these plans are implemented with maximum urgency.

**Not Just Exam Grades**

We must recognise that university applications are not judged on grades alone. Extracurricular interests and responsibilities are of vital importance to UCAS applications, so we must ensure BAME communities have similar access to these. Cultural industries in the UK are currently engaged in a process of questioning why they are so dominated by white staff and white creatives. And we must use the moment to ask ourselves how BAME youth can be better represented and engaged in the arts.

To this end, the government must work more closely with the arts and charity sectors. We must engage with community groups, places of worship, and schools, to see how cultural and travel opportunities, which may seem out of reach to lower income BAME young people, can be accessed.

Specific provisions for students from disadvantaged backgrounds must not end if the student enters university. There are significant disparities in university drop-out rates between different ethnic and faith groups in the UK, and we must work to address the causes of disproportionately high drop-out rates, especially among black students.

For students who do not choose university we must encourage access to vocational courses which relate to the UK’s most dynamic and growth-fuelling sectors: Fintech, financial services and start-ups.

**Empowering BAME Women**

Inequality of opportunity for half of a community negatively impacts the entire community. The impact of having a role model in the form of a professional mother is felt not only by daughters but also by sons.
This is of course a sensitive topic and we must respect cultural values. But we must also empower ambitious women who might otherwise be left behind so they have opportunities if they want them. The Social Mobility Commission has found that:

a) Muslim women in the UK are more likely than all other women to be economically inactive with 18% of Muslim women aged 16 to 74 recorded as “looking after home and family” compared with 6% in the overall population.

b) Young Muslims felt that parents held high, but different, expectations for boys and girls concerning their educational and employment outcomes, with boys seen to be afforded more freedom.

c) We need to be more confident on the importance of this topic. At the same time, we need to address this topic sensitively.

We must work more closely with local and national charities and institutions, who can start conversations in ways which take into account the sensitivities and needs of different communities and regions. Small steps, like bringing together professional women from a Muslim background and asking them to speak in schools, will inspire young Muslim women who are not necessarily encouraged by their families to pursue careers. The focus should not be on dictating aspirations but on allowing women to expand their comfort zone, boost their confidence, and consider the options which modern Britain provides.

Role models and mentors
Young people enjoy higher educational outcomes when they have access to role models from their own communities. We must work with the third sector to expand BAME alumni networks, and encourage schools to keep in touch with alumni from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Additionally, we must promote the increasing number of mentor networks operating in the voluntary and charity sector, aimed at gifted children from disadvantaged backgrounds, including those from disadvantaged BAME backgrounds. Peer-to-peer mentoring between secondary and primary school pupils can be an incredibly effective tool, and local authorities must invest in these areas.

Summary Of Recommendations
1) Provide urgent, targeted catch-up schooling for specific BAME groups most affected by Covid-19 school closures, particularly those where English is not their first language.

2) Ask arts & cultural sectors to help level up extracurricular opportunities for low income BAME families, because university entrance and later career opportunities aren’t judged on exam grades alone.

3) Ask local and national charities and institutions to help level up BAME alumni and mentoring networks, particularly for the most left-behind groups like Muslim women, so the next generation can be supported and inspired when they see what is possible.
3.2 The Overlooked Underachievers

The Right Honourable Sir David Evennett is MP for Bexleyheath and Crayford. He is a highly-experienced school and further education teacher, and is currently a Vice Chairman of the Conservative Party.

A Longstanding, Growing Problem
The underachievement of white working-class children has made the headlines many times over the past decade and there is clearly no “quick fix” to this longstanding and growing problem. In June 2013, in the Ofsted report Unseen children: access and achievement 20 years on, it was noted that “White British pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are consistently the lowest performing of all of the main ethnic groups and gaps in attainment to other groups have widened over time”. This remains the case today, particularly among the white, working-class boys.

At all stages of education, boys lag behind girls. This is a trend we see across the world, with all but four OECD countries having more female undergraduates than male. As the Higher Education Policy Institute has noted: “It is hard to think of other areas of modern life where there is such a big gender gap but so little discussion of it and so few proposals to remedy it”. When one boy fails to achieve good grades, that could be attributed to the individual, but when we see a pattern across the country, then it is a failure of us all.

