AM: Does it really feel different, this Cabinet, in terms of culture and so forth?

JG: I think it does in many respects. I’m really proud that there are so many state school educated people sat around the Cabinet table. It’s full of people who campaigned for staying in the EU but also, critically, leaving the EU. It’s from all regions of our country. So I think it’s a really balanced Cabinet and I hope that we can really deliver this agenda that Theresa May has set out for Britain.

AM: Well, let’s get on to that agenda then, because in her speech it was very interesting, in Downing Street, she singled out, she said, ‘if you’re a white working class boy you’re less likely than anybody else in Britain to go to university,’ and she made social mobility absolutely central to her purpose. And as Education Secretary you are, for England at any rate, in charge of social mobility really. So can I see if there is any kind of policies behind these warm words? Could we start with schools in England, because according to the IFS, as things stand, per pupil spending is going to go down in real terms by eight per cent by the end of this Parliament. Now, we have a new financial regime here, we’re no longer going to try and go into surplus by the end of this parliament. Austerity is being loosened a bit. So in those circumstances do you go back to colleagues and say, you know, an eight per cent cut for pupils in English schools is absolutely the wrong thing for social mobility?

JG: So social mobility is something that has characterised my personal life as well as my political life. It’s something that I hugely care about. Driving better and more opportunities for young people.
AM: I’d just like to stick with the policies if we could.

JG: So let me come back to your question. But what I want to say is this is so much more than just about the money. Driving more and better opportunities for young people, making the most of Britain’s talent isn’t just the right thing to do, it’s the smart thing to do for our economy. And I’m delighted to be in a department that can be at the heart of driving opportunities, not only are we now looking at the schools policy, we also have universities under our wing too. But if we’re really going to deliver on what Theresa May wants to see, which is a country that doesn’t just work for the privileged few, it works for everyone, it’s just going to be more about – let me finish, Andrew, because this is important. It’s more than just about education. It’s about what happens at home, it’s about what happens in communities in setting young people’s sights high. It’s about the ability of our businesses to pull through Britain’s rough diamonds and make the best use of the talent. It’s about having great teachers in school.

AM: Absolutely.

JG: Who can develop that talent in the first place.

AM: Alright. But in the end – these are wonderful words and warm words and all the rest of it, but you are in charge of education and if the education regime is going to be less money per pupil for schools for the rest of this government that is going to impact upon lots of poorer families and lots of people struggling in school, who don’t have other kinds of support. Which is why I ask you again would you seek to reverse that eight per cent cut?

JG: Well, the underlying schools budget is seeing a real terms increase. We’re reviewing and introducing a new schools funding formula that will be much fairer.
AM: But it’s the first cut per capita, per pupil in per pupil spending since the 1990s, the IFS says, and a lot of head teachers and a lot of teachers are profoundly worried about it.

JG: And we are reviewing and introducing a new schools funding formula that will be much fairer. It will make sure that funding per pupil is now equalised in a way that it hasn’t been before. Everybody recognises the need to change. But my point to you, Andrew, is driving better opportunities and driving social mobility in our country is broader even than education. It’s broader even than something that can change overnight, it’s a generational challenge and it needs a generational policy and we should stick at it if we’re going to make change.

AM: But you’re Education Secretary, which is why I’m sticking with education. There’s been suggestions in the papers today we discussed in the paper review, that grammar schools could be on the way back and that you are open-minded to that idea. Is that true?

JG: I remember having this debate when I was sat in my comprehensive school in the 1980s, so it’s been going on for a very long time. The setting in which schools find themselves has actually changed quite dramatically. It’s gone from really being a binary world in many respects to being an education world where there are many different schools now that have many different offers. So I think we need to be prepared to be open-minded. But from my perspective, and from my experience actually going through the state school, the times I learnt best were when I had great, amazing teachers who could excite me about learning who gave me an interest in the subject they were trying to teach me about. And so fundamentally we need to look at what’s happening in the classroom, having children there who are ready and able to
learn, having fantastic teachers. That’s what’s going to be most important and that’s what I’ll focus on.

AM: There are a lot of your colleagues on the Tory backbenches and elsewhere who are desperate for you to say, ‘do you know what? I think grammar schools were a good thing and I don’t mind them coming back.’

JG: And I think – I’ve been in this job literally two or three days. I’m not going to make some big, sweeping policy pronouncement.

AM: Go on, go on.

JG: I’m going to take a very measured sensible approach in this role. And I recognise that this is an important debate, so of course I’ve got lots of things in my in-tray, I will work my way through them very, very carefully over the coming months.

AM: But you’re not closed-minded to bringing back grammar schools?

JG: I think that the education debate on grammar schools has been going for a very long time, but I also recognise the landscape in which it takes place has changed fundamentally and I think we need to be able to move this debate on and look at things as they are today and maybe step away from a more old-fashioned debate around grammar schools and work out where they fit in today’s landscape.

AM: The biggest single crisis facing you right now is in universities, where people are terrified about the huge loss of funding that is going to come when we leave the EU. 125,000 European students in our universities right now. 43,000 teachers, lecturers and researchers. They don’t know what the future holds for them. All the time they’re being phoned up by people in the
States and so on trying to cherry pick our best universities. What reassurance can you give students and teachers in the British university system that they are welcome now, that they will be funded, and that the funding gap will be closed?

JG: We ought to make sure that the university system stays world-beating. I very much recognise that there are these two issues of students and also staff. As we now set about pulling together our strategy for Brexit, of course those need to be things that we reflect on extremely carefully. Britain isn’t going to deliver the kind of opportunities for young people if we don’t have a thriving university sector.

AM: Absolutely.

JG: This is absolutely – you’re quite right to ask me about it. And again I hope that over the coming weeks we can have a smart approach to Brexit that means we absolutely lock in that fantastic university system we’ve already got.

AM: I think 16 per cent of all European funding for research and science currently goes to British universities. If they lose that money we’re going to lose, you know, the departments and the jobs that are going to keep us prosperous otherwise for the next 50 years. They are going to be cherry picked by China and America and elsewhere. Will you make sure that money which is coming from Europe is replaced by the British government? It’s absolutely essential to British universities.

JG: Well, I recognise all these challenges. Whatever path we’d chosen on the 23rd June there were going to be pros and cons to that path. We now have a chance to work out our game plan on Brexit. It also though, gives us a chance to look at some of the risks around leaving the EU - you’ve talked about some of them –
and work out how we can make sure we mitigate them effectively.

AM: You presumably have to be part of that negotiating team, it can't all be left to David Davis and a separate department. As a departmental minister you have to in the thicket of that.

JG: The Brexit department now needs to work across government. Of course there are issues around universities. Every department overwhelmingly is going to be affected by the decision to leave the EU. What we now need to do is get on with that decision that people took, make sure we approach it in a smart way, make sure whilst working our Brexit strategy that we also get on with starting the process of putting in place international trade deals, which is why the other department Theresa May set up was the Department of International Trade. And I think it’s about having this approach, two-fold approach. One, looking at how we change the relationship with Europe, and two, building the trade deals with the rest of the world.

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