Leading for the Future:
A summation of The Great Education Debate
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Foreword

During my speech to ASCL’s Annual Conference in March 2013 I referred to Lord Callaghan’s famous Ruskin College (Oxford) speech of 1976 and set out the reasons why I thought the time was right for the profession to have a second ‘great debate’ about the future of our education system.

I have been deeply heartened by the fact that we have witnessed a veritable rush of ideas and leadership coming directly from the profession to promote best practice and drive up standards. I have attended conferences and workshops where groups of professionals have shared inspirational practice in our schools and colleges and learned from one another. Events such as the ResearchEd conference have sprung into existence in days on the back of conversations on Twitter. With increasing volume and confidence the colleagues driving this clamour for ownership of their professional ground have shown real leadership as they continue to seize back the agenda that rightly belongs to them. My optimism has been bolstered further by the growing consensus I am detecting within the profession and among many other stakeholders in education about what really matters to the young people in our care and a determination to work towards those priorities.

At the launch of his inspiring new book *Thinking Allowed: on Schooling*, Mick Waters argued the case for an ‘education spring’, during which we as a profession would create a ‘forward-looking, redefined purpose schooling where the people involved take appropriate responsibility to create a system which is carefully managed, research and practice driven … and focused upon long-term aims, regardless of government’. I could not agree more, and this is precisely the baton that I promised ASCL would take.

As leaders within the profession it is our responsibility to do everything we can to clarify those areas of consensus. We need to take stock, look objectively and without political bias at the evidence of what is and is not working. We need to identify and clarify the areas of consensus and set out a vision that will go beyond this and the next Parliament. We need to do what so many of those often cited high-performing

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1 Speech by Lord James Callaghan, then prime minister of the United Kingdom, at a foundation stone-laying ceremony at Ruskin College, Oxford, on 18 October 1976. [http://education.guardian.co.uk/thegreatdebate/story/0,574645,00.html](http://education.guardian.co.uk/thegreatdebate/story/0,574645,00.html)

2 [http://www.researched2013.co.uk/](http://www.researched2013.co.uk/) ResearchEd started as a grassroots conference held for the first time in 2013. The organisers sought to bring teacher and researcher together - to draw out the best of the practitioner’s experience and the analyst’s theory, and produce something better: evidence based education that fits the classroom, rather than attempts to make the classroom fit it.

jurisdictions do, which is to agree a long-term development plan for the future of our education service, which will rise above short-term political considerations and not be driven by the electoral cycle.

So to sum up our debate, we offer this publication setting out some of the best thinking and contributions to the debate.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the sponsor, Capita SIMS, for their generous support of this publication.

Brian Lightman
ASCL General Secretary
Introduction from the sponsor

The leadership factor
I have been into schools that within seconds I knew were outstanding. How you are greeted, what the reception looks and feels like and how pupils respond to you can tell you a lot about a school. I have also found, in contrast, that the structure of a school – whether it is a free school, an academy or a local authority (LA) school – gives very little indication as to whether the school is a great school or not.

I have been to outstanding schools where the head was relieved to be an academy outside of local authority control. Equally, I have been to other maintained schools that were grateful to have their local authority behind them.

So while we continue to debate which school structure will make the difference for our pupils, I am increasingly convinced that success has less and less to do with structure and more to do with leadership.

Wider leadership
My views on leadership extend beyond the walls of the school, and I feel that any effective debate on leadership should consider all the agencies that have an impact on schools.

For example, the ability of multi-academy trusts to deliver results will vary based on how well they are run and how well they inspire the heads in the chain to succeed.

The leadership of the LA, too, can have an impact on the performance of schools, both for the good and bad. I regularly talk to heads who are delighted with the services that their LA provides and others who choose alternatives because the quality is better.

So is the academy or free school model better or worse than the authority-supported system? Frankly, I don’t think there is a right answer, and the pendulum will continue to swing between the two.

Fundamentally, I believe that the structure of the school does not make a huge difference to outcomes. What really does make a difference is good leadership.
**What makes a good leader?**

What I have learnt is that a school is successful when its leader demands high standards of the teachers and pupils. In fact, it is more than this – it is when the leadership inspires the teachers and pupils.

To do this successfully, a leader will need to be flexible, creative and, above all, positive.

One thing that all successful heads have in common, regardless of the type of school, is that they have the adaptability to react to situations quickly. Good heads do not tolerate poor behaviour or lack of effort, and they reward progress immediately, so pupils know where they stand and what is expected of them.

In one school I know where extreme behaviours, such as graffiti, smashed windows and worse were a regular occurrence, the head set an ambitious target for the school of 100 per cent good behaviour.

A zero-tolerance approach to any issue was backed with additional support – extra reading help for one particular child who always played up during literacy time, for example. As a result of this positive action, behaviour was completely transformed and what was once a high exclusion rate at the school went down to zero.

The success of this initiative had little to do with the structure of the school. It worked well because the head took a positive approach, one that engaged pupils with astonishing results.

**A positive approach**

I have heard countless stories of schools that have transformed behaviour, attainment and the whole school community by rewarding good behaviour rather than simply punishing poor conduct.

Focusing on the positive is enormously powerful and can be effective even in schools that have a long history of underachievement and where poor behaviour has come to be regarded as endemic.

One such school that had been placed in special measures saw a 40 per cent increase in pupil attainment over five years as a direct result of an initiative introduced to ensure that sanctions were dealt with swiftly and pupils were rewarded for good behaviour and achievement.

**Leading by example**

To have the greatest impact, it is essential that the positive approach comes from the top and is then extended directly into the management of schools. This can be achieved in any type of school, from the newest free school to a well-established LA maintained school.
I recently met the executive head of a small academy trust who is having amazing success turning around schools in special measures. He explained to me the trust’s ethos of positivity in the staffroom.

Essentially, the aim in his schools is to create an environment where it is not acceptable for staff and management to simply state what is wrong; they are encouraged to come up with ideas of how things could be done differently and everyone is engaged with the programme of change. All staff are working together to affect positive change as a team – and it works.

**Involving staff**

With the introduction of wide-ranging changes to the way that schools are structured and managed, classroom teachers working far away from the decision-making process could be forgiven for feeling rather distanced from whole-school improvement at a strategic level.

This is where good leadership comes in once again. Teachers are on the front line of delivering change in our society, helping to address underachievement and closing the poverty gap. As such, they should be regarded as allies – partners in change.

As we continue to debate the benefits and drawbacks of how schools should be structured and to whom they should be accountable, I think we need to keep a firm eye on the fundamentals.

School leaders must encourage a culture of positivity towards change that becomes a golden thread running through the whole school. With a workforce (or even a student body) working with you, fully engaged in the overall goal, improvement will be far easier to implement.

Indeed, I would go as far as to say that the structure of a school only becomes crucial if one type of school is more likely to attract good heads than another.

What makes a genuine difference to outcomes is leadership that embraces positivity and engages the whole school community in changing for the better.

Phil Neal
Managing Director Capita SIMS
Overview of the debate

Education policy in the UK has been steadily evolving over the last 30 years, but the trickle of new initiatives and policy changes has turned into a torrent in recent times. Such is the rapid pace of change that today’s education landscape looks much different to that of just a couple of years ago.

Therefore, it seems that it was the right time to have convened a second great debate on the future of education, to begin to build on this emerging consensus. This debate aimed to take stock, look objectively and without political bias at the evidence of what is working and what is not, clarify the areas of consensus and set out a vision that will go beyond this and the next Parliament.

One common feature of countries that do consistently well in education comparisons is that they have a long-term vision for the future of their education service that rises above short-term political considerations and is not driven by the electoral cycle.

There seems to be a growing consensus, among those people who possess expertise and knowledge, about what needs to happen in order for the UK to meet the global challenges facing us now.

The Great Education Debate: 35 years on

It is more than 35 years since Prime Minister James Callaghan in October 1976 launched a great debate on the future of education.

The issues causing concern in the mid-1970s resonate with many of the issues that are still the subject of debate today. The context was different but the headline concerns are familiar:

- whether employers were receiving recruits with the basic skills they needed
- whether enough students were pursuing engineering and science courses
- how to achieve the higher standards and skills needed to compete in a changing world
- the performance of particular groups of pupils
- the content of the curriculum
- reform of the examination system
- the quality of teaching and concern over so-called progressive or ‘informal’ teaching methods
- governance of schools and colleges
- the nature of education and training post-16
The purpose of education

Underpinning these issues was the purpose of education. Lord Callaghan described how the education system had in the past focused too heavily on providing many young people with just enough skills to take their place on industry’s production lines. Education, for the vast majority of pupils, was basic and utilitarian in purpose. He welcomed the growing emphasis on enabling young children ‘to flower’ and reach their full potential – but he also warned of an overreaction to past failures. Getting a balance was vital. In his speech at Ruskin College, he said:

“The goals of our education, from nursery school through to adult education, are clear enough. They are to equip children to the best of their ability for a lively, constructive, place in society, and also to fit them to do a job of work. Not one or the other but both.

“Both of the basic purposes of education require the same essential tools. These are basic literacy, basic numeracy, the understanding of how to live and work together, respect for others, respect for the individual. This means requiring certain basic knowledge, and skills and reasoning ability. It means developing lively inquiring minds and an appetite for further knowledge that will last a lifetime. It means mitigating as far as possible the disadvantages that may be suffered through poor home conditions or physical or mental handicap (sic).”

A further parallel

Then, as now, there had been a period when resources had been injected into education on a substantial scale, partly to meet increased numbers and partly to raise standards. Then, as now, there was a debate on whether that investment had represented good value for money. Then, as now, the country faced serious economic problems with severe constraints on levels of public spending and little expectation of further increased resources. Then, as now, the challenge was how to achieve more with the current resources available.

A signal difference

However, there is one signal and important difference from 1976 to 2014. Lord Callaghan’s speech caused a furore. His words were controversial because the government was seen to be intervening in the world of education professionals. Government was asserting its voice in the domain of the classroom. Lord Callaghan resisted the pressure to ‘keep off the (educational) grass’ owned and tended by teachers. Even before he had stood up to speak, critics were rounding on him and arguing that the state was fettering educational freedom.

1 Speech by Lord James Callaghan, then prime minister of the United Kingdom, at a foundation stone-laying ceremony at Ruskin College, Oxford, on 18 October 1976.
In the decade or so that followed his speech, successive education ministers did not just walk on the educational grass, they took over and occupied the garden. A series of acts of Parliament determined how schools should be governed, who could enter the teaching profession, what should be taught, how they should admit pupils and how they should be funded.

Today, the government’s role in education is taken for granted – in the realm of curriculum content, qualifications and exam systems, improvement and accountability and structures and governance. Indeed the issue is not whether the state should have a say in shaping education but how much of a role is appropriate.

Working towards a self-improving, school-led system

The next stage of our work is to set out a long-term vision that builds on the direction of travel over the past 30 years towards an autonomous and self-improving system. The National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) has been recast in the light of this government’s policy and is seen as a key implementation body for a school-led system. However, the NCTL itself is attempting to move towards the profession taking greater responsibility for some fundamental decisions; for example, the Teaching Schools Council (TSC) is redesigning itself so that it can take on the governance of teaching schools. Government recognises that it cannot deliver a self-improving system; only the profession can. The role of government is to remove obstacles and create the conditions for a self-improving system. School leaders have to be key agents in leading, informing and enabling a self-improving system. Therefore, it is right that the profession of school and college leaders drives the blueprint for a self-improving system.

Leora Cruddas
ASCL Director of Policy
Great Education Debate
Part one: Vision and Purpose

In the framing paper for the first phase of the Great Education Debate on the purpose of education, Independent Education Consultant Dr Robert Hill asks us to consider a number of questions:

- Should we adopt a national statement on the purpose of education?
- If so, what may it say?
- How can we build a broad base of support for a statement of educational purpose?

The key leverage of system change is purpose, so this is where we started our discussion. We asked what it is that as a nation we truly believe about education and its purpose. This is inextricably linked to what we believe about society, social values and social justice.

Director of the Institute of Education (IOE) and Professor of Education at the University of London Chris Husbands, in his contribution to our debate, says we know what must be done. He reminds us: “In the best performing school systems, there is a strong consensus about the purpose, nature and organisation of the school system. There is a reluctance to embark on ill-planned or ill thought out change. Above all, there is a belief – from Helsinki to Singapore and from Ontario to Shanghai – in the moral purpose, professional skill and overwhelming importance of teachers. Educational reform is not a mystery. We know what to do.”

In this introduction, we will pull together what we have learned from the Great Education Debate about what may be the key components of a collective vision. Our debate offers three building blocks upon which system improvement could build:

- achievement for all
- professional skill
- collaboration

Achievement for all

Both Professor Becky Francis from King’s College London and David Hopkins Professor Emeritus at the Institute of Education, University of London and Director of Education for the Bright Tribe Trust, in their contributions to the debate argue that our sense of purpose must be motivated by achievement for all students. Becky Francis argues that we need far greater attention to equality in terms of outcomes for students. David Hopkins interrogates what he calls the “myth that achievement cannot be realised at scale for all students”.

While this seems self-evident, it is a hard ambition to realise. The tail of underachievement and the relatively wide gap between highest and lowest performers in our education system is testimony to this. As Sir John Dunford National Pupil Premium Champion and former ASCL General Secretary says, “Achievement of young people at GCSE has risen considerably, but the gap has remained stubbornly the same. Is it a realistic aspiration that schools can narrow this gap, or should we accept that there will always be a gap between the achievements of the poor and the rest of society?”

In his speech at ASCL’s 2014 Annual Conference, ASCL President Ian Bauckham reflected on whether our education system is optimistic in its approach to achievement for all. He cites the American psychologist Carol Dweck:

“The introduction to her book Mindset, notes that she belongs to a tradition in psychology that shows the power of what people believe. And that tradition, she says, shows also how changing people’s beliefs, even the simplest ones, can have profound effects.