Hampered By A Taboo
The underachievement of the white working-class has become a taboo subject, especially when taking gender into account. In December 2019, we saw Dulwich College and Winchester College turn down generous scholarship donations from Sir Bryan Thwaites for working-class white boys worth £1.2million because of a fear of racial discrimination. As this group are leaving school with the worst qualifications of any social or ethnic group, Sir Bryan wanted to try to help others follow his own path to success, as someone who had attended the two colleges on a scholarship himself. His motivation was to help alleviate the underperformance of this group, so it was disappointing the row that followed distracted from a very serious issue. It is worth noting that there was no backlash to the Stormzy Scholarship for Black UK Students at the University of Cambridge, which was rightly welcomed with open arms. It is deeply concerning that when efforts are made to highlight this matter, these are dismissed as racist or a topic that shouldn’t be discussed. Society generally refuses to acknowledge the problem, despite clear facts and figures.

1 Green, Miranda., 2020. The Challenge of educating the left-behind boys. https://www.ft.com/content/97d07f60-2bd2-11ea-bc77-65e4aa615551
According to the report Working-class Heroes by the National Education Opportunities Network last year, over half of England’s universities had fewer than 5% white students from poor households in their intakes, and the number of white university applicants continues to fall. The report also found that white young people in receipt of free school meals (FSM), are the least likely, next to those from gypsy/roma backgrounds of any group, to enter Higher Education. The progression rates for white young people on FSM into higher education were 17.6% for girls and 12.2% for boys in 2016/17.

In the Government’s GCSE results (‘Attainment 8’) published in August 2019, the average Attainment 8 score by ethnicity, gender and eligibility for FSM saw Chinese boys with the highest score on 52.9 points. Those with an Asian heritage scored an average of 40.2 points and black boys scored an average of 34.5 points. The data shows that white British boys were lagging well behind on 28.2 points. Action needs to be taken to help black and white working-class boys achieve better life chances.

If we are going to seriously look at tackling the problem, society first needs to accept the fact that this socio-economic group has hurdles to overcome. Only then can we understand the reasons why they are so far behind and actually do something about this. The Government has a role to play in improving outcomes but their actions alone will not be enough to tackle the problem. We need to see everyone playing their part, including families, teachers, society, and businesses.

Belief In Education
The Government and schools both need to get across the vital importance of a good education to all families. Unfortunately, in some households there is a lack of family belief in education. Also, family breakups and school non-attendance are issues. Indiscipline too must be addressed. Parents may not have had positive educational experiences and therefore fail to see how important it can be to advancement in life. On a cultural point, one of the reasons working-class BAME children perform better is because their families understand and appreciate how valuable a good education is, especially if parents did not have that opportunity.

Some homes themselves are not always conducive to education and learning, lacking in books and educational materials, as well as receiving little support with homework. Other homes are suffering overcrowding and therefore offer little space for children to study. There could be financial issues in obtaining the necessary facilities, such as internet and a computer. Until recently, some people believed this particular cohort did not have the ability to develop and used the excuse of their home environment and the community in which they live for their underachievement.

The Role Of Businesses
I strongly believe that there needs to be more liaison between businesses and schools, and that businesses should look to partner with schools or colleges in their local areas to provide careers advice, work experience and support to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Additionally, this would help to improve educational outcomes. Many white working-class pupils also need positive male role models in their lives, which this partnership could provide, as this may not be something they get at home nor at school. Whilst the Government has made great progress in improving our schools, it does have its part to play in recruiting and retaining more men in the teaching profession.

All children must be nurtured, valued, enthused and inspired by their schools and their families and encouraged to support teachers. We need more family involvement and engagement at all levels of
education. All children should study the basic curriculum but there should be leeway to have a curriculum with more relevance to their future life chances.

Role models are vital whether successful local sports, business, industry, entrepreneurs, media, travel, technology and hospitality people or former pupils who have overcome their background and achieved real success. There are so many jobs and careers today which most teachers are not knowledgeable about, but former students can be a great motivator and informer. Career guidance therefore needs to be radically improved.

Our teachers are dedicated and hardworking, and as a nation we owe them so much. They give inspiration for life but are unable to do the job alone and require the backing of the educational establishment, government, academies and business and industry to take a lead in support of the quest to improve attainment from white working-class children. We need to be more innovative in the approach to the challenges and a greater diversity of people joining the teaching profession from business, industry, the services and other walks of life would help.

