

Campaign for Real Education

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“Freedom to teach, freedom to learn, freedom to choose”

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Newsletter

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Editorial

2018 was supposed to be the year of stress, anxiety and burnout for pupils sitting their GCSEs and A-Levels. Exams were harder and step-by-step coursework components have been phased out in most subjects and replaced by one-off exam papers. Having just about reached breaking point in terms of collective hysteria, students had a shock when they were presented with their results.

‘Pass’ rates at GCSE rose and at A-Level those attaining the top grades – As and A*s – were the best for six years. Tougher papers, what the government is fond of calling ‘world-class’ exams, have led to better grades than ever. What was all the fuss about?

Congratulations go, of course, to the candidates. They can only do the exam papers that are put in front of them. But, sadly, this latest success for our educational establishment may not be quite what it seems.

Are we really supposed to believe that more rigorous exams will produce better results? What on earth is going on? The Daily Telegraph (16th Aug) came up with the answer a few hours before the A-Level results were published:

Students can get almost half of the questions wrong and still get an A in some of the new ‘tougher’ A-Levels.

At GCSE the dumbing down of grade boundaries was even more blatant with around 20 per cent of the marks judged sufficient for a good ‘pass’ on some papers.

The time has surely come to do away with misleading ‘grades’ and to replace them with raw percentages. For most people 55 per cent in A-Level Biology will be seen as a ‘pass’ but hardly as an A grade. And who would regard a GCSE mark of around 20 per cent as meriting more than a certificate of incompetence?

Last year the head of Ofqual, the government’s exam regulator declared that, ‘all our kids are brilliant’ (Sunday Times Aug 13 2017). What nonsense!

To cover up this great examination fraud Ofqual offered the pretence of an honest admission as to the grade manipulation:

We know from our research that student performance dips a little in the first years of a new qualification, because teachers are less familiar with the new specifications and there are fewer support materials and past

papers for students to use. Using statistics compensates for that dip, so that the 2018 cohort is not unfairly disadvantaged by being the first to sit these new qualifications.

<https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2018/01/19/gcse-and-a-level-awarding-in-2018/>

This is a great deception. The biggest change to public examinations in the past fifty years was the replacement of GCE O-Level by the GCSE exam in 1988. It was followed by twenty-three years of ever improving grades. There was no 'dip' in performance consequent on the introduction of the new and equivalent exam

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/sep/17/gcse-exams-replaced-ebacc-history-pass-rates>

The role of Ofqual, the government's qualifications watchdog, should not be to peddle lies and half-truths. It is not the department of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda à la Lord Haw-Haw. Its modus operandi should not be, 'This is Ofqual calling, this is Ofqual calling. Believe us because we speak for the Government!'

Young people deserve better than to be defrauded. Schools spend a lot of time urging children to be honest and trustworthy. It is time government got the message, too. Its willingness to go along with the fraud was evident in a subsequent newspaper article by the schools' minister:

Step by step - thanks to hard work from our teachers - we are putting our education system back on a par with the best in the world.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-tide-is-turning-and-our-schools-are-improving-l7tp8cxgs>

Pupils may find the truth about their examination performance to be stressful but I am sure that most would prefer the truth to the lie. World-class exams 'on a par with the best in the world'? You have got to be joking, minister!

Chris McGovern

Fact Check: Boys v Girls at A-Level

'For the second year running, boys outperformed girls at the top grades,' reported the BBC. Other media outlets made the same claim. There were, in fact, 81,000 more girls than boys sitting A-Levels. This offsets the slightly higher percentage of boys overall gaining the highest grades.

Northern Ireland is the top performing part of the UK.

Once again, the best examination results this summer were achieved by Northern Ireland, which still has grammar schools. 30.4 per cent of pupils in the province attained the top A/A* grades as against 26.4 per cent in England, and 26.3 per cent in Wales. At GCSE 81.1 per cent of Northern Irish pupils were awarded the 'good' pass grade (A*-C or 4-9) as against 69.2 per cent in England and 61.6 per cent in Wales. Scotland has a separate public examinations system.

The Conservative Party Conference 2018 - has the penny dropped?