“Dweck identifies two mindsets: the growth and the fixed. Students with growth mindsets believe that there is nothing predetermined or given about their achievement – for them, initial or even repeated failure is an opportunity to learn because they never doubt that with enough work they can succeed. For them, the sky’s the limit.

“Students with a fixed mindset, on the other hand, tend to assume that they are good or bad at something because of the gifts, or lack of gifts, they were born with. For them, education is a process of testing how far they can go with their innate talents, and they experience continual anxiety about living up to the strengths others may have imputed to them. This makes education, and indeed living, a stressful business.”

Ian goes on to argue that “we hear closed mindsets in everyday talk about school as well: ‘Maths is not her strong point; I was never any good at it either – I expect she’s got it from me.’ Or more damagingly still, because it is applied somehow to our whole national capacity: ‘As a nation, we know we are not very good at languages . . .’ – a collectively fixed mindset. Think of some of the terms which are used when we discuss educational potential and achievement . . . ‘bright’, ‘high ability’, ‘low ability’, ‘intelligent’ are traded without thinking as if they are givens.”

This juxtaposition of innate ability versus hard work is illustrated in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2012 reports:\n
1 From www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-volume-i.htm
“The PISA 2012 assessment dispels the widespread notion that mathematics achievement is mainly a product of innate ability rather than hard work. On average across all countries, 32 per cent of 15-year-olds do not reach the baseline Level 2 on the PISA mathematics scale. But in Japan and Korea, fewer than 10 per cent of students – and in Shanghai-China, fewer than 4 per cent of students – do not reach this level of proficiency. In these education systems, high expectations for all students are not a mantra but a reality; students who start to fall behind are identified quickly, their problems are promptly and accurately diagnosed, and the appropriate course of action for improvement is quickly taken.”

What we need is an absolute belief that excellence can be achieved for all. We must reject determinism either by social background or by perceived intelligence. To borrow renowned educator Ron Edmonds’ declarative statements, cited in David Hopkins’ contribution:

- We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all young children whose schooling is of interest to us.
- We already know more than we need to do that.
- Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven’t so far.

Sir John Dunford in his contribution gives us a helpful place to start with six things that school leaders can do.

**Professional skill**

Almost all of our contributors agreed that a focus on the professional skill of teachers is a key part of a collective vision and should be at the heart of any improvement programme. Chris Husbands says, “Above all, we know that school systems improve when the quality of teaching improves.” Becky Francis picks up this theme in her contribution. She says that we must ensure that high-quality teaching and learning is available to all pupils. David Hopkins asserts, “When the focus of policy is the quality of teaching rather than structural change, then student achievement will increase.” Learning from high-performing systems like those in Finland where it took more than 20 years to build a common understanding among teacher educators, university professors and practitioners about the complexity of the teaching profession, Chief Executive of SSAT (The Schools Network) Ltd Sue Williamson offers three key principles for teacher education.
It is now almost a truism to say, “The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.” This was one of the three assertions made in the 2007 McKinsey report; *How the World’s Best-performing School Systems Come Out on Top*. The report argues, “The quality of a school system rests on the quality of its teachers. The evidence that getting the right people to become teachers is critical to high performance is both anecdotal and statistical. … The top-performing systems we studied recruit their teachers from the top third of each cohort graduating from their school system.” Thus, entry to the profession is a key consideration for system improvement.

The second McKinsey statement, much less quoted, is “The only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction.” Where McKinsey uses instruction, they mean the professional skill of teachers – the method and practice of teaching. The report says, “[L]earning occurs when students and teachers interact, and thus to improve learning implies improving the quality of that interaction. They [that is, high-performing education systems] have understood which interventions are effective in achieving this – coaching classroom practice, moving teacher training to the classroom, developing stronger school leaders, and enabling teachers to learn from each other – and have found ways to deliver these interventions throughout their school system.”

So a strong and relentless focus on the professional skill of teachers is needed. But David Hopkins’ contribution cautions us about the “faddism” – a tendency to pick up new or popular ideas that are adopted in a superficial way. He advocates a “rich repertoire of pedagogic practice” and a “deeper search” for improvement that is informed by evidence. Perhaps, as Chair of the New Visions for Education Group Sir Tim Brighouse advocates, we need a national college for teaching, which would be the leading body in setting teacher standards and establishing a rich evidence base.

**Collaboration**

So is it the case that the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers? Finnish educator and scholar Pasi Sahlberg argues that this assumes that teachers work independently from one another. But teaching is perhaps most effective where teachers work collaboratively and see their achievements as the result of their joint effort. Pasi Sahlberg likens the role of an individual teacher in a school to a player on a football team: “all teachers are vital, but the culture of the school is even more important for the quality of the school. Team sports offer numerous examples of teams that have performed beyond expectations because of leadership, commitment and spirit. Take the US ice hockey team in the 1980 Winter Olympics, when a team of college kids beat both Soviets and Finland in the final round.”

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3 Ibid., 17
4 Ibid., 4
5 Ibid., 26
round and won the gold medal. The quality of Team USA certainly exceeded the quality of its players. So can an education system.

The third building block, therefore, which most of our contributors identify, is collaboration. Becky Francis, citing the German educational researcher Andreas Schleicher, points out, “While more autonomous school systems are generally more successful than highly directed ones, there is a much stronger correlation between collaborative culture and system success.”

And David Hopkins, citing another McKinsey report, Capturing the Leadership Premium, attempts to unseat what he calls the myth of school autonomy: “differences in what leaders do are not directly related to the level of autonomy they are given. Internationally, there is no relationship between the degree of autonomy enjoyed by a school principal and their relative focus on administrative or instructional leadership.”

School autonomy is a hotly contested subject. David Hopkins argues that school autonomy is a populist but ultimately flawed rhetoric of freeing schools from bureaucratic control so that they can make their own decisions. However, it is possible to argue, in keeping with Chris Husbands’ call for a small number of ambitious goals, that the principle of subsidiarity enables school leaders to focus on our three building blocks without being distracted by the vagaries of initiatives or political whim.

And, of course, there is some evidence that more autonomous systems are generally more successful where there is a strong focus on collaborative cultures. But, as David Hopkins warns, networking in itself isn’t enough if it is based on shallow and superficial activity – the latest fad. It needs to be rooted in a substantive body of evidence and channelled in a robust and rigorous way. This is the challenge for school and college leaders.

In conclusion, Chris Husbands says in his contribution, “We know that mobilising system support for a small number of ambitious goals can fire the imagination and release energy.” Our Great Education Debate has signalled three of these: first, a firmly held and widely shared belief that every student can achieve regardless of social background or perceived intelligence, second, a focus on building the professional skill of teachers and, third, a commitment to evidence-informed joint practice development.

Leora Cruddas
ASCL Director of Policy

8 In this context, ‘subsidiarity’ means that government should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks that cannot be performed at school level and enabling decision-making closest to the learner.
Extract from debate paper one: the purpose of education

Different perspectives
Put a cross-section of people in a room and ask them, “What is the purpose of education?” and you are likely to get as many different answers as there are people.

Some may focus on the personal value of a ‘good education’. Education, they may say, is about acquiring the knowledge and skills to enable each individual to achieve their ambitions and to become a successful, contributing member of society. Others may stress the role of education in empowering individuals: raising expectations and expanding horizons by supporting learners to understand the influence that they can have on their own life and their own world. Someone else may express a similar view but maintain that if every child is to have the opportunity to reach his or her potential then they need a framework of application and practice to turn dreams into reality.

An employer may put the emphasis on the skills that young people need, such as to be creative, collaborative and productive in the world of work. A government representative may stress the importance to the nation’s economy of having a highly skilled workforce. Or they may highlight the need to develop active citizens.

Others, however, may reject a utilitarian approach and argue that education is an end in its own right. From this point of view, we should build on young children’s natural curiosity, stimulate their imagination and enable them to become enquirers and life-long learners who are able to adapt and innovate as the world around us constantly changes.

Another person may pick up that theme and say that learning how to deal with failure is one of the key tasks of education, since failure breeds resilience, learning and creativity.

A parent in the room may say that emotional wellbeing and having a sound moral compass are as important as educational achievement: becoming a rounded young adult with a wide range of interests and friends should be on a par with levels of attainment.

Others, however, may point to the impact of technology on learning and the way it has opened up access to information, knowledge, theories and opinions. From this viewpoint, education should be about equipping tomorrow’s generation with the skills necessary to engage effectively in a fast-moving and fully digital age.

Of course many in the room may argue that they would want the education system to foster and reflect a combination or even all of these dimensions.
Debate by proxy

In an ideal world we would debate these issues and reach a shared view on the purpose of education. We would determine the relative weight to be accorded to the differing drivers. That would then inform the framing and content of the curriculum, our understanding of teaching, the way we trained our teachers and constructed the examination and accountability systems. This is not as far-fetched as it may sound: other counties such as Singapore do precisely this.

The reality, however, is that the debate on the purpose of education is effectively going by the board. Instead, we are debating the issue by proxy. The real debates that are taking place are about the nature of the curriculum and the form of the assessment and examination system.

Dr Robert Hill
Education Consultant
We know what must be done

We know a great deal about how not to improve schools. We know that school systems are always far more complex than they appear when viewed from the outside – whether that outside is a newspaper editorial writer’s office or a minister’s desk. We know that even the best-intentioned educational reforms founder on the challenges of implementation, as schools struggle with adapting to innovation even as they try to ensure that young people’s routines are not disrupted unnecessarily. We know that you can neither bring about change simply by exhorting teachers to do things differently, nor can you bring about change by bullying and threatening. We know that although striking improvement can be made quickly in ineffective schools, there are no quick fixes in system reform. We know that some reforms – to curriculum, to assessment regimes – are relatively ineffective.

But we also know a great deal about how to bring about sustained, sustainable and systematic improvement in school systems. We understand that standards matter, so that governments need to specify with clarity performance measures for schools, and, as fast as possible, hold these steady in the short-term. We know that mobilising system-wide support for a small number of ambitious goals can fire the imagination and release energy. Above all, we know that school systems improve when the quality of teaching improves. Education reform is effective when it focuses on improving the quality of teaching: challenging poor teaching, building great teaching and providing system tools that drive improvement. The quality of entrants to the teaching profession matters, and the quality of initial teacher education matters. In the medium term, high-quality teacher education, with a strong grounding in the research evidence on teaching, can help to build a high-quality profession. And we also know that sustained education improvement depends on building an initial teacher education with systematic continuing professional development (CPD), geared around enhancing the professional skills of teaching.

We know all these things. Yet, time and again, we chose to forget them. The best performing school systems have learnt them. In the best performing school systems, there is a strong consensus about the purpose, nature and organisation of the school system. There is a reluctance to embark on ill-planned or ill-thought out change. Above all, there is a belief – from Helsinki to Singapore, from Ontario to Shanghai – in the moral purpose, professional skill and overwhelming importance of teachers. Educational reform is not a mystery. We know what to do.

Professor Chris Husbands
Director of the Institute of Education (IOE) and Professor of Education,
University of London
A great education for all?

The Great Education Debate is certainly timely: both the government and its critics seem increasingly unclear on the purpose of education. This lack of clarity is exemplified across a range of current policy moves and debates. For example, are examinations intended to certify the acquisition of knowledge that we deem all young people to need, or are they intended to distinguish ‘those who can’ from ‘those who can’t’? Do we have expectations of equity of opportunity for all young people in relation to their access to a body of knowledge, or should ‘choice’ from diverse offers be paramount? These debates invariably relate closely to questions of social justice.

A strong concern with quality and ‘rigour’ has been a hallmark of this government’s educational policy making. But we also need far greater attention to equality – both in terms of access to high-quality provision, and to the quality of provision in different institutions – ensuring that high-quality teaching and learning is available to all pupils. We may characterise this as excellence for all.

Yet, currently, quality across the system is notoriously patchy. This implies a lack of equality of opportunity for young people, and also contributes to the close relationship between social background and achievement. My report on ‘satisfactory’ schools highlighted the overrepresentation of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in struggling schools, and their affluent counterparts in ‘good’ and ‘outstanding’ schools. Clearly we have seen a tightening of accountability in the rightful expectation that struggling schools improve – but no simultaneous system or offer to support these schools to do so. This is a fundamental omission.

To be fair, the government’s approach to this issue is to encourage school-to-school collaboration and the resultant spread of best practice and support. Securing this collaboration for improvement is fundamental, and a concern remains that it will not be universal across the system. There are of course numerous exemplary cases – the Academies Commission, of which I was a part, was privileged to have heard from many, and Commission Chair Christine Gilbert CBE has written on the energy generated by the ‘bottom-up’ movement for collaborative practice between schools. However, as we reported, we also heard from schools that felt they needed to target their energies at competition rather than collaboration, and that some governing bodies see school-to-school support as a low priority. Responding to the Academies Commission report,1 the Organisation for Economic Cooperation

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1 Pearson/RSA Academies Commission, 2013, Unleashing Greatness: Getting the best from an Academised System
and Development’s (OECD’s) Andreas Schleicher pointed out that, while more autonomous school systems are generally more successful than highly directed ones, there is a much stronger correlation between collaborative culture and system success. Indeed, he noted that the lowest performing schools in the OECD have autonomy but no collaborative culture. He argued that a danger is that, if incentives are not found to secure school-to-school collaboration, we will see brilliant practice in some areas and groups, while other schools continue in isolation. It was this concern that led the Academies Commission to recommend that converter academies be held to account for their commitments to support struggling schools, and that Ofsted judge school leadership ‘outstanding’ only if a contribution to system-wide improvement can be evidenced.

The concern about a current lack of oversight to ensure that schools – or indeed areas – do not fall through the cracks in terms of collaborative support, is a valid one. Given the evidence of the success of London Challenge, and the insights for future practice gleaned from its evaluation, that model offers clear potential to address this problem. The transformation of education in London is a success every bit as noteworthy as some of the international cases so regularly brought to our attention. We have learnt much from evaluations of previous City Challenges: especially, Hutchings’s evaluation for the DfE highlights the necessity of a strong infrastructure of support. System-wide improvement does need to be managed.