The children from the most economically deprived areas of our country are just as clever, able and talented as anyone in the wealthier areas. All they need is support, encouragement, confidence and a belief that they can achieve. I know they can.

Summary Of Recommendations

1) Recruit more men into teaching, and establish better pathways for mid-career switching into teaching from other sectors, to broaden the profession’s contact with, and understanding of, other careers and opportunities.

2) Work with local businesses to establish local career mentoring schemes and to improve the teaching profession’s understanding of local career opportunities.

3) Identify and organize successful former students as role models so white working class boys can see what could be possible for them as well.

4) Allow more flexibility beyond the basic curriculum, so local schools can tailor lessons to have more relevance to their pupils’ future life chances.
3.3 Rural opportunity

John Lamont is MP for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk. He was state educated before studying at Glasgow University, becoming a Solicitor and then subsequently a Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) for Roxburgh and Berwickshire between 2007-2017.

The ‘Exclusive Countryside’
Rural depopulation has been a notable trend across European countries, including the UK, since the middle of the 20th century. Many rural dwellers, primarily although far from exclusively younger people, have migrated to larger towns and cities in search of better, more secure, more highly-paid jobs, and the range of amenities required for modern family life.

This trend has led to what research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has described as ‘the exclusive countryside’, where ‘increasingly, only well-off people can afford to live.’ In essence, rural depopulation is both caused by, and an accelerator of, social exclusion in smaller and more remote communities.

As One-Nation Conservatives, committed to promoting the welfare and interests of all parts of society equally, tackling the root causes of the social exclusion affecting so many rural dwellers, must be a major focus of the government’s attention over the years ahead.

‘Levelling up’ must not simply be a process reserved for underperforming urban communities, as vital an ambition as that is. It must encompass all parts of society where social exclusion is caused by the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. And that must include smaller, more remote communities such as those in my own constituency in the Scottish Borders and across much of rural Britain.

While some notable work has been carried out in a rural context, this has been largely neglected, with a lack of localised data not helping this problem. Added to this, there is a lack of consensus on how to address problems of social isolation, primarily because of the need to involve intersecting government departments and devolved administrations, all with differing agendas and priorities.

Rural problems: Transport
There are, however, some factors that are generally accepted as specific to rural areas, with in particular problems of inadequate mobility, a disproportionate loss of services and the digital divide contributing towards rural social exclusion.

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4 The life chances of young people in Scotland: evidence review (2017)
5 Inequalities in Mobility and Access in the UK Transport System (2019)
One very obvious contributor to rural social exclusion is an increasing lack of transport options, with public transport networks shrinking in rural areas and in particular lifeline bus services.

Poor public transport links seriously hinder the ability to participate in social and economic activities, risking exclusion from the labour market and spurring rural depopulation in favour of the urban conurbation.

In Scotland, research has shown that half of the population considers that two or more transport services are inadequate or unavailable. These rates are significantly higher in non-urban areas, worsening to affect 78% of people in remote rural areas compared with 39% in large urban areas.\(^6\)

These findings are unsurprising, since a general decline in community transport subsidies has contributed to vastly reduced services. Between 2010/11 and 2016/17, £103 million was cut from bus support across England and Wales\(^7\). The relationship between job access by bus and employment outcomes is well documented, with a 10% decrease in bus travel times to jobs across England resulting in a predicted 0.2% increase in employment. That amounts to over 50,000 extra jobs\(^8\). Without public transport links, jobs become much harder to access and this is particularly acute in rural areas where alternative means of transport are frequently unavailable or cost-prohibitive for lower-income households.

Consequently car dependency is high in rural areas and, even though car ownership costs are high, it is an often unavoidable expense to be able to access employment and key services. For example, Scottish low-income households who have to wait over an hour for a bus have higher levels of car ownership (93%), compared to those with a frequent bus service (37%). \(^9\) With transport expenses now accounting for the greatest proportion of household budgets, over 2.3 million UK households are faced with ‘car-related economic stress’ \(^10\).

Yet, it is more than just issues of the availability of public transport that is a problem, but also the cost, further contributing to what has been termed a ‘poverty of access’. Today, Scottish bus fares are 64% more expensive than in 2002\(^11\). Increases such as this clearly demonstrate why public transport fares are reported as the biggest issue for young people, making access to employment, education, training or their local communities more challenging\(^9\). And, again, by the very nature of their more remote settings, these issues are all the more acute in rural communities.