Damian Hinds, the Education Secretary, has told his Party Conference that the government recognises the importance of technical and vocational education. He has promised £38 million in capital funding for the first providers of the new T-Levels to be introduced in 2020. These are intended to be a technical/vocational equivalent of A-Levels. Most advanced economies around the world adopted such a dual pathway education system – academic and technical – decades ago. Our governments have been, and remain, very slow learners in this area. Better late, though, than never!

Aged 5? Time to choose your gender!

Online teaching guidelines from Education Scotland, the Scottish government and the NHS, propose that from the age of 5 children should be allowed to choose their gender – male, female or neither. During Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) classes teachers are advised to inform children that ‘your gender is what you decide’, It adds that ‘people might think they know your gender because of the clothes you wear, or how you behave, or the things you like to do.’ This is a mistake, the guidelines stress. ‘You are a unique person, you know who you are.’

Whilst this project may be well-intentioned in seeking to help the tiny minority of children who have concerns about their gender, it is likely to confuse and trouble many others. Foisting adult neuroses on to infants is likely to rob them of their childhood. It would be far better to support children on an individual basis if they have concerns about their gender identity.

There is too much bureaucracy in our schools. Has the Education Secretary given up on finding a solution?

Damian Hinds, the Education Secretary, appears to be of the opinion that if there was a solution to the problem of educational bureaucracy it would have already been found by his predecessors. He recently told *The Guardian*:

If we could just find those forms or the pieces of bureaucracy to remove, then the people before me would have done it. It's a much more complex issue than that.

Complex, complex, complex! Why is teaching children these days so complex? It was not always so. In those less bureaucratic but much derided days of grammars, techs and secondary mods, the comparative performance of our schools, internationally, was much higher. There were many faults with that system but being less effective than today's ‘bog-standard’ comprehensives was not one of them.

According to the OECD we are the only country in the developed world where, in terms of literacy and numeracy levels, grandchildren perform no better than their grandparents. In many cases they perform a lot worse. [*OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills, p107*]

This older generation was schooled in much less complex times: pre-national curriculum, pre-dumbed-down public exams, pre-national pupil database, pre-PC rectitude logging, pre-child-centred this and that and everything. In addition, spending on education was considerably less – nine times so in real terms between 1953 and 2009. [*Crawford, Emerson and Tetlow, A survey of Public Spending in the UK, London, Institute for Fiscal Studies p22*]

The Education Secretary, the teacher unions and, indeed, parents should be asking the forbidden questions: How was it possible for us to achieve comparatively so much more in terms of pupil attainment with so much less spending? How is it possible, today, for so many lower education-spending countries to achieve more, in some cases much more?

Hinds's thinking is both lazy and dangerous. It is, also, quite daft! How can he sensibly believe that if solutions are to be found, they would have been found by now? This is rather like the medieval Church telling Copernicus that if the solar system were heliocentric it would have been discovered before Copernicus came up with his theory. A third century BC heliocentric proposition had been long forgotten!

As a well-educated Catholic grammar school boy himself, of course, Hinds should be cheered by the fact that the medieval Catholic world view was not always out of touch with reality. It was given supreme poetic expression by Dante Alighieri in his *Divine Comedy*. The words the poet places over the gates into Hell could, equally, be hung over the entrance to the Department for Education:

*Abandon hope all you who enter here
[Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate]*

A very simple and uncomplicated message, Master Secretary of State for Education! Have it engraved over the front door of your department. In that sense, at least, you are correct in your reasoning about the impossibility of doing anything that has not failed before.

Why are we running out of teachers?

The Left-leaning Education Policy Institute (EPI) has sounded a widely reported alarm bell about teacher recruitment.

English schools are facing a ‘severe shortage’ of adequately qualified applicants, especially in priority areas such as mathematics and physics. Around half of teachers in these subjects leave the profession within five years. Across all subjects the retention rate is no more than 60 per cent.

For schools in deprived localities outside London the problem is especially acute, not least in finding subject specialists. In such schools beyond the capital 83 per cent of physics teachers do not have a relevant degree, let alone a degree in physics! Amongst maths teachers in disadvantaged schools, 63 per cent do not hold a relevant degree for teaching the subject.