Importantly, such collaborative systems will improve teaching and extend best practice in pedagogy and professionalism. We need to facilitate systematically the professional development and life-long learning of existing teachers. This won’t be achieved via endless disparagement, but via constructive and high-quality collaborative initiatives. The impetus to instigate a College of Teaching (Royal or otherwise!) promises a significant contribution to the promotion of professionalism and development.

The balance between professional autonomy and system management to ensure consistent quality is a difficult one, and we have seen both wild swings and contradictory messages from policy makers over recent years. We need a balanced position that facilitates professional autonomy and continuing professional development (CPD), but maintains high expectations for all, to ensure the consistent quality and resulting equality of access to a great education that all young people deserve.

Professor Becky Francis
King’s College London

2 Hutchings, Merryn, et al., 2012, Evaluation of the City Challenge Programme
Exploding the Myths of School Reform

The title of my new book – Exploding the Myths of School Reform – is deliberately provocative. It is underpinned by a conviction that the failure of so many educational reform efforts to impact on the learning and performance of students is due to misguided action based on a number of myths associated with school reform that remain prevalent in education to the present day. The book is about myth busting and outlines ten myths that constrain the realisation of the moral purpose of school and system reform. In this paper for The Great Education Debate, I outline four of my favourites.

The myth that achievement cannot be realised at scale for all students

In beginning to explode the myth that achievement cannot be realised at scale for all students, it is instructive to go way back to the 1970s, to the very start of the effective schools movement. It was then that the renowned educator Ron Edmonds, who became known as the movement's initial leader in the United States, posed the following challenge by way of three declarative statements:

1 We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all young children whose schooling is of interest to us.
2 We already know more than we need to do that.
3 Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far.

Although these declarations are now more than 30 years old, in several respects Edmonds' assertions ring true in underlining the aspiration that student achievement can be realised at scale if it is underpinned by a strong sense of moral purpose and will. A recent review of the research on school and system improvement, however, suggests that Edmonds was both right and wrong.

Edmonds' passion for school effectiveness and social justice was certainly right, as was his aspiration for the realisation of potential for all students. He was also correct when he intimated that this passion was not being realised in the current context. Where he was almost certainly wrong was his contention that enough was known back then to improve all schools ‘whenever and wherever we choose’. As I argue in Exploding the Myths of School Reform, it is only now, in the light of sufficient

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3 Hopkins, David, 2013, Exploding the Myths of School Reform, Berkshire, Open University Press/McGraw Hill Education
4 Edmonds, Ron, 1979, Effective schools for the urban poor, Educational Leadership, 37(1), 15–27, p. 23
contextually specific knowledge, that we are learning enough to be helpful to most professional educators in meeting the challenge of improvement posed by school reform in the 21st century.

The myth of school autonomy

Having set the scene, we need now to sketch out in more detail the architecture of school and system reform. The myth that is particularly relevant here relates to autonomy. The myth of autonomy is currently highly popular given the increasing prevalence of 'right of centre' governments to embrace the trend towards the devolution of school management. The rhetoric is that if we let schools be free – that is, release them from bureaucratic control and encourage independence, self-governance and making one's own decisions – then they will flourish. This is an attractive and populist image.

However, we know from the evidence of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)\(^6\) that there is no correlation between decentralisation and achievement, and that the world's best performing educational systems sustain improvement by:

- establishing collaborative practices around teaching and learning
- developing a mediating layer between the schools and the centre
- nurturing tomorrow's leadership

The McKinsey report on *Capturing the Leadership Premium* is unequivocal when it states “Finally, differences in what leaders do are not directly related to the level of autonomy they are given. Internationally, there is no relationship between the degree of autonomy enjoyed by a school principal and their relative focus on administrative or instructional leadership.”\(^7\)

Exploding this myth is not an exercise in negativity because the evidence that disproves it also helps us acquire a more sophisticated understanding of the contours of a new educational landscape. There is an important caution to be entered here, however. As with all the other myths, just because it is wrong or misguided does not mean that the status quo should be endorsed. In most cases the myth is correct in identifying a problem; sadly, it is the solutions that are invariably wrong.

Debunking the autonomy myth, however, is both tricky and vital. Tricky, because it is ubiquitous as well as populist; vital, because if we allow the simple-minded form

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of autonomy to flourish, a few schools may well improve, but the variation in school performance will inevitably increase and social equity will remain a far off goal.

The myth that teaching is either an art or a science

In exploding the myth that teaching is either an art or science, and establishing that it is both, the argument follows the traditions of good science, in working from observations, to developing propositions and then testing their value in practice. The theories of action for teaching and learning that we have recently developed emerged inductively from the work of hundreds of teachers we have been working with in both the UK and Australia.\(^8\) Having synthesised many instructional rounds and established a composite set of theories of action, I tested them against the research evidence. Here John Hattie's book *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of over 800 Meta-analyses Relating to Achievement* proved invaluable.\(^9\)

In summary, the theories of action for the teacher established as a result of this process are:

1. When teachers set learning intentions and use appropriate pace and have a clear and strong narrative about their teaching and curriculum, then students are more secure about their learning, and achievement and understanding is increased.

2. When learning tasks are purposeful, clearly defined, differentiated and challenging, then the more powerful, progressive and precise the learning for all students.

3. When teachers systematically use higher order questioning, the level of student understanding is deepened and their achievement is increased.

4. When teachers consistently use feedback and data on student actions and performance, then behaviour becomes more positive and progress accelerates.

5. When peer assessment and assessment for learning (AfL) are consistently utilised, student engagement, learning and achievement accelerates.

6. If teachers use cooperative group structures/techniques to mediate between whole-class instruction and students carrying out tasks, then the academic performance of the whole class will increase as well as the spirit of collaboration and mutual responsibility.\(^10\)

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8 Northern Metropolitan Region (NMR), 2011, *Curiosity and Powerful Learning: Northern Metropolitan Region School Improvement Strategy*, East Melbourne, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development


The myth that innovation and networking always add value to school reform

This myth is a tricky one, for it flies in the face of conventional wisdom. Everywhere we go in this postmodern world of ours we are being encouraged to be innovative, to grasp the future and embrace transformational change. That is all well and good, but if basic knowledge management practices are not in place, then innovation, which by definition builds on the best of existing knowledge, will be futile.

There seem to be four interrelated issues here:

- The first is that, at present, teaching cannot be called an evidence-based profession. Although research-based practice is ostensibly a prominent feature of many teacher education, leadership development and school improvement programmes, it is not systematically embedded in the day-to-day professional practices of educators across the system.

- Second, there is no explicit professional agreement on what is good practice. This problem is compounded or compensated for by ‘faddism’ – a tendency to pick up new or popular ideas that are adopted in a superficial way.

- Third, most educational research is expressed in a way that is not immediately accessible by teachers. Even when it is of good quality, it is rarely presented in an implementable form.

- As a consequence, networking and professional learning become largely superficial activities because the discourse they are designed to engender has nothing substantive to focus on.

The critical point here is that in embracing innovation, networking and professional learning, both school and system reform efforts need to be channelled in robust and rigorous ways to ensure that the transfer of practices that impact most directly on student achievement are at the heart of the matter.

Coda

Discussion of the myths stems from a deep frustration that despite what we collectively know about school and system reform, the potential contained in this knowledge is not systematically realised. This is because, as Michael Fullan says, “the wrong drivers are chosen”\(^\text{11}\) and often occurs because of ineptness, misunderstanding or cultural and bureaucratic hegemony. So, as Machiavelli presciently commented, “It seems to me better to follow the real truth of things

\(^\text{11}\) Fullan, M, 2011, ‘Choosing the wrong drivers for whole system reform’, CSE Seminar Series paper no. 204, May, East Melbourne, Centre for Strategic Education
than an imaginary view of them.”¹² This is what I have attempted to do, and the overarching narrative goes something like this:

1. We know much about school and system reform, as is evidenced here.
2. Unfortunately, this knowledge is often misused and an illusion or myth is generated that leads in unproductive directions and consequently has little impact on the learning and achievement of students.
3. In order to fulfil our moral purpose we must correct the myths and present ‘the real truth of things’.
4. We need then to couch them as theories of action within an overall strategy for school and system reform. As follows:
   - When schools and systems are driven by moral purpose then all students are more likely to fulfil their potential.
   - When the focus of policy is on the quality of teaching rather than structural change, then student achievement will increase.
   - When teachers acquire a richer repertoire of pedagogic practice then students’ learning will deepen.
   - When teachers and schools go deeper in their search for improvement (rather than adopting fads) then the student learning experience also deepens and outcomes improve.

David Hopkins
Professor Emeritus at the Institute of Education (IOE), University of London and Director of Education for the Bright Tribe Trust

Improve national decision making

Over the last 70 years there have been gradual changes in educational policy making that add up to a significant and unhealthy imbalance in the respective influence of those mainly involved. This manifests itself in:

- a failure to make enough progress in addressing issues of underachievement among young children from disadvantaged backgrounds
- too much power at a national level, especially in the hands of the Secretary of State
- an undermining of the teacher’s voice and role in matters that are properly professional rather than political – especially in the curriculum and how to teach
- inappropriate influence of market forces in areas of school provision where market forces put at risk the overriding duty of the state to secure equity and equality for its citizens
- decisions about policy that owe too much to anecdote and not enough to weighing the evidence

One can argue, therefore, that it is time to take stock and to adopt changes that would improve the way national policies affecting schools are made.

I accept and welcome the need for change in educational policies in response both to the accelerated pace of change more widely and to our increased knowledge of what works. What I am anxious about is the need to ensure the best possible response to that need for change and to minimise unexpected and undesirable outcomes.

Any schooling system does not operate in isolation. Schools – and those who set policy for them – have to respond to the national and international context in which they sit.

National decision-making could be improved if the following five ‘test questions’ were to be applied and addressed in White Papers and minister’s actions taken towards detailed implementation.

1. How is the proposed change intended to improve life’s chances for all young children, especially those who are gaining least from the schooling system?

2. Does the proposed change improve the skills and quality of, and promote respect and trust in, the teaching profession?

3. What is the evidence to support this change?
Within the context of the desirability of the principle of democratic accountability and subsidiarity, will the proposed change increase or decrease the power of the centre and the Secretary of State?

Does the change promote collaboration among schools and guard against the dangers of leaving schools and their pupils unfairly exposed to market forces?

I would urge any government to adopt the ‘test questions’ as their means of governance and to set out its priorities for its programme as a means of redressing some of the serious and threatening imbalances that have emerged under all governments over the last 30 years.

Among the priorities where I think answers to our ‘test questions’ would suggest some changes in current practice are the following:

- access to high-quality early years provision for the most vulnerable
- the curriculum
- examinations
- admission policies and practices
- securing a sufficient supply of suitably qualified teachers
- methods of accountability
- funding support for some 16-19 year-olds
- transitions in education

Of course, I accept that in a system where there is appropriate trust in the teaching profession many of the issues to which we draw attention will be powerfully affected by day-to-day practice.

I accept, therefore, that the actions of individual schools given their autonomy should also be subject to a similar set of tests but believe that they should be promulgated initially by the profession itself, acting I hope through a College for Teaching, which I have advocated elsewhere.

Sir Tim Brighouse  
Chair of the New Vision Group
The Pupil Premium: a chance to make a big difference

Since 1997, the government has tried to close the educational achievement gap between disadvantaged young children and others in England and has had no success. Achievement of young people at GCSE has risen considerably, but the gap has remained stubbornly the same. Is it a realistic aspiration that schools can narrow this gap, or should we accept that there will always be a gap between the achievements of the poor and the rest of society? As natural optimists, can school leaders make a real difference to this situation?

Any definition of the purpose of education would surely include maximising the life chances of all young people by making them work-ready, life-ready and ready for further learning. And any national school system should surely recognise that this is a more difficult job for schools with some young people than with others. That recognition is at the core of the Pupil Premium (PP) and its laudable aim to narrow the gap between the attainment of disadvantaged young people and others.

Twenty years ago the Council of the Secondary Heads Association (as ASCL was then called) debated the plight of schools and colleges in disadvantaged areas (SCIDAs being our acronym for this) and campaigned for extra funds to enable them to do more with disadvantaged pupils, especially where they had a large number of them.

To an extent, our campaign yielded results as one initiative after another – Excellence in Cities (EiC), Education Action Zones (EAZs) and so forth – was rolled out by the government. But only when the London Challenge began to target individual schools, instead of whole areas, did additional funding produce significantly improved results for city children.

The Pupil Premium is better than all of these schemes, in that it funds schools for every individual disadvantaged child – and the additional funding dwarfs all previous schemes. In 2014-15, Pupil Premium funding will total approximately £2.5 billion – a big commitment on the part of the government and a huge challenge for schools to use it successfully in order to close the gap.

The attainment gap between disadvantaged young children and others is much larger in England than in nearly all other countries – and it becomes wider as they get older.
A 16 per cent difference between disadvantaged and others at age 11 becomes 27 per cent at GCSE grades A* to C, including English and maths.\textsuperscript{13} In some counties, the gap at age 16 is a shocking 40 per cent.

Good school leaders are never defeatist and, in my work as Pupil Premium Champion, I have met no resistance to the notion that schools should use this money to close the gap and be held to account for the progress and attainment of disadvantaged children and the size of the gap. Indeed, school leaders recognise that few things could be more important for schools than finding the best ways of giving extra support to disadvantaged young people.

Effective use of the Pupil Premium is at the core of the moral purpose of school leadership. There are at least six things that schools can do:

1. Prioritise closing the gap, ensuring that every member of staff is fully signed up to the importance of this.

2. Study the evidence of what works and implement the strategies that are likely to be most effective in the context of the school. Use the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) toolkit and study excellent practice in other schools that are successful in closing the gap.

