

How to best encourage aspiration

East Ham MP Steve Timms talks about aspiration

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Social mobility is one of the hot political debating topics. How can we best encourage and support aspiration and mobility?

The topic was addressed at a conference at Kingsford Community School, Beckton. Head Teachers and students from around the country gathered to share their ideas. The basis of the conference was the unique partnership between Kingsford and the well-known public school, Brighton College. Joan Deslandes, Head Teacher of Kingsford, is on the governing body at Brighton, and the Head Teacher of Brighton is a Governor at Kingsford. We heard at the conference from talented former Kingsford students who are now in the sixth form with scholarships at Brighton. The Head Teacher of Eton College was one of those taking part. Not someone who visits Newham regularly!



Stephen Timms speaking at the 100 Group Conference

In Newham, social mobility has been closely linked to actual mobility. If you were doing well, you moved out - usually eastwards. That is dramatically illustrated whenever West Ham plays at home, and thousands of people stream in to Upton Park from further along the District Line. We have a chance to change that now. With the Olympics, people will be attracted towards Newham, instead of wanting to move away. Newham is becoming the place where the action is.

We will be linked to aspiration, to high achievement. It's a chance for our area to be a place where you can aspire and achieve - and still put down roots. The jobs and opportunities the Olympics are bringing are inspiring young people. They can see the chance to achieve their full potential without moving away from their hometown. It was our sense of community in diversity that persuaded the International Olympic Committee to send the Games to London. Now the Olympics can help meet the aspirations of our young people.

New interest in social mobility has been sparked by the 'Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions'. The panel, reporting to the Prime Minister, was chaired by Alan Milburn MP. It made 88 recommendations, most of which the government has agreed. It recommended, for example, a big expansion of internships in the professions, so that young people with no inside connections had the chance to experience working in a professional setting. It emphasised that these internships needed to be really good quality, and that details should be set out on a freely accessible website. And it made recommendations for improving careers advice.

Social mobility has a lot to do with economics. Our economy will do much better in the future if the people in top jobs are those who deserve to be there, than if they were simply those who were born into privilege. With Newham a place where aspirations are met, not just bred, we will see a generation of leaders for whom staying in Newham fits in with their ambitions much better than moving out.