

Keir Starmer is no closer to providing answers

Published: January 13, 2026, 6:40 am

I struggled with Keir Starmer's speech yesterday.

The most obvious question to ask was 'why' did he make it? It seemed like nothing more than mild reiteration of promises made during the election campaign, so what was all the fuss about?

The next question was, 'what' did he hope to achieve? Is it his belief that restating goals that are already failing for him might be sufficient to persuade people that he is on track? If so, I think he's seriously mistaken.

The third obvious question was, 'how' did he think this would be received? I think that Beth Rigby from Sky News summed up the most likely reaction when she told him during the press question session that she was confused by what he had to say. I am sure that many people will be.

To continue the obvious sequence, the 'when' all this might happen appeared to have been answered by Starmer himself. Sometime by 2029 appears to be the goal. So, what's up? It would seem that, like Boris Johnson, the only thing that Starmer is really interested in doing is campaigning, and that what the speech was really all about was launching the 2029 election campaign.

Perhaps the most bizarre element of all of this is, however, to be found in the answer to the quite appropriate 'where' question because, as I mentioned in a Tweet I also posted here yesterday, at least four of the six objectives, goals, milestones or whatever else that he wishes to describe them as, related to responsibilities devolved to the governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland over which, as a consequence, Starmer has remarkably little control. In that case, the answer to this question would appear to be in England alone, which for someone who is as an unreasonably determined and small-minded unionist is strange. Alternatively, it provided the very clear indication that he really does not know what he was talking about.

That last suggestion was reinforced by his objective of having at least 75% of all

children ready for school by the age of five. It would seem that he thinks that's when children enter reception classes. The reality is that it is now quite exceptional that a child starts school in England at the age of five because, as a matter of policy, they start at the beginning of the school year in which they are five. In other words, they start at age four and in some cases (for example, in the case of one of my sons, with a late August birthday) that means they start at school when they are only just four. Is he really so unaware that he does not know this?

That made me wonder what Starmer is really all about. If, after all, he thought it appropriate to summon the media to this debacle he must have thought it would provide some insight into his thinking. I believe it did. What it showed is that he, like Rachel Reeves, is a man who thinks that government is about sweating over the figures on a spreadsheet. He has obviously persuaded himself, or been persuaded by others, that if only he can tick some boxes then his work will be done and the country will be truly satisfied with his performance.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Senior management is nothing like that, even if too much middle management is. Instead, senior management is about creating the narratives that will explain to people how you will keep them happy. Starmer is nowhere near doing that. That is why he is failing, and nothing he did yesterday will change that.