3. Train all the staff on the strategies to be adopted. Success won’t come without this.

4. Regularly collect and analyse data on the gap and target strategies at the needs of individual Pupil Premium children.

5. Raise aspirations by working with the parents as well as young people.

6. Plan the curriculum so that disadvantaged young people leave school with the knowledge and skills they need.

In the words of Andreas Schleicher of the OECD, “Our data shows it doesn’t matter if you go to a school in Britain, Finland or Japan, students from a privileged background tend to do well everywhere. What really distinguishes education systems is their capacity to deploy resources where they can make the most difference. Your effect as a teacher is a lot bigger for a student who doesn’t have a privileged background than for a student who has lots of educational resources.”\textsuperscript{14}

This strikes a chord with our mission as school leaders. If we can respond to the massive challenge to use the Pupil Premium funding to close the gap, we will have gone a long way to fulfilling the purpose of education for the young people who


need it most. We will have accepted the notion that no young person, by virtue of their birth, should necessarily achieve less than others. This is a challenge to which every school leader must respond.

Dr Sir John Dunford
National Pupil Premium Champion and former general secretary of ASCL
New professionalism

Throughout my professional life, I have always tried to read widely, but, as David Hargreaves has told me on a number of occasions, I have not read enough. I have always excused myself by saying that I’m too busy and have tended to dip into books. There have been exceptions when I have dedicated time to reading and research; for example, in my second year of teaching, I started to study for a masters in history of education, and loved every minute of the two-year programme, because it was so relevant to my work in the classroom. This year, I read Professional Capital by Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan and immediately thought that it should be compulsory reading for every teacher in the UK.

In Finland it took more than 20 years to build common understanding among teacher educators, university professors and practitioners about the complexity of the teaching profession. They are now clear that teacher education has to be research-based and that there are three key principles:

1 Teachers need a deep knowledge of the most recent advances of research in the subjects they teach. They also need to be familiar with the research on how something can be taught and learned.

2 Teachers must adopt a research-orientated attitude toward their work. This means teachers learning to take an analytical and open-minded approach to their work, drawing conclusions for the development of education, based on different sources of evidence coming from the recent research as well as their own critical and professional observations and experiences.

3 Teacher education in itself should also be an object of study and research.

As we know, teaching in Finland is a much-desired profession and parents trust teachers. What can we take from the Finnish system and use to define the new professionalism for teachers in England?

The one sure way to raise standards in schools is to have an outstanding team of teachers, who are constantly learning themselves. How can we achieve this for every school in the UK? What does this mean for Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and continuing professional development (CPD)? How can we ensure that all teachers find the time to read and look at research, as well as being researchers themselves?

Now is the time to define our profession – we must not leave it to others.

Sue Williamson
Chief Executive, SSAT (The Schools Network) Ltd

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15 Hargreaves, Andy and Fullan, Michael, Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in every School, Oxon, Routledge
Vision and Purpose
- achievement for all
- professional skill
- collaboration

Leadership and Learning
- a compelling curriculum vision
- rich pedagogical practice
- strong assessment strategy and practice

The Leadership Challenge
- create value
- lead the system
- imagine the future
Great Education Debate
Part two: Leadership and Learning

In his framing paper, Dr Robert Hill considers the curriculum debate. He reflects the arguments of those who make the case for a knowledge-based curriculum versus those who argue that to focus solely on knowledge is to misunderstand the nature of effective learning.

Ian Bauckham, ASCL President 2013-14, argues that skills and knowledge are equally important and that we need to move beyond the polarisation that has characterised some recent debates about the curriculum. He cites Daniel Willingham, an American cognitive psychologist, who argues, “Knowledge comes into play mainly because if we want our students to learn how to think critically, they must have something to think about”. But Ian takes it further and says, “It’s true that knowledge gives students something to think about, but a reading of the research literature from cognitive science shows that knowledge does much more than just help students hone their thinking skills: it actually makes learning easier. Knowledge is not only cumulative, it grows exponentially. Those with a rich base of factual knowledge find it easier to learn more – the rich get richer.”

Robert Hill cites Charles Fadel, Chair of the Center for Curriculum Redesign in Boston, who identified four dimensions as necessary in a 21st century curriculum.1

Philip Dent picks up the idea of scale and pace of change in a 21st century global community. He argues for what he calls a progression whole – taking account of the whole person and their whole journey into adulthood.

In this introduction, we will try to encapsulate some of the following points that arise from our debate in relation to the leadership of learning, curriculum and assessment:

- a compelling curriculum vision
- rich pedagogical practice
- strong assessment strategy and practice

In giving consideration to a curriculum vision, pedagogical practice and assessment, we need to be mindful perhaps of the knowledge, skills, behaviours, values and

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1 Figure 1 identifies the four dimensions that Fadel argues are needed in a 21st century curriculum.
thinking that we wish to develop in our young people as they move through the education system.

**A compelling curriculum vision**

Ian Bauckham argues that there is significant scope now for individual schools to develop and implement their own curricular philosophy. This is not a question of the national curriculum, which is currently statutory for maintained schools but not for academies. Nor should the curriculum be simply a pragmatic or instrumentalist response to qualification reform and accountability measures. School and college leaders must decide on a curricular vision and philosophy that will suit the context in which they are working – one that inspires and enables young people to achieve and be successful, rounded people.

Sir Anthony Seldon, in his contribution called ‘Ignorance and Wisdom’, says that we need an organic model that “sees each young person as a unique human being, born with inalienable gifts and talents, and with a unique mission in life. The job of a good education system … is to help that child find their inner purpose and loves, and to develop all their innate talents.”

Alongside this, we must heed Cameron Butt’s and Jordan Buck’s (students at Lawrence Sheriff School in Rugby) thoughtful reflections on the need for education to be enjoyable and relevant. Part of a commitment to achievement for all students is an education system that is stimulating and relevant in a global society.

Finally, ASCL Colleges Specialist Stephan Jungnitz argues that the curriculum should not be determined by Parliament. Arguably, it is perhaps the role of government to establish a challenging and appropriate standards framework for student outcomes, in the form of benchmarks and rigorous public examinations, and provide transparent accountability for schools and colleges in meeting these. It is the role of school and college leaders to determine a curricular vision and philosophy. A key challenge of this will be to support teachers and middle leaders to develop the skills of curriculum development.

**Rich pedagogical practice**

Many of our contributors talk about the methods and practice of teaching. After years of those methods and practices being centrally imposed through initiatives like the National Strategies, it is now time to re-engage the profession in a debate about pedagogy.

Headmaster of Wellington College in Berkshire Sir Anthony Seldon says that the young person should be actively rather than passively engaged in their learning. He eschews the concept of education as a conveyor belt along which young people pass, with appropriate bits of mechanised knowledge inserted into them at different points. He invites us to consider an altogether more organic, richer set of methods and practices.
Dr Lynne Sedgmore CBE, Executive Director of the 157 Group\(^2\), reminds us that vocational learning has a lot to offer in relation to a discussion about methods and practices of teaching: a strong focus on team work and problem solving, a focus on learning by doing, developing the meta skill of learning to learn, a heightened degree of learning by watching and practising, the embedding of broader critical skills and a ‘blended’ pedagogy using varied methodologies and technologies.

We are perhaps poised at a moment where it is possible to reclaim the methods and practices of teaching as the responsibility of the profession. We are no longer tied either by government initiatives or by the inspectorate to particular practices. More recently, Ofsted has been explicit in not favouring any particular style of teaching. Now is the time for us to explore new forms of teaching and learning and introduce into our schools and colleges richer and more varied pedagogical practices that connect with our students – that inspire, engender curiosity and provoke thought and progression in learning.

**Strong assessment strategy and practices**

Robert Hill proposes that the assessment debate to a degree reflects the curriculum debate in that those who value knowledge tend to believe that exams should test the acquisition and application of knowledge; while those who value skills tend to favour a broader, more flexible approach to assessment. As with curricula, this polarisation is ultimately unhelpful. We need both formative and summative assessment processes – and we need teachers who put assessment at the heart of their practice.

The removal of national curriculum levels is both a challenge and an opportunity. It is undoubtedly difficult that a national scaffold of learning and a shared language of assessment have been removed. However, the opportunity may outweigh the challenge: we have the opportunity for the profession to lead the way in developing good assessment practice. A stronger emphasis on the practice of formative assessment is likely to mean that assessment becomes an integral part of the learning process, not a crude indicator for national statistical purposes.

Assistant General Secretary responsible for policy at the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) Nansi Ellis states categorically that the primary purpose of assessment must be to support learning: “Teachers assess their pupils all the time and are best placed to choose the form of assessment to suit the learning.” She wants to see “a better understanding of different assessment methods used to assess what a student knows, what they can do, whether they can apply their knowledge and skills in new situations”.

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\(^2\) The 157 Group is a consortium of 29 of the UK’s largest FE Colleges.
Head of Public Policy at AQA Dale Bassett agrees. Dale says that assessment can and must get better: “Assessment should support, not hinder, good teaching and learning. It should help teachers – and students themselves – keep track of progress. It should identify strengths to build on and weaknesses to address. It should provide a formative basis for improvement. It should recognise achievement. It should facilitate progression by providing a passport that demonstrates what young people can actually do.”

The challenge for school and college leaders is that while assessment skills are improving, not every classroom yet benefits from consistent, high-quality formative assessment. In the absence of levels, every school needs an assessment strategy that will develop teachers’ assessment practice.

If this is the challenge for school and college leaders, then there is also a challenge for the assessment community. As Nansi Ellis says, the challenge is “to move away from the assumption that the only way to assess with rigour is to test all students on the same day and in the same way. I challenge the assessment community to develop assessment methods that can give consistent results while enabling pupils to choose different ways of being assessed.”

In conclusion, there is a moment now – a window of opportunity – for school and college leaders to seize the opportunity to cultivate their curricula vision and philosophy, develop rich repertoires of teaching methods and practices that enthuse, inspire and progress learning and improve assessment practice so that it supports and advances learning and achievement.

Leora Cruddas
ASCL Director of Policy
Extracts from the curriculum and assessment debate

The curriculum debate

On one side of the debate are those, including the government, who believe that the curriculum should be based on imparting and building up knowledge. They see a knowledge-based curriculum as being a tool of social mobility, bringing greater educational opportunity to disadvantaged children. The argument runs like this:

- Knowledge helps to drive cognitive processes like problem solving and reasoning. Proponents of this view, such as American psychologist Daniel Willingham, argue that the richer the knowledge base, the more smoothly and effectively these cognitive processes – the very ones that teachers target – operate.\(^1\) Acquiring knowledge triggers a virtuous circle in which knowledge helps students to acquire and remember new information, solve problems and improve thinking.

- Young people who grow up in disadvantaged circumstances often have fewer opportunities to learn at home and so come to school with less knowledge. A knowledge-rich curriculum can help to compensate for what their peers from more advantaged backgrounds have acquired.

The curriculum should therefore be based around what is often referred to as ‘core knowledge’ – a concept developed by another American professor, Edward Hirsch. The ‘core knowledge’ approach builds up a list of things a child should know – whether words, books, concepts or history – on a year-by-year basis. The approach is reflected in the way that the government has gone about re-writing the National Curriculum.

Those who espouse this view argue that knowledge will inform and enhance the development of other skills that young people need in order to be effective learners.

On the other side of the argument are those, such as Professor Guy Claxton, Co-Director of the Centre for Real-World Learning (CrL) at the University of Winchester, who argue that to focus solely or mainly on knowledge is to misunderstand the nature of effective learning. Achievement, for example, requires application and resilience as well as knowledge and intelligence. The demands of today’s society require “inquisitive, experimental, reflective and sociable” learners. Learning is

practical as well as factual; collaborative as well as individual; and requires self-knowledge as well as core knowledge. The task for teachers is to act as learning coaches and help their students develop the attributes that they will need later in life.

In a mirror image of Daniel Willingham’s view, Professor Claxton argues that students who are more confident of their own learning ability learn faster and learn better, “They concentrate more, think harder and find learning more enjoyable. They do better in their tests and external examinations.”

Some countries, therefore, are beginning to put less of an emphasis on the content of the curriculum. Finland, for example, is “[t]rying to reduce content and give more time to learning… We want to boost critical thinking, citizenship and we also have cross-curricular themes which should be going through every subject… sustainability, responsibility, humanity, safety, taking responsibility for your community and entrepreneurship.”

A third way comes from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). It describes how the conventional approach of schools to problems was to break these down into manageable bits and pieces, and then teach students the techniques to solve them. But, the OECD argues, today individuals create value by synthesising the disparate bits. Learners need to be open-minded: able to make connections between ideas that previously seemed unrelated. This requires being familiar with and receptive to knowledge in different fields and learners who can constantly learn and grow. The OECD points to the work of Charles Fadel, Chairman of the Center for Curriculum Redesign in Boston. As Figure 1 illustrates, Charles Fadel identifies four dimensions that are needed in a 21st century curriculum, along with the challenges for those with the responsibility for developing curricula.

The assessment debate

The assessment debate to a degree reflects the curriculum debate. Those who place great store by knowledge content tend to view that exams should test the acquisition and application of that knowledge through formal tests and exams. So we now have phonics and spelling and grammar tests. GCSE and A level exams are no longer to be modular and mostly exclude coursework – instead testing students on the range of the knowledge they have covered during the course.

Those favouring a more skills-based approach to learning argue for a broader and more flexible approach to assessment. They tend to support including assessment

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2 Claxton, Guy, What it is, Building Learning Power, www.buildinglearningpower.co.uk/what_it_is.html
of input into assignments, and projects that enable students to demonstrate creative, planning and reasoning skills – alongside their knowledge of a particular subject. The International Baccalaureate (IB), for example, assesses students in one subject from six subject groups. But, in addition, students take a course in the theory of knowledge, write an extended essay and participate in a non-examined module that focuses on creativity, sport and community service.