It is, of course, one thing to be able to define a problem, but what tangibles steps can we take to solve these problems? How do we ‘level up’ the transport infrastructure and available modes of transport in rural areas to help close the ‘poverty of access’ gap?

A credible rural and inter-urban public transport network should be a policy priority, enabling intermodal links to local walking, cycling, taxi, demand-responsive transport and other transport

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\(^6\) Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK (2018)
\(^7\) The future of rural bus services in the UK (2018)
\(^8\) Greener Journeys, Buses and the Economy (2014)
\(^9\) Inequalities in Mobility and Access in the UK Transport System (2019)
\(^10\) Addressing transport barriers to work in low income neighbourhoods (2017)
options. Transport to Employment (T2E) is one example of this in action. T2E offers subsidised on-demand community-based transport and shared taxi services in rural Scotland. By moving people into employment, it was found to have social and economic benefits that outweighed the investment by 3 to 1. Similarly, wheels to work (W2W) initiatives have shown promise in improving access to employment in rural areas, providing individuals with a short term loan of a moped. Such schemes facilitate social mobility and freedom, empowering individuals with the financial security and stability to escape isolation and poverty.

**Bad Broadband**

Another fundamental contributor to social exclusion in rural areas is all too frequently a poor, or even non-existent access to broadband and mobile connectivity. In an age where broadband is no longer a luxury but an integral part of building resilient and sustainable communities and economies, rural connectivity lags significantly behind urban areas.

Allied to this, is a widening rural-urban skills on an individual and collective business level, in terms of both access to and use of digital technologies and services which underpin the UK’s future economy.

And, in the social sphere, with communication between friends and families and access to services increasingly transferring online, social exclusion is increased through lack of access to fast and reliable broadband and mobile connections.

In Scotland, 21% of properties in rural areas do not have superfast availability compared to only 0.5% in urban areas. Around 9% of the UK’s landmass has no good 4G coverage from any operator, with rural areas worse affected. In urban areas, a good 4G services is available from all operators to 83% of premises, but in rural areas the figures is only 41%. Broadband is crucial to enabling competition in a wider economy and 82% of firms said that the quality and reliability of the digital infrastructure were significant factors when they were deciding where to invest.

So ‘levelling up’ the delivery of superfast broadband and other digital infrastructure is crucial if the digital divide which hampers the sustainability and growth of rural communities is to be closed.

In delivering that infrastructure, governments must continue to be innovative and, where necessary, non-standard approaches should be pursued such as community-led schemes, satellite broadband and other solutions more appropriate to rural provision than provision to urban areas. For example, future 5G licencing sales and income streams should be considered as a means to target non-commercially viable roll out of mobile and broadband connectivity. And government must not shy away from the need to put further substantial public funds behind the drive to connect up rural communities and close the digital divide.

While 98.2% of the UK has access to at least a decent broadband connection, this masks significant disparities faced by rural communities. These areas have been playing catch up for far too long and the rolling out of full-fibre must prioritise rural areas priority for improvements.

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12 An evaluation of the T2E scheme (2009)
13 Digital Skills for the UK Economy (2016)
14 An Update on Rural Connectivity (2019)
15 Enhanced broadband access as a solution to the social and economic problems of the rural digital divide (2013)
The strength and resilience of our rural communities lies, as it does with their urban counterparts, in their diversity, but that healthy diversity is threatened for as long as, through social exclusion and lack of access to basic services such as transport and reliable, modern digital connections, force lower-income households and small businesses from those communities.

Summary of recommendations

175 years ago, Disraeli laid the foundations of One Nation Conservatism when he wrote of “Two nations between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other’s habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets. The rich and the poor.” Today, let’s resolve to take forward those wise words from more than a century and half ago and to apply them to the modern divide between town and country and to pursuing solutions to the social exclusion affecting to many of our fellow citizens in rural Britain.

1) Roll out proven schemes like Transport to Employment (T2E) or Wheels to Work (W2W) across rural Britain, to create a new inter-urban public transport network with links to local walking, cycling, taxi services and other transport options
2) Use more ‘non-standard’ approach like community-led schemes, satellite broadband and future 5G licencing spectrum sales to ‘level up’ rural broadband coverage and speed to match urban performance.
Chapter 4:
Every Age – A Lifetime Of Opportunities
4.1 A fair recovery for young and old?

