



**Media release – 5 October 2011**

## ***Call for ‘culture change’ to support state schools***

***Speakers for Schools*** is being launched the week of 10 October 2011 with a series of talks in state secondary schools around England. It is the idea of **BBC Business Editor, Robert Peston**, who wants young people in disadvantaged state schools and colleges to have the same opportunities to hear from inspirational speakers as those who attend top independent schools. The idea is to level the playing field and for it to become the norm for leaders in their fields to give talks in state schools and colleges. *Speakers for Schools* is administered by small charity the Education and Employers Taskforce of which Robert is a Trustee. Please visit: <http://www.speakers4schools.org/>

**Speakers during launch week include:** George Alagiah (BBC News), William Boyd (author), Damon Buffini (business leader), Sir Suma Chakrabarti (Ministry of Justice), Marcus Davey (Roundhouse theatre), Martha Lane Fox (founder Lastminute .com), Andy Haldane (Bank of England), Julia Hobsbawm (media entrepreneur), Laurence Hollingworth (J.P. Morgan), Ruby McGregor-Smith (FTSE 250 CEO), Sir John Parker (Royal Academy of Engineering), Robert Peston (BBC), Trevor Phillips, (Equality & Human Rights Commission), Dame Marjorie Scardino (Pearson), Philipp Schindler (Google), Lord Rees (Astronomer Royal) and Baroness Vadera (former cabinet minister). Also taking part from the world of government and politics: David Cameron, Nick Clegg, Ed Miliband and Sir Gus O’Donnell. **Full list of speakers at:** <http://www.speakers4schools.org/speakers>

Over 700 people have so far agreed to participate including many leading CEOs, politicians, media and arts people, scientists, entrepreneurs and academics. Speakers will address the big topical issues: technological, scientific, political, economic, historical, cultural, artistic, ecological and ethical. The aim is to broaden the horizons and raise the aspirations of disadvantaged young people.

**Robert Peston, BBC business editor and founder of *Speakers for Schools*** explains his motivation: "I passionately wanted to create *Speakers for Schools* because now, more than ever, it matters that young people are told that they are valued and are encouraged to aim high. One way of doing this is for inspirational speakers, brilliant thinkers, leading business people and community figureheads to go into schools in order to share their precious knowledge and experience. I decided to found it after being inundated with requests from leading public schools to talk to their kids, but getting almost no invitations from the kind of state comp I attended. So I am trying to level the playing a little and make it easier for state schools to get such speakers."

**Christine Sydenham, Headteacher at a state school in Ealing - the Ellen Wilkinson School for Girls**, talks about the impact of a pilot talk in July: "The girls realise that highly successful people are actually people *just like them*. They see that for successful people background isn’t the thing that

defines them. They've had to overcome challenges, work hard, be determined and resilient. If the girls can relate to the challenges that really is inspirational. They realise that their ambitions are achievable – and often that they should be aiming higher.”

**Baroness (Shriti) Vadera** who gave a pilot talk said “*Speakers for Schools* allows young people in state schools to talk to senior figures in all walks of life - business, economics, politics, journalism - and to believe that it is possible to achieve your ambitions whatever your background.”

**Brian Lightman, General Secretary, Association of School and College Leaders** says: “All students need good role models, they need to see first-hand that they can succeed in whatever field they choose and that they should aim even higher than they think possible. *Speakers for Schools* is an excellent resource for bringing business leaders into contact with young people in schools which may not otherwise have access to well known, high profile, inspirational speakers.”

## **Media contacts**

Robert Peston, the BBC's Business Editor, and a diverse selection of speakers are available for interview. We can also put you in touch with head teachers who have experienced *Speakers for School* talks. Please contact Carol Glover, Communications Manager, Education and Employers Taskforce, mobile: 07939 061 850 or [carol.glover@educationandemployers.org](mailto:carol.glover@educationandemployers.org)

## **Notes to Editors**

### **1) About *Speakers for Schools***

*Speakers for Schools* is an initiative to get inspirational speakers who are leaders in their field to give talks for free in state schools and colleges, prioritising the most disadvantaged. Such speakers commonly visit independent schools, but many state schools and colleges lack the networks to approach them. *Speakers for Schools* is the idea of Robert Peston, the BBC's Business Editor, and is being administered by the charity, the Education and Employers Taskforce.

Speakers will address the big subjects: technological, scientific, political, economic, historical, cultural, artistic, ecological and ethical. Over 700 speakers have already accepted invitations to participate. The aim is to broaden the horizons and raise the aspirations of young people.

The target was to build a list of over 500 speakers before the launch week of 10 October 2011, and increase the list to 1000 during 2012. It is hoped that many of the talks will be filmed and used to create a free online video library of similar quality to TED Talks [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com), but for a school-student audience.

- **Pilot talks around England**

In early summer 2011 pilot *Speakers for Schools* talks were held to test what works best and gauge responses from speakers, teachers and students in state secondary schools. Responses were very positive and the feedback used to improve the service before the October launch.

Pilots took place in London, Manchester, Bristol and Sheffield with the following speakers: Will Butler-Adams (Brompton Bicycles), Huw Edwards, Andy Haldane (Bank of England), Tristram Hunt MP, Jim O'Neill, Roland Rudd, Mark Thompson, Baroness Vadera, Andreas Whittam-Smith and Robert Peston.

- **UK wide launches**

*Speakers for Schools* will launch in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in the coming months.

- **Research**

A survey of 200 English state schools and colleges earlier this year by the Education and Employers Taskforce, showed that 75% identified high profile guest speakers to talk to pupils as being 'important' with nearly 50% seeing it as 'very important'. However, the majority of schools and colleges also found it very difficult to access such speakers.

It is commonplace for high profile speakers to visit independent schools to speak to pupils. A 2010 desktop review by the Taskforce of 20 high performing independent schools showed that it very much the norm for such schools to run programmes of visiting speakers of high public prominence.\*

*\*What is to be Gained? Exploring the value of education-employer relationships – pages 44-45, 80:*  
<http://www.educationandemployers.org/media/10096/what%20is%20to%20be%20gained%20through%20partnership%20v%202.pdf> )

- **Thank you to Muira**

Website design company Muira have done a considerable amount of pro bono work which has enabled us to keep the cost of launching *Speakers for Schools* very low indeed.

## **2) About the Education and Employers Taskforce**

The Education and Employers Taskforce was launched as a small independent charity on the 15<sup>th</sup> October 2009, and has seven staff. Its aim is to ensure that every school and college has an effective partnership with employers which provides young people with the inspiration, motivation, knowledge, skills and opportunities they need to help them achieve their potential and so secure our national prosperity.

The Taskforce's Partnership Board comprises the leaders of the main representative organisations from education and employment and the Trustees are principally senior business leaders with an interest in education. For more details please see [www.educationandemployers.org](http://www.educationandemployers.org)

- **Research conference on education and social mobility**

On the 12 October the Education and Employers Taskforce is overseeing an international research conference on education, social mobility and employer engagement at Warwick University with Professor Robert Schwartz from Harvard University and participants from the United States, Canada, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Gambia, India, Lebanon, Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sweden, Trinidad & Tobago and Tanzania.

<http://www.educationandemployers.org/research/research-conference-2011/>

### **3) For further information**



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