The OECD is thinking of changing the way it conducts its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) to include creativity and reasoning skills. In 2012, a problem-solving test was added to the PISA menu and the plan is to develop assessment for further ‘21st century skills’ in future PISA tests.

Lying behind the issue of how we test and assess students are other big issues. Some people argue that pupils and schools in England are subject to too many exams. They say that the focus on testing has bred a culture in which too often young people are taught or drilled to pass tests rather than become mature learners. They point to those countries that wait until pupils are 16 years of age before requiring them to participate in standardised tests.

Source: Summary in Schleicher (2012)⁵

Some propose that as young people are required to participate in education and training until they are 18, assessment at 16 (for all but core subjects) is unnecessary and should be abolished in favour of a more baccalaureate or high-school graduation-style assessment on leaving school.

There are also those teachers and educationalists who believe that the emphasis on external testing has been at the expense of developing expertise in using formative assessment – in particular providing effective feedback to students to help them improve their learning.

But ranged against those views are those who say that those education systems that abandon standardised tests become flabby and complacent about their overall performance. The tests and exams provide a passport of achievement for young people and enable parents and policy makers to hold schools to account for pupil progress and achievement.

Dr Robert Hill
Education Consultant
The progression [w]hole

What school or other education provider does not have an admirable vision statement that seeks the successful and flourishing lives of its learners as positive contributors to 21st century society? But, there is a great ‘hole’ in our concept of education, a progression hole – a telling gap between what education is for (its fundamental purpose in preparing learners to thrive in society) and the policies and practices employed to achieve this goal for every child.

The complex mix of factors that impact on this grand vision for education are far beyond the gift of teaching, curriculum and assessment to bestow. The system needs to be built on a whole-person view of the development needs of children and to apply each part of the whole system in keeping with the whole journey outcomes that this vision champions. What is education for? We call it ‘whole person, whole journey progression’. That’s the Progression Whole.

Expanding the vision for education to such broad aspirations about social good, however, cannot be achieved by adding more responsibilities on to a teacher’s job description and crow-barring more content into our narrowly focused curriculum. We must value teaching as highly as when in preceding centuries it was the route to the emancipation and empowerment of the poor and disenfranchised. The education revolution needed today is of equal scale, since it has to ensure that young people born now can not only survive, but thrive and lead in a global community where the pace and scale of change is unimaginable to us today. It has been said that it is better to teach someone how to fish than to give them a fish. While our system continues to give out too many fish and teaches some skills, we need to create a system (to continue the analogy) that builds the capacity to learn how to find alternative food sources when fish stocks run out and fishing is a redundant skill.

Here are the basics:

**Whole person**: young people progress successfully into thriving lives because of a complex mix of cognitive, non-cognitive, social, emotional and other factors, which the current system pays insufficient and incoherent attention to.

**Whole journey**: the provision at each stage of the journey is not designed to build coherently towards the end vision: a thriving adulthood. Talented professionals are shoe-horned into narrow roles with short-term goals.

**Whole system**: the targets that govern the purpose of each element of the system do not add up to the vision. The reactive or remedial approach to ‘under-performance’ means that the system ends up serving itself rather than the young people that should be its focus.
Whole person, whole journey

‘Whole person, whole journey progression’ describes a view of education and the associated support systems that enable life-long progression success for all children and young people. Mainstream education must be seen within this courageous vision and alongside the range of other stakeholder inputs that impact on life-long progression outcomes.

The unique challenges of the world in the 21st century require a better understanding of the underpinning personal capacities that are the difference between the success and failure of otherwise identical young people. Leading policy and research reports in health, socioeconomics and national economic policy all point to the fundamental importance of a broad conceptualisation of personal capabilities and promote coordinated, holistic approaches to developing them.

This places the education system in a central facilitating role in addressing not just attainment gaps between those from disadvantaged backgrounds and their more advantaged peers, but social and health inequalities and persisting social mobility and social justice challenges.

However, the performance management and regulatory system that directs educators’ practice perpetuates a narrow concept of their role, which misses the well-evidenced significance of non-cognitive and social factors on educational achievement. Neatly sidestepping, as I do here, the necessary and important debate about curriculum design, it is clear that whatever is in it, in its current format the outcomes the curriculum enables will only provide part of the development needs of the children and young people it should serve.

Whole system

Education and associated support services for young people are segregated (and often for logical operational reasons, no doubt). Education and training, youth support, social care, housing, mental health services and so on all contribute to the future success of individuals and their communities, but this activity does not always line up, build progressively or address the underlying issues. Targets that measure short-term outcomes in each part or stage encourage system-led behaviours that cannot address the unique needs of the individual effectively.

In segregating the system in this way, we cut up the person and their journey with costly consequences for the individual, society and the public purse.

Segregated services with incoherent targets make for a reactionary, ineffective and costly education and support system for young people. The most vulnerable suffer most, and society as a whole pays the price.

The system as a whole, and the organisations and individuals in it, need to be re-oriented around a coherent vision for the thriving lives that should be the goal of our policy and provision in education. Strategy and practice in schools, colleges, training providers, universities and associated youth services needs to be directed so that each part is complementary, building on the work before and alongside it.

Practitioners and leaders need to be supported and directed to view their role in terms of its contribution to the life-long progression success of the individuals in their care, but often feel confined by the narrow attainment targets that focus their attention.\(^9\)

**The Great Progression Debate**

Many have written intelligently about the narrow focus of curriculum and assessment, and subsequent articles will consider leadership and more, but these are elements of a whole system governed by grand national rhetoric and narrow, short-term targets for local deliverers.

We must have a Great Education Debate, not merely an education debate, nor a great schools debate, nor even a great education system debate. In asking the question, ‘What is education for?’ we must be mindful that schools, or even the education system, are not the sole arbiters of a young person’s learning and development. This is why in championing the Progression Whole mission and movement The Progression Trust works with stakeholders in the mainstream.

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education system at every level, with other public and third-sector stakeholders, and with research pioneers, so that we can:

- Understand the personal capacities, contextual factors and active ingredients that make the difference in progression towards thriving lives.
- Develop policies and practice within a vision for ‘whole-person, whole-journey progression’ that enables every stakeholder to contribute in a coherent system.

We must take full advantage of the Great Education Debate (and great thanks are due to its pioneers), as the crisis in our system today calls for an investigation of great scale, solutions born from great wisdom and implementation enabled by great courage.

Count me in.

Philip Dent
Chief Executive, The Progression Trust
Ignorance and wisdom

A struggle is taking place over the soul of education, and it is in danger of being lost if good men and women do not stand up and fight. The battle is between those with a mechanical view of life and those with an organic view. The former see education as a process of maximising literacy and numeracy with a smattering of other subjects thrown in, including science, the right kind of history, a foreign language maybe, a sprinkling of classics and, if you must, a bit of elevating culture. They see education as a process, a conveyor belt, along which young people pass, with appropriate bits of mechanised knowledge inserted into them along the production line. The student is essentially passive. They have to learn received wisdom and be able to repeat it in acceptable ways at regular moments. The whole process is validated by the master validator, the international comparison test, known as PISA, which rules on which country or city is doing best, and which are failing.

Let me make clear that not everything about this mechanical model is wrong. The organic model, in contrast, sees each young person as a unique human being, born with inalienable gifts and talents, and with their own mission in life. The job of a good education system, which involves parents and not just schools, is to help that child find their inner purpose and passion, and to develop all their innate talents. The student is actively rather than passively engaged in their learning. The received wisdoms of humankind are an integral part of their learning, but the knowledge and skills are made profound by each student reflecting on their meaning in the context of their own life and in the society they see about them. To facilitate this process of individuation, it is necessary to develop the character traits of the young people, virtues that have been known about long before the PISA edifice was erected, dating back as far as Plato, Aristotle and Confucius.

Not everything is right about the organic model.

The best education systems, the best schools and the best learning begin with the organic model, but recognise that education is also a process, and some mechanical learning, testing and rigour is inevitable and indeed helpful.

The aim of education should be to help bring up young people, with all their various aptitudes developed, to set them on the road to discovering their unique contribution to life, and to live harmoniously in their own skin and with other people. An overreliance on the mechanical model is to have generations of school and university leavers who may know a lot of facts but who understand very little.
This all seems blindingly obvious to me. I have never been able to understand fully why those with power find it so difficult to understand. My own conclusion is that they have reached their position of power by accelerating quickly through conventional examination systems, at which they have excelled, but are incomplete and undeveloped human beings. They will I am sure become much more rounded, wiser and more compassionate over time. Sadly, however, they may well have left the reins of office behind them long before they have fully woken up to the depths of life.

Sir Anthony Seldon
Headmaster, Wellington College
Skills and knowledge are equally important

I still remember the consternation with which the head of science greeted the (to me, welcome) news that the Key Stage 3 SATs had, with the flourish of a minister’s pen, been abolished. “But how will we know what to teach, and to what standard?” Since then, and many ever bolder ministerial pen flourishes down the line, we are now in a period where major aspects of the secondary curriculum for many schools, along with the entire structure of national curriculum levels, have disappeared as centrally determined features.

When I started teaching in the 1980s, many teachers thought that the last thing we needed was a government-imposed curriculum or framework of levels and tests. But the focus on raising standards and closing gaps in achievement made such a curriculum, along with accountability through league tables and a regular inspection system, seem inevitable.

Although accountability through both performance data and inspection remain, there is undoubtedly now significant scope for individual schools to develop and implement their own curricular philosophy. That means for me that it is time to get beyond some of the polarisation that has characterised some recent debate about the curriculum, such as:

“I am for rote learning of knowledge and formal exams to test that knowledge!”

“No, I am in favour of continuous assessment and skills development!”

“I want us to go back to the academic curriculum of 1950s grammar schools before the rot set in!”

“No, I am in favour of a curriculum for the 21st century where most jobs, and the skills and knowledge needed for them, don’t yet exist!”

“Knowledge comes before skills!”

“No, skills come before knowledge!”

A debate characterised by these polemical assertions is scarcely very enlightening for schools trying to find ways to think seriously about how best to take professional ownership of the curriculum and develop a model that is right for their students.
I think it is important to reflect on some of the basics with our teaching staff as a lead-in to curriculum development work. We can do worse than starting with the hitherto rather unhelpful skills versus knowledge controversy. Few teachers will have done much work on this as part of their training.

Daniel Willingham is an American cognitive psychologist who argues that in favour of knowledge in the curriculum. On his excellent website (www.danielwillingham.com), which is a rich source of ‘think pieces’ that can be used for professional development, he writes that knowledge is, first, “grist for the mill … knowledge comes into play mainly because if we want our students to learn how to think critically, they must have something to think about.” But he takes it further: “It’s true that knowledge gives students something to think about, but a reading of the research literature from cognitive science shows that knowledge does much more than just help students hone their thinking skills: It actually makes learning easier. Knowledge is not only cumulative, it grows exponentially. Those with a rich base of factual knowledge find it easier to learn more – the rich get richer.”

So the argument is not about whether or not we should return to rote learning of pointless and disconnected facts – I certainly don’t favour that, and as a teacher know how demotivating that would be not only for students but for teachers, too. The debate does need to move away from the knowledge–skills polarity – it is not an either/or – and explore in more depth the important role that knowledge plays in the intellectual and educational development of young people, and how teachers can best address those needs as we develop the school curriculum.

Ian Bauckham
ASCL President 2013-14

Is our education system effective in the modern world?

The UK has fallen to 26th in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) league tables for maths, a downward trend reflected in sciences and reading. So things bring us to the question of whether our modern childhood education is effective.

Nowadays, most of our education focuses on academic topics, which have little application for students at present. Further, the introduction of strict specification for many courses does little to encourage natural ability to flourish. Practical and active learning is always more effective than passive learning, for then you have a use for what you learn. It is frustrating when a teacher cannot answer your question because “it’s not on the spec”. Yet in humanities you are encouraged to read around the subject, broadening your mind in areas that interest you.

The average student wakes up early in the morning, tired from a late night and has to drag themselves to school for a day’s worth of free but generally, unwanted, education. Why is this? These students desire education on a topic they enjoy, not the lists of facts and trivialities peddled to us by exam boards.

As a matter of basic values, everyone wants to do well. But unless the motivation can be found, there is little chance of this. Education needs to be stimulating and interesting for a student in order for them to enjoy it and thus make best use of it.

It could be said that schools reject the idea of education being ‘fun’ and ‘enjoyable’, but this could just be due to our obsession with getting a good career and money, in the belief that this will bring us fulfilment.

Some schools are not capitalising on their pupils’ abilities. Thankfully, Lawrence Sheriff School has recognised that education must be in the students’ interests. I personally believe that everyone is talented, in different ways, and we should all make use of these talents. It is up to the schools to find and unlock our natural ability and help us to further our interests.

Cameron Butt
Student at Lawrence Sheriff School
Should education be purely academic?

Where would we be if we all knew everything but had no personality, no charisma, no social ability to share it?

Perhaps the most typical connotation of education is that it is solely focused on teaching people and imparting facts pertaining to certain subjects. According to Dictionary.com, the definition of ‘education’ is “The act or process of imparting or acquiring knowledge, developing the powers of reasoning and judgement and generally of preparing oneself or others intellectually for mature life”.11 Currently, education just about scrapes the surface of “developing the powers of reasoning and judgement”. There’s a lot more to be learnt.

The fact of the matter is, it’s all well and good to have the knowledge and the understanding of what things are and how they work, but if we haven’t been taught the skills necessary to communicate them and inform others, how do we expect to progress? When it comes to preparing people for an outside world that is becoming increasingly competitive, a purely academic education is simply not sufficient. Education should be something that is broad and wholly prepares people for work.

Jordan Buck
General Secretary of Lawrence Sheriff School Student Council

Vocational learning for all

The Great Education Debate presents us with an opportunity to revisit the very purpose of education and the ways in which the current system is equipping young people in particular with the knowledge and, crucially, the skills they will need to engage fully and happily with work and life. While the media and much public debate focuses on the performance of our schools and on rigour in the teaching of academic subjects, we believe that there is much to learn from the pedagogy of vocational learning for all.