Chloe Smith is MP for Norwich North. Growing up in Stoke Ferry she attended comprehensive schools in Swaffham and Methwold. She is currently the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office.

Coronavirus: older victims first, but the young aren’t exempt

Coronavirus has preyed on the old. We learned that age was the greatest inequality in the grasp of the virus, with people diagnosed who were 80 or older a staggering seventy times more likely to die than those under 40.\(^{16}\) Nine out of ten of its British victims were over 65.\(^{17}\)

No one would say it was only about the elderly, because every death in a pandemic is a tragedy. Each person, whatever their age, was loved and lost and mourned. And the medical approach from the start set out to protect people who might be most susceptible, for a range of reasons beyond only their age. That clinical approach also depended on the knowledge that we are all connected. We could pass the disease to each other across the generations.

But beyond the clinical pandemic itself, we may see longer lasting effects that are different across the generations.

The social and political approach that was demanded in early 2020 was radical. It saw the population stay at home, with most of the around 11 million young people of school age out of school or nursery,\(^{18}\) 2.4 million university students affected,\(^{19}\) and 9.3 million jobs temporarily furloughed.\(^{20}\) ‘Social distancing’ has had far-reaching implications in much of everyday life, including for how we see our family and friends, how we relax, how we take exercise, how we shop and how we travel.

I have dedicated years of my work to opportunities for young people. I founded a huge constituency project that has helped thousands of young people into work; I have guided national social mobility programmes to listen directly to young people; I encourage young people to register to vote and be part of our historic democracy.

I do this because I want every youngest generation to be equipped to get started, to burst into life. That’s because people can then make their own choices. I believe in individuals’ freedom, which is fostered at the start of a person’s life. If politics helps people as they set out, they will flourish – and they’ll also pass it on.

So as we hope to watch the tide go out on coronavirus, how can we do right by those who are ready for their chance?

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\(^{16}\) Office For National Statistics, 19\(^{th}\) June 2020, Coronavirus Roundup

\(^{17}\) Office For National Statistics, 19\(^{th}\) June 2020, Coronavirus Roundup

\(^{18}\) Office For National Statistics, 21\(^{st}\) October 2019, UK population projection aged 4-19 years

\(^{19}\) Commons Research Briefing, March 2020, CBP-7857

\(^{20}\) Her Majesty’s Treasury, 30\(^{th}\) June 2020, Coronavirus statistics
Education

Let’s start with education. Children of all ages, from nursery to sixth form, have suffered a loss of developmental and educational time at their usual school. Some have faced disruption to their important exams, their ticket to the future, and to them the Education Secretary was right to say: “how sorry I am that this has happened to you this year. The sacrifices that you and all young people have made have been especially tough.” Yes, there’s been innovation as teachers have provided home resources, and much love and support as families have spent more time together at home.

But evidence is clear that the poorest children, the most disadvantaged children, the children who do not always have support they need at home, will be the ones who will fall furthest behind when school gates are closed. They are the ones who will miss out on the opportunities and chances in life.

Meanwhile, universities have made significant contributions to the covid fight, but they face an uncertain next year, with students naturally keen to get qualifications and experiences that have real value. And vocational education will have to flex with the demands of the changed labour market and help its students to succeed in a new world. We should:

- Help young learners get back to their school, college or university as quickly as possible by: implementing the safety guidelines to minimise risk for students and staff; focusing on innovation and freedom within a practical framework; planning for continuity in the case of any local lockdowns; and giving students and parents confidence.
- Use the Covid Catch-up Fund to help the most disadvantaged catch up on lost time by: encouraging local solutions, using what works best for a school or particular learners; sharing great ideas; and drawing on the successes of continuing schemes like the Opportunity Areas such as in Norwich.
- Ensure that qualifications are not undermined by: drawing on a student’s prior work and achievements, combined with fine-tuning standards across schools and colleges; and providing universities, colleges and employers with the confidence that this summer’s grades have the same status as before.