Across the country as a whole, including London, a majority of pupils are being taught GCSE maths by teachers who do not hold a relevant degree. Is it any wonder that the ‘good’ pass grade last year had to be lowered to 15 per cent and is not a lot higher this year?

Had the Education Policy Unit investigated primary schools it would have discovered that many, perhaps most, teachers of mathematics hold no more than a certificate of incompetence in the subject – the GCSE Grade C that qualified them to become a teacher.

Nor will it come as much comfort to the exporting side of post-Brexit Britain to learn from the EPI report that only 40 to 50 per cent of foreign language teachers hold a relevant degree. Overseas countries have no issue with exporting to us through the medium of the English language. If we wish to export to them, however, knowledge of their language can be the deal-winner.

To some extent, of course, the Education Policy Unit is a self-serving part of the educational establishment. As ever with the Blob, the only way forward it can discern is to increase spending. In particular, it is advocating ‘targeted salary supplements’ in subject areas where there is a shortage. The debt incurred by the necessary borrowing costs will have to be paid for by our grandchildren and by children not yet born. Any recognition of this simple fact has escaped the EPI.

So, too, it seems has any awareness that many other countries around the world run considerably more successful education systems with much lower overall educational spending. In relation to the local cost of living a few even pay higher salaries to their teachers. The EPI appears not to know or understand that we increased educational spending by almost nine times in real terms between 1953 and 2009 [A Survey of Public Spending in the UK, Institute of Fiscal Studies 2009] but, during those years, we went backwards in terms of relative international educational attainment.

More and more spending will not resolve the current crisis of teacher recruitment. Nor, indeed, will the proposed introduction of pay apartheid by subject. The notion of paying a third-rate graduate teacher of maths more than a first-rate graduate teacher of English is plain silly. The best teachers of whatever subject deserve to be paid more, pure and simple.

And where should the money come from? In order to sustain ineffective ‘child-centred’ learning and group work, schools, especially in the primary sector, are over-loaded with classroom assistants. Standards would rise quickly if we restored teacher-led whole-class teaching that requires far fewer of these assistants. The money saved would fund a significant pay rise for all our best teachers, not just those in shortage subjects.

Back to the 1950s? Yes, it would be for the UK. And that is why the 1950s generation had a higher level of basic employment skills than today’s school leavers. Another way of looking at the restoration of whole-class teaching would be to see it as a jump forward to the 21st century. Whole-class, teacher-led lessons is how it is done in the Asia-Pacific super-star education systems.

The EPI is deluding itself, though, if it believes that the teacher recruitment crisis is all about pay. There are several reasons why many of the best and the most in-demand graduates are shunning the profession or not staying in it for long. Here are just a dozen points from the job description for today's teacher:

- long, long hours
- stress-induced sleepless nights
- a high risk of being verbally abused or physically assaulted
- endless form-filling and data-logging
- unremitting and relentless adherence to, and enslavement by, the worst excesses of political correctness at the expense of teaching your subject(s)
- a dumbed-down grading system to ensure exam success for your pupils
- a mediocre salary· an expectation that you will solve most of society's problems and ills including mental health issues, drug abuse, social media addiction and obesity
- a need for longish holidays for recuperation in order that you can battle on for a while longer
- a predominantly female and feminist 'profession' with only 15 per cent of teachers in primary school being male
- widespread antipathy to competition in both academic and sporting spheres
- no time for a life of your own

How sad it is that in 2018 this is what the teaching 'profession' has degenerated into. It should be the most energising, invigorating and satisfying job in the world. Certainly, it is the most important.

The Education Policy Unit has scarcely scratched the surface of what is putting bright young graduates off the teaching profession. It needs to face up to reality but, like the rest of the Blob, that is something it struggles to do.

Cheating the exam league tables

Some state schools are cheating the public examination system, according to a [Times newspaper front-page scoop yesterday](#). Pupils likely to fail are being excluded from school to manipulate overall pass rates and ensure an enhanced position in the GCSE league tables. Around 13,000 were shown the door last year in the months before the exam season kicked off.