It is great that vocational education and pedagogy are figuring in debates about education policy. However, we have a mountain to climb if we are to overcome the innate preference of many families for their own children to pursue an academic route to success. It is often said that people in England are uniquely prejudiced against vocational education. This is not true, as can readily be seen in the high level of applications for apprenticeships at firms like Rolls-Royce or British Telecom (BT) or in the status of vocational subjects such as law and medicine at university and beyond. But what there is in England is an ingrained and centuries old class prejudice to what are perceived as lower level skill occupations, such as a hairdresser, welder or cook. Too many people still believe that vocational education serves only these latter occupations.

One aspect of government reform for 16-19 year-olds is that Level 3 qualifications will be more strictly defined – with Tech Levels for occupationally specific courses and a smaller, perhaps less well-respected, cohort of ‘applied general qualifications’, the latter being those intended to teach broader skills that may be applied in a number of career settings. They will, of course, sit alongside A levels, which, apparently, everyone understands. But why the need to categorise at all? The phrase ‘applied general’ is not very inviting. Why would a young person want to do something ‘general’?

Yet, attention to and success in developing a broad range of skills for work and employment is what those in the FE sector are good at. We know that success is as much about attitude and skills as it is about occupationally specific knowledge.

Vocational learning typically includes:

- a strong focus from the outset on team work and problem solving
- individual attention that focuses not just on progress through a qualification or a learner's knowledge, but also on learning by doing, their skill development and their ability to learn autonomously
- developing the meta skill of learning to learn – recognised in the 21st century as critical to the ability to adapt to changing circumstances and become resilient to change
- a heightened degree of learning by watching and practising
- the development of a set of values that relate to the profession being learned about
- an emphasis on real work, with much learning taking place ‘on the job’
- the embedding of critical broader skills (including literacy and numeracy, but also general employability skills, such as timekeeping and planning for deadlines), within curriculum elements such as projects and set-piece tasks
- embedded learner support, rather than an add-on service, which enables the curriculum to be more individualised and learner-led
- a ‘blended’ pedagogy, using varied methodologies and technologies and, crucially, one that is often peer-assessed and even peer-led

We argue that vocational learning is needed by all, and that ‘vocational’ learning is in fact an extension of more traditional ‘academic’ learning. The word can be used to describe the application of knowledge and the development of the skill to do that – in other words, it describes a way of learning that goes beyond the theoretical and enables knowledge to be put to a practical purpose. In this sense, there are few, if any, jobs or professions that do not require some form of ‘vocational’ learning to have taken place before people can perform them competently.

This is not just an argument about how vocabulary is used, but a challenge to what we have seen as the intended outcomes of our education system for a long time. Both coalition and opposition political and educational policy discussions talk about those who are ‘not academic’. In regard to such inaccurate definitions, and to the potential impact on individual aspiration, we posit this is deeply unhelpful, and only serves to reinforce the idea that somehow people are either academic or vocational, rather than their learning.

Reflect on the bulleted list above and ask whether this is a reasonable content for all curricula. Reflect on whether we want people to have knowledge or skill – or perhaps both. We ask that you launch into the debate bearing in mind the wealth of experience and practice that vocational learning, as we define it, can contribute.

Lynne Sedgmore CBE
Executive Director of the 157 Group of FE Colleges
The curriculum should not be determined by Parliament

“Don’t know much trigonometry ... don’t know what a slide rule is for,” sang Sam Cooke in ‘Wonderful World’. The lyrics probably weren’t meant to be prophetic, but a recent Internet search for the most useless things learned at school puts trigonometry and slide rules high on the list. However, Internet forums generate wide disagreement. Some people love trigonometry and recall ‘SOH–CAH–TOA’ with fondness.

In terms of useless information that I have taught over the years, my personal favourites are plate tectonics (introduced with the 22 attainment targets for National Curriculum science in 1988), how to write a database (introduced with key skills in IT in the late 1990s but already outdated then), and the lifecycle of the sun (that could possibly be useful knowledge in five billion years’ time). However, there are probably readers who would argue articulately that these are important.

What should be taught at school or college, whether it is knowledge or skills, captures media headlines. It’s an ideal topic for politicians wanting publicity. The previous Secretary of State recently brought about a ‘revolution in education’ according to the Prime Minister. Headlines included primary pupils learning to recite poetry by heart and history being taught chronologically up to 1066 in primaries, and the rest in secondary schools. The proposals have both garnered criticism and praise.

When secretaries of state come in to office, we often are promised changes to the curriculum that will raise standards, better prepare young people for the future and put right the wrongs of a previous administration. When they go, the initiatives often fade.

Do you remember TVEI, CPVE, GNVQs, AVCEs, or even the Diploma? There are too many faded vehicles of a promised new curriculum. Too much effort and resource has been wasted in a merry-go-round of educational change.

Parliament should not be the place where the curriculum is determined. Secretaries of state for education have careers to build, and MPs are not the most representative cross-section of society. More than a third of them were educated in independent schools, 62 per cent of them are white men aged more than 40, and 90 per cent went to university (28 per cent to Oxbridge). Perhaps that’s why when secretaries of state feel the need to give credibility to their plans, they usually call upon the support of particular university dons?

I started my teaching career in challenging comprehensive schools and finished in sixth form colleges. In my experience, if students value the knowledge and skills being taught in lessons they will let you know. If they don’t, the feedback can be
instantaneous. From defiantly refusing to do ‘boring’ work to disruptively fooling around, students can make it plain to teachers when particular knowledge and skills aren’t for them. Students can be very forthcoming with praise, too, when the subject matter inspires them. Teaching gives a good insight into the knowledge and skills that encourage learning.

There are roughly half a million teachers in England’s schools and colleges and they teach about 1,000 hours a year, which adds up to about 500 million taught hours each year. Teachers get a lot of student feedback on the knowledge and skills they are expected to acquire, and that’s not counting Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. There’s a lot of teacher insight that ought to be fully used.

Of course, it’s not just about students soaking up knowledge and practising skills. Students should become enthusiastic and confident about learning and, as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) says in its First Steps report “develop a pattern of behaviour, thinking and feeling based on sound principles, integrity and resilience”. Teachers’ experience could help inform policy development on these matters, too.

It is hoped that the Great Education Debate will lead to all that teacher knowledge and all those teacher skills being made use of in shaping education into something that is highly regarded for imparting lasting and useful knowledge and skills.

And as for useless knowledge, I’m sure there are still many teachers who can recall how to use a compass on a chalkboard, or reproduce student worksheets using methylated spirits and purple ink!

Stephan Jungnitz
ASCL Colleges Specialist

12 Confederation of British Industry (CBI), 2012 First Steps: A new Approach for our Schools. CBI.
The role of assessment in education

I admire (but don’t envy!) ASCL for tackling the big questions in its Great Education Debate. I’m not sure I can express the consensus view on ‘what is the purpose of education’; indeed, I’m not sure there is a consensus view. However, I suspect that there is agreement on what is not the purpose of education.

The purpose of education is not to repeatedly drill young people to pass exams. It is not to spend a significant amount of time, which could be spent learning valuable knowledge and skills, memorising the finer details of GCSE mark schemes. It is not testing for the sake of testing, or taking qualification after qualification for the sole benefit of school performance tables. The purpose of education, in other words, is not assessment.

Assessment is blamed for many of the ills suffered by the education system and the young people going through it. But assessment itself isn’t the problem – it’s the uses that it’s put to that have had such a damaging impact. The purpose of assessment has become corrupted; it has become the end rather than the means. School accountability is vitally important but it has come at the expense of education, and it has certainly helped to destroy much of the educational benefit of assessment.

This hasn’t happened by design. Most school leaders and teachers believe that assessment is a key part of learning, that school accountability is important and that the profession should be held to a high standard. But even the most ardent supporters of testing and accountability want it to benefit young people’s education, not harm it. As a system, we need to take back assessment so that it actually does good in education. Assessment needs to once again serve the purpose it was meant to.

Assessment should support, not hinder, good teaching and learning. It should help teachers – and students themselves – keep track of progress. It should identify strengths to build on and weaknesses to address. It should provide a formative basis for improvement. It should recognise achievement. It should facilitate progression by providing a passport that demonstrates what young people can actually do.

We need to get a number of things right for this to happen. Part of this is about the assessment itself. Part of it is about the framework into which the assessment fits.

Assessment can and must get better. It is essential that exams assess the skills and knowledge that we actually want students to learn, and as an industry we need to get better at this. Confidence is crucial, and exam boards need to improve consistency of marking and the transparency of the whole exam process, from question paper setting through to grading. Teachers’ assessment skills are improving but not every classroom yet benefits from consistent, high-quality formative assessment.
Perhaps the most important element will be how the educational framework evolves. We need to improve the school accountability system but we should also acknowledge that any system will be imperfect and there will always be some potential distorting effects. That’s why it’s vital that everyone in the system plays their part, too.

Politicians should continue to hold schools accountable for their performance, and they should be uncompromising on this: for all the negative impact of the school accountability system, it has undoubtedly helped to drive a huge reduction in the number of seriously underperforming schools over the past 15 or 20 years. But it is important that the demands of accountability don’t lose sight of the system in which they operate. Politicians should challenge conventional wisdom about what is achievable, but they shouldn’t demand the impossible. Half of schools will always be below average; what matters is that the average keeps getting higher.

Exam boards must avoid falling into the trap of assessing only what’s easy to measure. We need to be sure that we are designing high-quality assessments that help to support good teaching and learning, rather than asking students to jump through hoops. And when qualifications change, as they inevitably will from time to time, we need to work with teachers to make sure they understand what they are expected to deliver and how they can seize the opportunities and freedoms that reforms can bring.

Teachers are the last piece of the puzzle. It’s oh so easy for those of us who aren’t in school every day to say that teachers shouldn’t succumb to the pressures of the accountability system. We need to improve it but – again – it will never be perfect. So teachers must continue to defend what they know to be right. They should resist multiple exam entry or excessive resits where these aren’t in students’ interest. And, above all, they should have confidence that teaching well will always be the best route to getting the best grades – a combination that is in the interests of teachers themselves, the government and, most importantly, young people.

Dale Bassett
Head of Public Policy at AQA, the awarding body and education charity

NB: This article was originally part of AQA’s Future of Assessment Project.
What forms of assessment are most appropriate for different types of learning?

I was always quite good at exams. I know that to get good marks on this question I should identify some different types of learning, perhaps vocational and academic, practical and theoretical, skills-based, play based, knowledge based, and include some forms of assessment – observation, course work, project work, written exam, viva – with some good explanations of why they work for each type of learning.

But there are dangers in trying to map particular forms of assessment to particular types of learning and assuming we’ve solved a problem. There are many forms of assessment we could be using that we don’t, and our blinkered approach is damaging pupils’ learning. By increasing teachers’ skills in designing and using assessment, and pupils’, employers’ and politicians’ understanding of the importance of assessment, we could expand the range of assessments without compromising their rigour.

There are many forms of assessment, but lack of shared clarity over the purpose of assessment often means an assessment is used for too many purposes, which then distorts the assessment itself.

The prime purpose of assessment must be to support learning. Teachers assess their pupils all the time and are best placed to choose the form of assessment to suit the learning, if they have the skills to do so, and haven’t been browbeaten into using ‘optional tests’ and practice papers.

Formative assessment supports current learning – informing the learner, teacher, other teachers, parents. Summative assessment, and the resulting qualifications, supports learners to move on, informing employers, universities, colleges. Assessment helps teachers improve their teaching by understanding what pupils have learnt. And it helps governments to understand the impact of their policies on pupils’ learning. Each demand different measures, and different levels of reliability and validity.

Different methods can be used to assess what a learner knows, what they can do, whether they can apply their knowledge and skills in new situations. Employers often complain that employees have good exam grades but cannot write in work situations, or work as part of a team, or be creative. Our current system doesn’t prioritise the assessment of these things.

Increasingly all learning is geared towards end of course exams – GCSEs and A levels, which causes problems because we attempt to use the results to determine the future of students, teachers, schools and, potentially, the government. In the process we’ve forgotten to decide what our priorities are for the education system and the education of young people, and to choose the appropriate assessments.
Professor Mick Waters (formerly Director of Curriculum at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority), in *Thinking Allowed on Schooling*, talks of holding ‘time trials’ instead of exams, “The student enters the room, is given a problem with three hours to solve it... Then like most people in business and industry, they would contact others, hold small meetings, get on the web... gradually provide solutions, test out their solutions with colleagues and eventually work towards the best answer possible”.

People learn in myriad ways and we corral people into separate pathways at our peril. By 2025, I hope we can balance a need for consistent data with the flexibility to allow students to learn in ways that work for them.

We need to move away from the assumption that the only way to assess with rigour is to test all pupils on the same day and in the same way. I challenge the assessment community to develop assessment methods that can give consistent results while enabling pupils to choose different ways of being assessed. They need to work with teachers to improve their assessment skills so they can help young people to use the appropriate assessments. And they need to provide the government with persuasive evidence these forms of assessment can provide rigour without compromising student learning.

Nansi Ellis
Assistant General Secretary (Policy) Association of Teachers and Lecturers

NB: This article was originally part of AQA’s Future of Assessment Project.

Vision and Purpose
- achievement for all
- professional skill
- collaboration

Leadership and Learning
- a compelling curriculum vision
- rich pedagogical practice
- strong assessment strategy and practice

The Leadership Challenge
- create value
- lead the system
- imagine the future
Great Education Debate
Part three: the Leadership Challenge

Independent teacher and Professor of Educational Leadership John West-Burnham opens his contribution to the Great Education Debate with a story:

“In the years before the First World War the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein was researching the mathematics of the aircraft propeller as part of the new science that had emerged following the first manned flight and he produced a radically innovative design for a new type of propeller – however it was still a propeller. There is a limit to the speed of a propeller driven aircraft. The answer to the problem of making aircraft faster was the jet engine, not the ultimate propeller.”