Economy

And what is happening in the world of work? During the crisis, the young were hit the hardest in economic terms. Workers aged under 25 were about two and a half times as likely to work in a sector that was shut down as other employees. Over one in three 18-24 year olds got less pay than they did at the start of the year, compared to less than a quarter of workers aged 35-49. Interestingly, these studies show that the oldest workers also suffered loss of work or pay – with the age groups in the middle the most resilient – but all less affected than the youngest cohort.

It’s too early to say what the full effect of coronavirus will be on the British economy. The pandemic itself will decline, and we hope recovery will take its place. I am naturally optimistic about the UK’s

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21 Gavin Williamson, 16th May 2020, Education Secretary’s statement on Coronavirus
21 Universities UK, 4th May 2020, Response to UK Government announcement on support
22 Universities UK, 4th May 2020, Response to UK Government announcement on support package
23 Michele Donelan, 1st May 2020, DFE letter to all higher education students
24 IFS, 6th April 2020, Sector shutdowns during the coronavirus crisis: which workers are most exposed?
25 Resolution Foundation, 18th May 2020, Young Workers in the Coronavirus Crisis
strengths, but the chancellor has warned of permanent scarring, and “severe recession the likes of which we haven’t seen.”

On top of their difficulties during the crisis, at least two further consequences are likely for the youngest workers. Firstly, 2020 has been hugely costly to the public finances. Today’s youngest will, logically, have to shoulder that debt in the years ahead.

Secondly, stalled growth and any rise in unemployment have baleful consequences all round, but spawn yet more difficulties for younger workers in particular. If job opportunities simply aren’t there, how can school leavers catch their first chance? As the Resolution Foundation argues, “the large proportion of 18-24-year-olds on furlough and who have lost their main job is particularly worrying because these people are at the beginning of careers. Young people who have recently left education and have recently entered, or are about to enter, the labour market are more susceptible to long-term employment and pay scarring”, projecting a nearly 40% drop in employment possible for the lowest skilled youngsters.

The Prime Minister gets this: “For young people in particular, for whom the risk is highest of losing jobs, I think it’s going to be vital that we guarantee apprenticeships.”

We should:

• Return the public finances to stability as quickly and responsibly as possible by: continuing the Chancellor’s and Treasury’s responsible yet creative thinking; and maintaining a mature conversation with the electorate about what has been and will be needed.

• Use the Prime Minister’s Opportunity Guarantee to back young people’s chances of jobs by: implementing all schemes from the July Plan for Jobs quickly, going all-out to recruit companies to the schemes in every part of the country.

• Encourage local recovery plans to support young people, by: ensuring that public, private and community partners can work together to deliver the Plan for Jobs, such as through the successful Norwich For Jobs project.

Housing

This crisis has hardly invented intergenerational analysis, though. Tensions between young and old have long been visible in the housing market, so I just briefly touch on some new aspects here.

The government was committed to ensuring no one lost their home during the crisis, by protecting renters and enabling mortgage holidays (and indeed securing shelter for rough sleepers).

Obviously, lockdown hit some households harder than others. Life is harder shut up in a small flat with no outdoor space, than in a large home with a garden.

Some extended families decided to lock down together, with some middle-aged parents welcoming back their grown-up children. Indeed, the IFS argues this was beneficial to “the majority of the

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26 Lords Economic Affairs Committee, 19th May 2020
27 Resolution Foundation, 18th May 2020, Young Workers in the Coronavirus Crisis; Resolution Foundation, 6th May 2020, Education Leavers in the Current Crisis
28 No 10 press conference, Wednesday 3rd June
affected younger workers and lower earners (who) live with parents or others whose earnings are likely to be less affected, so many may suffer smaller hits to their living standards than otherwise.  

On the other hand, Warwick University researchers hinted at a corresponding unfairness, arguing that the young cohort of UK citizens aged between 20 and 30 who do not live with parents should have been freed from lockdown.

As in the economy more broadly, this crisis will echo throughout the housing market.  There will likely be short-term corrections.

We should: Build more homes, to boost the economy and back the dreams of the young for affording a home of their own, by: implementing the announced post-covid homes programmes rapidly.

Conclusion
Coronavirus is not all about the young and the old. I began this article sombrely by paying respects to its victims, and recalling that although there may have been more deaths amongst the elderly, generations sheltered together from infection and have supported each other.