The investigative journalists deserve thanks for lifting the lid, a little, on the murky world of corruption within the sanctimonious, self-serving and secretive world of the educational establishment. This 'Blob' would have us believe that it knows best. Questioning its trustworthiness and its integrity brings, at best, opprobrium and at worse banishment to outer darkness and another version of exclusion – professional assassination.

Woe betide any teacher who spills the beans! Many thousands were, and are, fully aware of this immoral malpractice, known in the trade as 'off-rolling', but chose to remain silent. It has taken a newspaper to expose it. And yet for those of us within the profession, the Times story is about as much of a scoop as finding sand in the Sahara or water in the Amazon rain forest.

The guardians of educational standards, including the Department for Education and the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual), need to cut out the lies and the spin. Schools fiddling the figures does not make 'all our kids . . . brilliant', [as Ofqual's boss claimed last year](#). Equally, teachers in the poshest of posh schools who set questions for public exams [do not have the right, in effect, to reveal those questions to their own pupils](#).

Nor should exam boards be boasting to teachers who have coughed up cash to enrol on their behind-closed-doors training courses that they are cheating. Several years ago, tipped off by the CRE, an undercover

journalist managed to infiltrate an exam board's training session and to her amazement actually recorded and filmed an examiner's boast: 'We're cheating . . . Probably the regulator will tell us off.'

Small wonder that those running the course could announce to delegates that there was 'standing room only'. Every one was a winner! The teachers were getting inside information on what would come up in the exam and the board was making loads of money by running the course.

Are matters any better today? Of course not! Corruption remains endemic within the system. The latest dishonesty is the manipulation of GCSE grade boundaries that is described in the editorial to this newsletter. Around 20 per cent of the marks will secure a 'good' pass. Tougher than last year's 15 per cent, it is true, but hardly a challenge. With such low marks required it is remarkable that any pupil should need to be excluded to boost a school's pass rate.

Are you a journalist? Want another exam scandal? Check out the number of independent school pupils who are entered as private candidates in other independent schools! Are you part of the Blob? Get spinning!

Educating Baron Adonis about British history in our schools

Baron Adonis of Camden Town in the London Borough of Camden can be disconcertingly ill-informed, and just plain silly at times. One of his areas of special expertise is, supposedly, education. It was part of his portfolio in Tony Blair's Number 10 Policy Unit and, following his appointment to the House of Lords, he went on to serve as a Labour education minister. Should he know better, therefore, than to utter this recent pronouncement on Twitter?

Very little Irish history & culture is taught in English schools & I think there should be a debate about changing this. I'm surprised how little young people know about Ireland – even those of Irish heritage.

Given that not a single specific event or personality from British history is prescribed by the history national curriculum, the call for more Irish history is highly discriminatory. It would give Ireland the same elevated status as other prescribed non-British topics such as these:

- the achievements of the earliest civilisations – an overview of where and when the first civilisations appeared and a depth study of one of the following: Ancient Sumer, The Indus Valley, Ancient Egypt, The Shang Dynasty of Ancient China
- a non-European society that provides contrasts with British history – one study chosen from: early Islamic civilisation, including a study of Baghdad c. AD 900; Mayan civilisation c. AD 900; Benin (West Africa) c. AD [900-1300](#)

True, British history appears as central to the curriculum as world history, but appearances can be deceptive. It turns out that this is not British history as most people would recognise it at all. This is 'Sex Pistols' British history. British history as the vehicle for destroying our national identity, as the band put it so aptly here:

*I am an anti-Christ
I am an anarchist
Don't know what I want
But I know how to get it
I want to destroy the passerby . . .*

*Anarchy for the UK.
It's coming . . . It's the only way to be*

*Is this the MPLA
Or is this the UDA*

*Or is this the IRA
I thought it was the UK
Or just another country
Another council tenancy*

*I want to be anarchy
And I want to be anarchy
(Oh what a name)
And I want to be an anarchist
(I get pissed, destroy!)*

Baron Adonis would get a better idea of the Sex Pistols' direction of travel for the teaching of British history in our classrooms if he checked out the drug-fuelled and alternative world of his own Camden Town and its market on a Saturday. Anything goes there, just as it does with British history in the national curriculum. It turns out that all the familiar landmarks such as Alfred the Great, the Battle of Hastings, Magna Carta, the

Reformation, the Civil War, the Glorious Revolution, the British Empire, Churchill, the World Wars and so on are given only the measly status of ‘examples (non-statutory)’ that teachers ‘could include’ if they so choose.