Global society is changing rapidly – socially, economically and technologically. Education needs to respond. Perhaps the appropriate response is not incremental change but radical, transformational thinking – as John West-Burnham suggests, a transition from the propeller to the jet engine.

Three key leadership challenges emerge from the contributions to our debate: our collective ability to:

- imagine the future
- create value
- lead the system

Alongside the day-job of leading our schools, we must also consider the future shape of the education system – not just how we add value, but how we create value and how we lead the system.

Imagining the future
The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) states in its report Education Today 2013 that countries need to provide a “good basic education in childhood and adolescence that equips people not just for the jobs of today, but with the ability to learn new skills for the jobs of tomorrow right through their lifetime”.

Most of us will be familiar with the iconic Shift Happens presentation.² It originally started out as a PowerPoint presentation for a staff meeting in August 2006 at Arapahoe High School in Centennial, Colorado, United States. In his original blog, Director of Technology at the school Karl Fisch says, “I decided to take David Warlick up on his idea of telling the new story. I put together a PowerPoint presentation with some (hopefully) thought-provoking ideas. I was hoping by telling some of these ‘stories’ to our faculty, I could get them thinking about – and discussing with each other – the world our students are entering. To get them to really think about what our students are going to need to be successful in the 21st century, and then how that might impact what they do in their classrooms.”³

Shift Happens is one school leader’s attempt to help his staff imagine the future. Karl Fisch gives us a powerful way of imagining the future by contemplating a series of facts and extrapolations. The juxtapositions rely on the reader/listener making the connections.

The contributors to this section of our Great Education Debate set out some powerful narratives that help us imagine and begin to engage with the future. Almost all of them call for us to consider how the demands on education are changing and how we should respond to those changes.

Creating value

Director for Education and Skills and Special Advisor on Education Policy to the OECD’s Secretary-General Andreas Schleicher questions how we create value in education. He argues that this may be done by synthesising the disparate bits, by integrating different fields of knowledge. He contends, “When we can access the world’s knowledge on the internet, when routine skills are being digitised or outsourced, and when jobs are changing rapidly, success becomes increasingly about ways of thinking including creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving and judgement; about ways of working, including collaboration and teamwork; and about the socio-cultural tools that enable us to interact with the world.”

John West-Burnham agrees. He argues, “Only teachers and lecturers are concerned with subjects… [people] need to be able to work collaboratively, solve problems, communicate and be creative.”

And Director of the Centre for Real-World Learning and Professor of Learning at the University of Winchester Professor Bill Lucas writes, “Education must be more expansive, cultivating the capacity to learn in all pupils rather than just focusing on a narrow range of subject expertise… We need to cultivate a range of dispositions in young people that will serve young people well in their learning and social lives in uncertain times.”

However, as highlighted earlier, that does not mean the abandonment of knowledge content. Cultural capital is about access to both the knowledge forms that are considered worthy and desirable in a society as well as certain behaviours and qualities. Resilience, determination, a mindset to succeed alongside the skills of creativity, collaboration, problem solving and communication are all essential to bridge the social divide. They are a form of power. As educators, we create value by ensuring that all of our young people have access to these knowledge forms, skills and qualities.

Bill Lucas proposes that the job of creating value and redesigning schooling can only be done in response to a set of questions about desired outcomes:

- What are, for your school, the desired outcomes of education (DOE)?
- What kinds of learning, in your school, with your students, will deliver your DOE?
- What kinds of teaching will lead to the kind of learning that is needed?
- What kind of leadership is required to create the kinds of teaching and learning that are desired, and so ensure that students leave your school with your DOE?

**Leading the system**

The contributions of Professor of Leadership and Innovation, Institute of Education (IOE) Toby Greany focus not on preparing our young people for life in a global society, but rather on the conditions for the education system in England to be self-improving. He does a helpful analysis of the competing narratives in the current policy environment. In his second contribution, he moves on to considering some ways in which a self-improving system may be stimulated or supported to emerge.

The reason that this is important is that while our school system is good, it is not yet great. The McKinsey report, How the World’s Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better, says the ‘good’ to ‘great’ journey marks the point at which the school system comes to largely rely upon the values and behaviours of its educators – its teachers and school leaders – to propel continuing improvement. And the ‘great’ to ‘excellent’ journey moves the focus of improvement from the centre to schools themselves.4

It is now time for the profession to step forward and grasp the leadership challenges of improving the system through imagining the future, creating value and leading the system. The next phase in system leadership is to make the leap to defining what a self-improving, school-led system looks like, and then moving irrevocably towards it.

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From propellers to jets – re-thinking schooling

In the years before the First World War the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein was researching the mathematics of the aircraft propeller as part of the new science that had emerged following the first manned flight and he produced a radically innovative design for a new type of propeller – however, it was still a propeller. There is a limit to the speed of a propeller-driven aircraft. The answer to the problem of making aircraft faster was the jet engine, not the ultimate propeller.

History is full of such examples of radical and profound change in which a problem is solved not by incremental improvement of existing practice but rather through radical or transformational thinking in which the core purpose of an activity is achieved through a fundamental re-think of norms, systems and structures. In nature, caterpillars become butterflies, not better caterpillars.

It may be that the time has come for a radical re-think of the key processes in education that have not been questioned for several generations. Incremental improvement has a place if the context for education is stable and positive and the school system is working to optimum effect. However, if there is sustained anxiety about the equity, effectiveness and sustainable potential of an education system then there is a need to question the fundamental principles on which it is based.

Such questioning in England would involve re-thinking our obsession with automatic cohort chronological progression and replacing it with an approach based on stage, not age. Schools need to work on the basis of cradle to adulthood in the same context (as happens in every other dimension of life), ending the quite arbitrary divisions that are so artificial and counterproductive. The primary/secondary divide is totally arbitrary – a bureaucratic outcome of the Education Act 1944. Schools need to be microcosms of communities that move from involving parents in schooling to seeing them and the wider community as co-educators.

Another possibility is to move from a subject-based approach curriculum to themes and projects with the focus on collaborative problem-solving based approaches – which is how most people live and work. (Only teachers and lecturers are concerned with subjects.) To live effective lives as citizens, members of communities and families, and workers people do not need subjects – they need to be able to work collaboratively, solve problems, communicate and be creative. Equally to lead meaningful lives they need access to thinking ethically, growing spiritually and being able to enjoy the astonishingly diverse ways of celebrating our common humanity.
Most importantly perhaps we need to recognise the limitations of the school as the basis for educating a society. The role of the family, the impact of the community, the effects of social and economic variables and the unique intellectual inheritance of each individual provide a basis for challenging a generic model and replacing it with one that is designed in every respect to secure equity through recognition of the dignity and value of every individual.

John West-Burnham
Independent teacher, writer and consultant in leadership development and Professor of Educational Leadership at St Mary’s University College, Twickenham
We must be able to compete in a global education system

In a global economy, the benchmark for educational success is no longer improvement by national standards alone, but the best performing school systems internationally. Global comparisons show what is possible in education, they take away excuses from those who are complacent and they help to set meaningful targets in terms of measurable goals achieved by the world’s educational leaders. But they also give us a perspective on how the demands on education are changing, and how education systems respond to those changes.

Labour demand in the industrialised world shows amazing changes over the last decades. The steepest decline in skill demand is no longer in the area of manual skills, but in routine cognitive skills, memorising something and expecting that that is going to help us later in life. When we can access the world’s knowledge on the Internet, when routine skills are being digitised or outsourced, and when jobs are changing rapidly, success becomes increasingly about ways of thinking including creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving and judgement; about ways of working, including collaboration and teamwork; and about the socio-cultural tools that enable us to interact with the world.

Conventionally our approach to problems in schooling was breaking them down into manageable bits and pieces, and then to teach students the techniques to solve the pieces. But today we create value by synthesising the disparate bits, by integrating different fields of knowledge. This is about curiosity, open-mindedness and making connections between ideas that previously seemed unrelated, which requires being familiar with and receptive to knowledge in other fields than our own. If we spend our whole life in a silo of a single discipline, we will not gain the imaginative skills to connect the dots for where the next invention will come from.

Much of the time in school is spent learning individually. But the more interdependent the world becomes, the greater the premium the more we need great collaborators and orchestrators. Innovation today is rarely the product of individuals working in isolation but an outcome of how we mobilise, share and link knowledge.

So the premium in education needs to shift from qualifications-focused education upfront to skills-oriented learning throughout life. Our data also shows that skill development is far more effective if the world of learning and the world of work are linked. Compared to purely government-designed curricula taught exclusively in schools, learning in the workplace allows people to develop ‘hard’ skills on modern equipment, and ‘soft’ skills, such as teamwork, communication and negotiation, through real-world experience. Hands-on workplace training is also a great way to motivate disengaged youth to re-engage with education and smoothen the transition to work.
Achieving that is no doubt difficult, and requires a very different approach to education.

Modern enabling school systems set ambitious goals, are clear about what students should be able to do and then provide teachers with the tools to establish what content and instruction they need to provide to their individual students. The past was about delivered wisdom; the future is about user-generated wisdom.

Today’s challenge is to embrace diversity with differentiated pedagogical practices. The goal of the past was standardisation and conformity; now it’s about being ingenious, about personalising educational experiences. The past was curriculum-centred; the future is learner-centred.

The policy focus was previously on the provision of education; today it’s on outcomes, shifting from looking upwards in the bureaucracy towards looking outwards to the next teacher, the next school.

In the past we emphasised school management; now it is about leadership, with a focus on supporting, evaluating and developing teacher quality as its core, which includes coordinating the curriculum and teaching programme, monitoring and evaluating teacher practice, promoting teacher professional development and supporting collaborative work cultures.

School systems need to recognise that individuals learn differently and differently at different stages of their lives. They need to foster new forms of educational provision that take learning to the learner in ways that allow people to learn in the ways that are most conducive to their progress.

We can no longer ignore countries like China. Today, the talent pool is roughly equal in Europe, the United States and China. But, in 2020, a few years from now, China alone will have more highly educated young people than Europe and the United States have young people.¹

All of this is everybody’s business, and we need to deal much more creatively with the question of who should pay for what, when and how, particularly for learning beyond school. Employers can do a lot more to create a climate that supports learning, and invest in learning. Some individuals can shoulder more of the financial burden. And governments can do better in designing more rigorous standards, providing more effective financial incentives and creating a better safety net so that all people have access to high-quality learning.

It’s worth getting this right. If the industrialised world would raise its learning outcomes by 25 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) points – the level of improvement that we have seen in a country like Brazil or Poland over the last decade, its economies could be richer by more than 100 trillion Euros over the lifetime of today’s students. I know that many countries still have a recession to fight. But the cost of low educational performance is tremendous; it is the equivalent of a permanent economic recession.

Andreas Schleicher
Director for Education and Skills and Special Advisor on Education Policy to the OECD's Secretary-General
Out of the garden into the real world…

ASCL’s Great Education debate is inviting us to mimic earlier national debates about the purposes of education. Recalling Lord Callaghan, Brian Lightman invites us to address some of the deep underlying questions using evidence. What should schools teach? What should be assessed and how? What are the respective roles of pupils, parents and teachers? How should schools use research to inform their practice?

These are the right questions to be starting with and here are a few first thoughts.

1 Education must be more expansive, cultivating the capacity to learn in all pupils rather than just focusing on a narrow range of subject expertise. Deep knowledge is, of course, important and we must have passionate, well-informed teachers who are skilled in their disciplines. But this is not enough. We need to cultivate a range of dispositions in young people that will serve young people well in their learning and social lives in uncertain times.

2 We have to expand the debate beyond school. Currently we pay lip service only when it comes to engaging parents. This has to change. We know that when we really listen to and work with families life chances are hugely enhanced. We just have to put this into practice now and there is plenty of help at hand such as that of Joyce Epstein and her team.

3 And – here’s the really hard part – we have to change fundamentally the role of teachers. They need, as John Hattie has suggested, to become much better at noticing their own actions. As learners and researchers, they can do this.

There is a growing body of educators committed to these kinds of ideals2 - all passionately already contributing to the Great Education Debate.

Redesigning Schooling

Along with ASCL, SSAT (The Schools Network) Ltd has invited the profession to redesign the system. In the thinkpiece, what kind of teaching for what kind of learning?3 Guy and I have focused on the fundamental re-thinking that we believe is called for. We have posed four questions that every school leader needs to consider:

2 www.expansiveeducation.net
1 What are, for your school, the desired outcomes of education (DOEs)?

2 What kinds of learning, in your school, with your students, will deliver your DOEs?

3 What kinds of teaching will lead to the kind of learning that is needed?

4 What kind of leadership is required to create the kinds of teaching and learning that are desired, and so ensure that students leave your school with your DOEs?

Our own answers to these questions require teachers, unsurprisingly, to adopt an expansive view of their role. So, in short, they are:

1 The DOEs are the kinds of capabilities that teachers in the expansive education network are assiduously cultivating in schools up and down the land.

2 The kinds of learning that will deliver such DOEs are those that explicitly seek to develop the kinds of capabilities that will enable young people to thrive.

3 Teaching that can achieve this will necessarily encourage young people to undertake more enquiry-based exploration with the kinds of demanding roles this requires.

4 And the leadership of all this will place a steely focus on pedagogy and learning in the midst of everything else.

All in all, as we reach autumn and start a new school year we should collectively feel a spring in our steps and be confident that school leaders and practitioners can hold their nerve and not be swayed by the many short-term political debates swirling around them and, instead, focus on teaching and learning, on pedagogy.

Professor Bill Lucas
Director of the Centre for Real-World Learning and Professor of Learning at the University of Winchester
School improvement: Competing policies undermine the coalition's admirable aims

In his speech at the North of England conference in January this year, Charlie Taylor, CEO of the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL), talked about his aim of an ‘irrevocable shift’ towards a school-led, self-improving system by September 2016.