As some Leipzig University researchers noted, “everyone who lived during this period will have shared similar experiences, which confounds generational inferences.” They look to the economy and argue that a broader picture of covid-19 and what it means for individuals and workplaces is needed.

And there are challenges still out there. There could be a second spike of this disease, or a different public emergency inside our borders. War, famine, pestilence and death will still happen across the world. Indeed, climate change and its arguments (in some aspects, strikingly similar to covid’s debate over collective action) have not gone away.

The generation that is ready for its chance knows this and will have to play its part in those crises. That generation also loves its parents and its grandparents, and those elders want the best for the whole family and the whole country. There is no sensible outlook – clinical, economic, social, political – that separates generations from each other.

A responsible approach brings the generations together. As I argued in a previous essay series, we should lead where Disraeli pointed, in trying to break down the barriers between “two nations between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy”. Our one nation must answer the needs of both young and old.

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29 IFS, 6th April 2020, Sector shutdowns during the coronavirus crisis: which workers are most exposed?
30 Oswald, A.J. and Powdthavee, N. 2020. The Case for Releasing the Young from Lockdown: A Briefing Paper for Policymakers
31 Savills, 27th March 2020, Coronavirus and the Housing Market
33 ConservativeHome, 9th June 2014, Chloe Smith MP: Why I want politics in our country to work for Generation Y
Summary of Recommendations

1) Help learners get back to school, college or university quickly, by implementing the safety guidelines to minimise risk to students & staff, with contingency plans for local lockdowns.

2) Use the Covid Catch-up Fund to help disadvantaged students catch up lost learning time by using proven schemes like Opportunity Areas (such as the one in Norwich).

3) Ensure qualifications are not undermined, by using each student’s prior work to justify and prove their grades, so universities, colleges and employers have confidence that this summer’s grades have the same status as before.

4) Return the public finances to stability by confirming a ‘sound money’ set of fiscal rules quickly, and then justifying them to the electorate so there is a democratic consensus to underpin them when economic or political pressures are high.

5) Use the Prime Minister’s Opportunity Guarantee to back young people’s chances of jobs; implement the July Plan for Jobs quickly; use local recovery plans (like the Norwich For Jobs project) so public, private and community partners work together to deliver it.

6) Build more homes, to boost the economy and back the dreams of the young for affording a home of their own, by implementing the recently-announced post-covid homes programmes rapidly.
Power To The Pupils

*John Penrose is MP for Weston-super-Mare. He’s the son of two teachers and Chair of the Conservative Party’s in-house think tank, the Conservative Policy Forum.*

In a global knowledge economy, skills create life chances

Nelson Mandela said that education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world, and he was right. In today’s global knowledge economy, high-quality skills aren’t just the engines of Britain’s wealth and growth; they give each of us choices about what kind of life we want to live, and the kind of person we want to be.

Without them Britain is a far less socially-mobile place, where each of us is wrapped in a straightjacket of fewer, narrower life choices whether we like them or not. We may have made huge strides in escaping the straightjacket already – for example there are more pupils educated in good or outstanding schools than ever before, and we’ve got some of the best universities in the world – but there’s more to do.

Bewildering choices

For a start, it’s really hard for pupils to know which of the bewildering array of different Higher or Further Education courses would be best for them. In an age where apps give them oodles of information to choose everything else in their lives, from coffee to ketchup, education is a ridiculous exception.

It’s far too hard to know whether the chances of getting a well-paid job after taking *this* course at *that* University are better or worse than a similar version at a rival College a few miles away. And if they don’t know that, how can they tell if taking on thousands of pounds of student debts will be worth it or not?

Power to the pupils

So let’s give power to the pupils by shedding more light on the most important decision of most students’ lives so far. Transparently publishing information every year to show the one and three year employment rates and average salaries of graduates from every HE and FE courses at every college and university would mean pupils would be able to choose the best-value course in whichever subject, and from whichever College or University, is right for them. They already get, and expect, this for every other decision they take. How can it be right or fair for education to be worse?

Level playing field

Publishing this information would transform Universities and Colleges for the better too. The best-value courses will grow, because more students will apply, while poor-value ones will either have to improve quickly, or shrink and close. Whether you’re a student or a taxpayer, all of those options look great.