Too often, though, they are scarcely choosing them at all. It is Jack the Ripper rather than Gladstone and Disraeli about whom children are more likely to learn when they study the nineteenth century. A quick glance at the teachers’ oracle, the *TES* (formerly *Times Educational Supplement*), shows 275 lesson plans and resources for the Whitechapel murderer. Neither Gladstone nor Disraeli can clock even half that amount and Horatio Nelson manages only 41. The aforesaid ‘Jack’ is the chart-topper when it comes to secondary school history. He even outscores the Jamaican ‘nurse’ Mary Seacole, who managed 189 *TES* resources at the time of writing.

Baron Adonis is calling for more Irish history at a time when ‘Ireland and Home Rule’ does, at least, make it on to the list of ‘examples (non-statutory)’ that ‘could’ be taught. Nelson, Wellington and the Napoleonic Wars are not even awarded that status. They have disappeared altogether. Even when landmark events and personalities are taught, more often than not it is through a distorting prism of political correctness.

One of the most popular secondary-school history textbooks of recent years, many times reprinted, has been [*Minds and Machines – Britain 1750-1900*](#). Its authors include principal government advisers and established figures within teacher training. Baron Adonis would do well to take a peek. It will give him a perspective on what is going on in history lessons. A lack of Irish history is the least of the problems.

In this book, traditional ‘heroes’ such as Clive of India, General Wolfe, Admiral Nelson and General Gordon are excluded. [Wellington has a role only in relation to Peterloo](#); his role at Waterloo is not mentioned. Nor do many prime ministers get a look-in: Pitt the Elder, Pitt the Younger, Peel and Palmerston are amongst those sidelined. Gladstone merits a minor walk-on part. Instead, new heroes appear, including the American Chief Crowfoot, the African Chief Lobengula, the Fijian Chief Cakobau, the Indian Princess Rani Lakshmi, an Aborigine teacher named Bessy Cameron and Josephine Butler, a British campaigner against sexually transmitted diseases. In the absence of information about what these rediscovered heroes did and said, the book makes up the evidence:

‘We have tried to imagine what they would tell us if they were to come back from the dead.’

Needless to say, this is damning of the British. Further damnation comes from the imagined confessions of British imperialists such as Cecil Rhodes. Welcome, Baron Adonis, to the wonderful world of the ‘undead’ Zombie version of the past now masquerading as British history in schools up and down the country. The knowledge of Irish history that you are calling for is important but, perhaps, our starting point should be the landmark personalities and events from across the British Isles. How many pupils today, for example, know and understand that we are currently living through the hundredth anniversary of the greatest military achievement of the British Army? The crisis in school history relates far more to its anarchic Sex Pistols presentation of Britain’s past rather than to its insufficiencies with regard to Ireland’s past.

Baron Adonis of Camden Town in the London Borough of Camden appears to know little about the school history curriculum, and he understands still less.

To be young, female and black . . . is where it’s at!

What fortunate times these are to be a female university student, especially if you happen to come from an ethnic minority background. ‘Victimhood’ status is conferred automatically. Doubling-up by having both is, as Cecil Rhodes noted in a parallel context, ‘to win first prize in the lottery of life.’ Rhodes’s boast about the good fortune of being born British, now translates into the benefits of gender and non-white skin colour. To update Wordsworth for our own age: ‘Bliss it was in that dawn to be of the fair sex/But to be female and ethnic minority was very heaven.’

Nor are the ‘leg-ups’ associated with race and gender diminishing. The advent of ‘no-platform’ and ‘safe-spaces’ policies at universities is now taking an even more sinister turn. Current restrictions on freedom of speech and on unfettered debate have not gone far enough, it seems. The time has arrived for aberrant, ‘off-message’, professors to have their intellects cleansed. Recantation and re-education are to become the new norm in the senior common room.