So what does the government mean by a self-improving system? When you read *The Importance of Teaching: the Schools White Paper 2010*, I think you can boil it down to four criteria:

1. Teachers and schools are responsible for their own improvement.
2. Teachers and schools learn from one another and from research so that effective practice spreads.
3. The best schools and leaders extend their reach across other schools so that all schools improve.
4. By implication, government intervention and support is minimised.

I am not convinced that either the system capacity or the policy conditions are yet right for an ‘irrevocable shift’ to be achieved, even by 2016. My worry is that if the self-improving system becomes no more than a narrative device to justify the removal of central and local government support as quickly as possible, then a two-tier system could rapidly emerge in which strong schools thrive but large swathes are left behind.

In saying this, I am by no means entirely negative, nor am I harking back to a centralised model of top-down improvement. There are a number of policies in train that do appear to be giving schools greater ownership of their own improvement, and many schools and teachers are responding energetically. These policies include the sponsorship of struggling schools by school-led multi-academy trusts, the concept of School Direct (although in practice its development has been problematic) and the work of many teaching schools.

So what am I worrying about? One key challenge for me is that the coalition government does not have a clear or coherent strategy for supporting a self-
improving system to emerge. Instead ministers are following at least four different reform approaches at the same time (see the table below). These compete with one another in the minds of school leaders, creating confusion at best and unresolvable tensions at worst.

Four narratives for the coalition’s approach for system improvement

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<th>The world-class (no excuses) approach:</th>
<th>The freedom to teach approach:</th>
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<td>We are raising the bar in every area and benchmarking ourselves against the best in the world – a new curriculum, more rigorous exams, less teacher assessment. Ofsted’s new inspection framework and area-based inspections are shining a spotlight on schools and authorities that require improvement, while its new regional structure means it can follow up to check that schools take action in response. Where a school is found to be failing we will broker a new academy sponsor.</td>
<td>Teachers should be free to get on and teach. We have given schools autonomy and freedom and we have focused accountability on what matters: the quality of teaching. We have given schools greater powers on classroom discipline. We have stripped away bureaucratic guidance and removed the requirement for teachers in academies to have Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). We have made it easier to sack poor teachers and pay good teachers more. We have raised the bar for new entrants to teaching and given schools a greater role in training new recruits.</td>
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**Key quote:**
“High-performing jurisdictions set materially higher expectations in terms of what they believe children can and should master at different ages… If our schools, and young people, are to become internationally competitive again we must learn from the best in the world.”

*Michael Gove MP, December 2011*

**Key quote:**
Academies “will be free of any government interference, free to hire whoever they want, pay them whatever they want, teach whatever they want, and as a result we can demand higher standards”.

*Michael Gove MP, November 2011*

**Key message for school leaders:**
Raise your game or accept the consequences.

**Key message for school leaders:**
We trust you – it’s all down to you.
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<th><strong>The market-based approach:</strong></th>
<th><strong>The system leadership approach:</strong></th>
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<td>It’s not the job of civil servants to tell teachers how to teach, so we have closed the quangos and are cutting one in four DfE jobs. We are reforming the funding model so it is fair and transparent and we have introduced the Pupil Premium (PP) to ensure equity. Our academies policy has freed schools from the grip of local bureaucracies. We are supporting new free schools, University Technical Colleges (UTCs) and Studio Schools so that weak schools are challenged to improve and parents and employers have real choice.</td>
<td>We want the best schools and heads to drive improvement. We have more than 400 school-led academy sponsors taking on the most challenging schools. We are designating 500 teaching schools and giving them a key role in professional development and school-to-school support. We are designating 1000 National Leaders of Education and introducing payment by results so they focus on supporting struggling schools. We want to develop a champions league of outstanding leaders who can travel to the most challenging schools and regions to secure improvement.</td>
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**Key quote:**
“Hopefully, recent reforms will push the English system towards one in which the state provides a generous amount of funding per pupil which parents can spend in any school they wish … while the DfE does little more than some regulatory, accountancy, and due diligence functions.”

*Dominic Cummings, Special Adviser to Michael Gove, 2013*

**Key quote:**
“At the heart of this Government’s vision is a determination to give school leaders more power and control. Not just to drive improvement in their own schools – but to drive improvement across our whole system.”

*Michael Gove MP, June 2010*

**Key message for school leaders:**
Choice and competition rule.

**Key message for school leaders:**
The strong will inherit the earth (and make it better).

The first three approaches – world-class/no excuses, freedom to teach and the market-based approach - may enable an improving system (though that is questionable in some cases), but not a self-improving system. Applying the government’s four criteria, they may make schools responsible for their own improvement, but they will not foster the sharing of expertise, capacity and learning or the better use of evidence. Partly in response to these flaws, the role of accountability in these models becomes over-dominant and punitive, setting up unrealistic expectations for what Ofsted can achieve and an unhealthy us-and-them dynamic between school leaders and the centre.

The fourth approach – system leadership – reflects the beginnings of a sea change in attitudes and practice in England over the past ten years. Many of the
best schools do now provide hard-edged support to their peers, whether as an academy sponsor, teaching school or National or Local Leader of Education. These approaches do meet the criteria for a self-improving system and there is evidence that they can be effective.

But their potential is being undermined by policies enacted to foster the first three approaches. Furthermore, in the rush for an ‘irrevocable shift’, the pace of devolution to system leaders is arguably too rapid, with too little attention being paid to building capacity.

One illustration of all this can be seen in the tensions at the heart of the Teaching Schools model:

- How should individual school accountability be married with system leadership? The fear of losing their Teaching School status if Ofsted downgrades them from ‘outstanding’ is preventing many school leaders from investing real energy in this model.

- Are Teaching Schools a publicly funded good, or a solution for a broken school improvement marketplace? Teaching Schools are told to earn their income by meeting the needs of other schools, but are also heavily incentivised to deliver on policy priorities such as School Direct.

- How should supply and demand for system leadership be managed on a geographical and phase basis? As Ofsted noted in its 2013 annual report, there are large parts of the country with too few system leaders and no established culture of school-to-school support.

These tensions are all symptoms of the wider fault lines caused by incoherent policy on school system reform.

So how can we move forward? My thinking here starts with an acceptance of David Hargreaves’s core argument that if England’s 21,000 schools are to be autonomous, with minimal external support, then most of them will need to work in deep partnerships that provide challenge and support and that meet the needs of every child.

We know that achieving such deep partnerships is intensely difficult: according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), partnership is a vulnerable strategy – all it takes is for one school to break ranks and act competitively and its partner schools will feel intense pressure to do the same.

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7 www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/ofsted-annual-report-201213-schools
When I work across local areas I do see some genuinely exciting partnership arrangements emerging, whether as part of academy trusts, teaching school alliances or other local responses to change.

But the wider picture I see is much more mixed. Often, a group of visionary headteachers in an area is working hard to develop school-led approaches, but they complain that other schools aren’t really engaging and contributing. When you talk to those other schools they often feel oppressed by accountability, which prevents them from looking out beyond their school and/or they feel suspicious about the motives of the visionary heads.

So what can be done? The government’s current approach is all about reducing central and local support in the hope that a self-improving system will spontaneously emerge.

Instead, I think we need to recognise that the system needs more time and support to develop deep partnerships that meet the needs of every school and every child. Some areas are more mature than others in terms of how schools are working together, so we need a differentiated ‘local solutions’ mindset. In less mature areas schools need help to build their capacity to take on more.

So here are some recommendations:

- Develop a revised, coherent vision for reform that is focused on supporting the development of a self-improving system for all schools, including by stopping or reshaping policies (such as market-based reforms) that detract from that vision.
- Create a budget for building capacity. I would do this by top-slicing 0.5 per cent of the existing schools budget, the Schools Block Allocation. This would provide about £150 million per year, of which 100 per cent should be made available to schools.
- Adopt Ofsted’s proposal in the Unseen Children report for local area challenges in the lowest performing areas. ¹⁰
- Make Teaching Schools more sustainable and more focused on impact.
- Offer funding that higher performing areas and partnerships could bid for if they had a credible proposal for how they would pass greater responsibility for school improvement to schools over time.

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¹⁰ Ofsted, 2013, *Unseen Children – Access and Achievement 20 years on*, Ofsted
Offer an Ofsted inspection ‘holiday’ to partnerships that can demonstrate that they have a rigorous peer-review model in place and where progress is continuing to improve across all member schools.

Develop evidence-informed teaching, including by pausing any further expansion of School Direct until an evaluation has been concluded to understand what works.

I can see two possible scenarios for the journey we are on towards a self-improving system.

The first is drawn from Mortal Engines, the amazing series of books by Philip Reeve. In a post-apocalyptic world, London is the first city to move itself onto wheels, so that it can then devour and asset strip the other cities and towns in its path, forcing their citizens to work as slaves. Of course, the other towns and cities follow suit by moving themselves onto wheels, and the world quickly descends into a brutal fight for the survival of the fittest. As this happens, an entire belief system – known as municipal Darwinism – emerges to describe and justify the culture that has developed: the epitome of a two-tier system.

The second is the Tour de France: cyclists competing in a tough professional sport with clear and consistent rules, supported by expert coaches and the best equipment money can buy. The critical point here, however, is that even though cycling appears an individual sport, it’s very much a team effort: the national teams work together, for example by taking turns in the lead in order to break wind resistance. If the lead cyclist gets a puncture then the whole team will wait for him to get back on the road. If they are successful they share the prize money.

I think we’re seeing both scenarios playing out on the ground. Collaboration will always remain vulnerable to the stronger competitive pressure, so policy must do more to help make sure it is not crushed.

Toby Greany
Professor of Leadership and Innovation, Institute of Education (IOE)
Edward Morgan Forster said it all. Although not a writer normally associated with landmark statements about education, his first two words in *Howards End* tell us everything that we need to know about the Great Education Debate. His advice is: ‘Only Connect!’ Through this simple yet profound epigram he charts the way forward with greater clarity than any number of policy statements or keynote addresses.

Mr Forster’s insistence that connection matters above all else seems at first hearing to strike an oddly dissonant note when applied to education in the 21st century. We live in an age where autonomy is king and fragmentation is a constant danger. However, I would argue that in 2014 the twin principles of connection and trust offer the only sustainable way forward for our system.

When I became a headteacher in January 1999 I spent some of my early months researching school culture. My 16 years as a teacher had taught me that institutions operated not on mission statements or explicit policies, but rather through a set of cultural rules that everyone understood but did not always find easy to articulate. Terrance Deal and Allan Kennedy summed this up wonderfully when they described organisational culture as being “the way we do things around here”. I thought that before I really got stuck into this new experience of being a headteacher I had better try to find out who it was that created the cultural rules that in reality determined how a school ran.

Educational literature was clear in stating that culture was derived almost entirely from the headteacher. For example, Hall and George argued, “No matter what the leader does (and does not do) the effects are detectable throughout the school.” However, when I started carrying out some actual research with heads, teachers, students and policy makers, a more complex picture emerged of school culture being a shared entity, shaped by a coalition of the different groups who make up the school community. As one sixth former put it, “It is a collaboration of different people and voices … everyone has a part to play.” I concluded that school culture was like a jigsaw, with leaders, teachers, parents, pupil, governors and policy makers all having crucial pieces to contribute to the whole.

That importance of connection for schools as individual institutions applies equally to the whole educational system. Like most headteachers I am a fierce supporter of autonomy and can see the huge benefits that it has brought through energising creativity and innovation. However, autonomy should not be misinterpreted as meaning that every school should stand alone. The word that we need to use alongside autonomy is trust, because it is by recognising that sense

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of connectedness and the need to work alongside others that we can continue to move education forward.

Elsewhere in this publication Professor Chris Husbands points out, “Educational reform is not a mystery. We know what to do.” Why then have we failed to implement the measures that would lead to such significant improvement? I would argue that the answer to this question is rooted in culture. We have allowed a lack of trust to paralyse our system, preventing us from moving forward together. Too often there has been a suspicion of individual schools from the centre, a conviction that “they must be up to something; we just haven’t worked out what it is yet”. In response, policy makers and government institutions have been regarded with equal suspicion by the autonomous institutions that they have created. Education in 2014 could be described as many things, but certainly not as a closely fitting jigsaw in which each piece recognises its need of the other in order to create the whole.

Trust can sound a rather weak and naïve word compared to the forceful language of recent educational times. Who would want to be a promoter of trust when they could be a ‘Hero Headteacher’ a ‘National Leader’ or an ‘Educational Champion’? However, focusing upon the need for trust is actually a hard-headed recognition of what does and does not work. Study after study has shown that developing a robust culture of trust and connectedness actually raises achievement. Michael Fullan points out that real improvement happens when “school culture, district culture and government culture align”. The McKinsey report How the World’s Most Improved Education Systems Keep Getting Better highlights the importance of ‘collaborative practices’ while a follow-up report from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) argues that for genuine school improvement to take place we need ‘a long-term vision and strategy for Teaching and Learning that moves beyond compliance and to which all partners sign up’. Professor David Reynolds identifies ‘school to school collaboration … making available to individuals and organisations the fundamental knowledge of good practice’ as being at the heart of successful attempts to reduce the variation within schools that successive Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) studies have identified as the major issue facing the UK. Although it may not always sound exciting, the evidence for the impact of strategies focusing upon building trust and connection is compelling.

5 Aston, Helen et al, 2013, What Works in Enabling School Improvement? The Role of the Middle Tier, https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/MTSL02/MTSL02.pdf, P7
Louise Stoll has suggested that culture can operate either as a “black hole” or “fertile garden”. If we want our educational system to flower then we need to recognise the transformational impact of a culture built upon trust. All of us – schools, policy makers, pupils, parents and the middle tier – are part of a complex three-dimensional jigsaw that only achieves coherence when each of the pieces are put together. If we want to improve our educational system, we can only connect.

Peter Kent
ASCL President 2014-15 and Headteacher of Lawrence Sheriff School