Even better, it will rebalance our heavily-skewed Higher and Further Education system. For years, people have complained that too many pupils are pushed towards poor-value Higher Education
courses which aren’t really right for the lives they want to lead, when they’d do far better at a high-value Further Education course instead. Giving power to the pupils would reset this imbalance effortlessly, by arming pupils with the facts to make fully-informed choices for the first time.

Lower costs mean lower student debts
We could help student debts too. If more students choose high-value but cheaper Further Education courses instead of longer, more expensive University qualifications, then the total amount of student debts will fall, and what’s left will become easier for students to repay as well. We could reinvest the savings in scholarships for students from less well-off families, or in grants for older career-switchers, where the prospect of taking on student debts later in life alongside a mortgage and kids is frightening away much-needed new recruits.

University degrees with equal worth
Last but not least, imagine a world where Eton awarded its own A-levels. No one else could take them and, if you got an A grade in, for example, chemistry, it was worth more than an A grade in the same subject from any other exam board.

It would be hideously unfair. Etonians would have a huge, inbuilt advantage in everything, from getting into the best universities to applying for jobs. It wouldn’t matter how hard you worked, how clever you were, or how well you performed in your exams. If you didn’t go to Eton, your life chances simply wouldn’t be as good. Thank goodness that sort of thing doesn’t happen today in the real world, right?

But it does. Right here in modern Britain, universities are doing precisely that. Instead of Eton awarding special A-levels that no one else can match, Oxford and Cambridge do it for degrees instead.

For every other serious qualification in the UK, the same grades in the same subjects mean the same things. A City and Guilds qualification in plumbing is worth the same to a student or a potential employer, no matter which further education college you studied at. A particular grade at A-level or GCSE English is worth the same whether you went to school in Truro or Tadcaster.

But a first in English from Oxford or Cambridge isn’t worth the same as one from most former polytechnics. How can it be fair that older institutions with long-established reputations are automatically assumed to be better than new ones, whether their teaching and courses deserve it or not?

There are a few honourable exceptions, like medical subjects, which standardise their grades so a degree is worth the same from everywhere. And their approach holds the seeds of an answer across the board: if every university pledged to make qualifications from similar courses equal, so a 2:1 in English or maths was worth the same no matter where students studied, it would be revolutionary.

Students would feel the effects first. Anyone who fluffed their A-levels and didn’t get into their first choice of university would have a second chance; they could still fulfil their potential by getting an equally good qualification from somewhere else.

It would make Britain a far fairer place: a more socially-just, meritocratic, mobile society, where someone who works hard and succeeds has the same life chances whether their father is a duke or a doorman.
And directly-comparable grades would give a jolt of adrenaline to Britain’s universities as well. For the first time, everyone would be able to compare the A-level grades which students had when they arrived with the quality of degree they’d earned when they left.

Pretty soon, there would be league tables showing which university courses added the most value during the three years of study, and which ones added least. Students would beat a path to the doors of those with the best teaching, and avoid the worst like the plague. Poor performers would have to pull their socks up, and the good ones would have nothing to fear.

Even better, universities would have a much stronger incentive to find and admit students with undiscovered talents. Bright students who’d got poor grades because they were ill on exam day, or had problems at home, or came from a disadvantaged background, would be like gold dust for admissions staff looking to vault up the value-added rankings. All those recurring stories about there not being enough clever working-class or ethnic minority students at posh old universities would vanish.

In today’s global knowledge economy, enabling everyone to make the most of their talents doesn’t just help people live more fulfilled lives. It fuels the engines of Britain’s wealth and growth too. It might not be exactly what Nelson Mandela said, but it was certainly what he meant.

Summary of recommendations

1) **Give ‘power to the pupils’ by publishing employment rates and average salaries for every course from every university and college every year, so pupils can see which HE and FE courses lead to the best jobs, and choose where to apply based on accurate, up to date information instead of hearsay or snobbery.**

2) **As pupils start making well-informed choices about where and what to study, allow popular courses to grow, and unpopular ones to change or close. If this provokes students to switch from higher-cost HE to lower-cost FE courses, reinvest the savings in scholarships for students from less well-off families, or in grants for older career-switchers.**

3) **Require universities to make degree qualifications worth the same in each subject, like medicine does already, no matter which institution is teaching the pupils. Publish the average A level grades of arriving students, and the average degree grade they’ve achieved as they leave, for every course from every institution every year, so it is clear where students are learning most, no matter what level they started from.**