The latest chapter in promoting the supremacy of female and ethnic minority 'rights' is known as 'reverse mentoring'. The BBC introduced it last September and now it has spread to universities. Its purpose has been set out by one of its promoters, Professor Jon Rowe of Birmingham University. He told The Times Higher Education Supplement:

In 'normal' mentoring, you tend to have a senior person whose job it is to coach a junior person . . . In reversing that we will take, for example, a black, female academic, who will then explain to a senior white, male professor what it's like being who they are, the journey they've come through and the challenges they have faced.'

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/minority-scientists-mentor-senior-professors-equality-drive>

No mention here, of course, as to reversing the 'reverse mentoring' and having an older white male professor explain to a young black female what it is 'like being who they are, the journey they've come through and the challenges they have faced.'

In terms of empathy 'reverse mentoring' is one-way traffic. 'You must understand me because according to me this is all about me,' appears to be the gist of this new law of dialectics.

Any esteemed professor wishing to avoid the fate of Sir Tim Hunt of University College London would do well to go along with it. This distinguished Nobel prize-winning scientist was forced to resign for observing that women working in labs have a tendency to 'cry' and even to 'fall in love'. Yes, serious stuff this is judged to be, rather than the bit of verbal silliness he admitted.

So, action has been deemed necessary in order to bring stale, male white professors into line. The initial cost of the 'reverse mentoring' scheme will be £5.5 million, funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council.

I do not doubt that racial or gender prejudice occasionally rears its ugly head amongst older members of university authorities, as it does elsewhere in British society. On the whole, though, it is the younger generation with their politically correct credentials that dominate and control thinking at our universities. They are the masters, now.

How else can one explain the student attacks on the white male icons of British imperialism such as Cecil Rhodes and Rudyard Kipling but the veneration of arch-imperialist and racist 'nurse' Mary Seacole?

Seacole lauded the Empire and was, in today's terms, a full-on racist. She described the Turks as 'degenerate Arabs' who were 'worse than fleas' and she was happy to use the n***** word for those with darker than her own. Her statue was erected a couple of years ago in the grounds of St. Thomas's Hospital opposite the Houses of Parliament at a cost of half a million pounds. Having a Jamaican background, though, provides her with immunity from criticism and raises her to the status of Britain's Number 1 black hero/heroine.

'Reverse mentoring' should be called out for what it is – intellectual dishonesty and hypocritical nonsense. This is not to say that young people should not be listened to and understood. It is to say that, generally, age brings with it the benefits of experience, hindsight and accumulated knowledge. Formalised mentoring of the old by the young is to turn society upside. It is revolutionary in the truest sense.

Mostly, the old understand more than the young. There is much truth in old quip, often attributed to Mark Twain, that comes in a number of versions:

When I was a boy of 18, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 25, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years."

Age and experience are, of course, revered in most cultures around the world. It was no accident that, during Mao's cultural revolution, the young turned their fury against Confucianism because of its reverence for ancestors. China's so-called 'Four Olds' of customs, culture, habits and ideas were subject to sustained attack. Much the same was true of Pol Pot's return of Cambodia to Year Zero.

'Reverse mentoring' is another step along the pathway towards purging what remains of intellectual nonconformity – the cornerstone of our once free society.

No comment

It's one of the frustrating things in my job that I know that workload is the single biggest drag factor in the teaching profession today, and there's not actually, it turns out, quite so much as you might hope that the government you can do about it.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds addressing a fringe meeting at the Conservative Party. TES 2.10.18

An estimated 15,000 teachers are snapped up overseas each year, driven away by the stress in British schools.

The Guardian 2.10.18

Lecturers and students back sex workers' freshers stall amid row.

The Argus (Brighton and Hove) 1.10.18

Graduates with 2.2 degrees who train to become history, RE, music and design and technology teachers will receive bursaries for the first time.

Daily Mail, 28.9.2018

...schoolchildren who keep the same best mate as they move to secondary have been found to get better results.

BBC Education 27.9.18

Transgender children are 'a social contagion fuelled by the internet'.

Dr. Nicola Williams of the women's rights group, Fair Play to Women, interviewed on 'talkRADIO' 17.9.18