

# Sir John Cass's Foundation Lecture 2010



**Why Schools?  
Why Universities?**  
Dr Anthony Seldon



# Sir John Cass's Foundation Lecture 2010

## **Why Schools? Why Universities?**

Dr Anthony Seldon



Copyright © 2011 Dr Anthony Seldon

First published in the UK in 2011 by Sir John Cass's Foundation

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0-9527503-4-1

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission from the Publisher in writing.

Designed by Andrew Barron/Theextension  
Printed in England by Geerings

Sir John Cass's Foundation  
31 Jewry Street, London EC3N 2EY

[www.sirjohncass.org](http://www.sirjohncass.org)

# Contents

<b>Foreword</b> by Kevin Everett, Treasurer and Chairman, Cass Foundation	5
<b>Introduction</b>	7
The aspiration <i>for schools and universities</i>	8
The reality	9
Is the <i>status quo</i> popular?	14
Why change the <i>status quo</i> ?	15
The narrowness of British schools	17
Drawing the correct lessons from abroad?	20
Five solutions for Britain's schools	21
What are universities for?	31
Who is happy with universities?	32
Problems with British universities	33
Solution to the problems for universities	36
<b>Sir John Cass's Foundation</b>	40

# Foreword

**Sir John Cass's Foundation** is a leading City of London based educational charity, which promotes participation and achievement in education. It takes its name from Sir John Cass (1661–1718) who was a City of London politician and philanthropist.

The Foundation not only supports six educational institutions in the nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education, which bear the name of the Founder, but has also provided substantial assistance to a large number of major educational initiatives in London, including educational action zones, specialist schools, parent promoted schools, the schools alumni initiative, theatres, academies and universities.

The Sir John Cass Foundation Lecture is given annually by a high profile policy maker or commentator at the Cass Business School in London and seeks to advance debate about the future of the provision of education in our country.

The inaugural lecture was delivered by Lord Andrew Adonis, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools on 25th June 2007 and was entitled 'Schools For The Future'. The Second Lecture took place on 13th November 2008 and was delivered by Ed Balls, the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families and was entitled 'A World Class Education For Every Child'.

The Third Lecture took place on 3rd December 2009 and delivered by Michael Gove, the then Shadow Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families. It was entitled 'The Democratic Intellect-What Do We Need To Succeed In The 21st Century?'. This Lecture was published and widely disseminated to educationalists, politicians and other interested parties across the country.

This year the Sir John Cass's Foundation Lecture was delivered by Dr Anthony Seldon, the Master of Wellington College. It was entitled 'Why Schools, Why Universities' and the Foundation is very grateful indeed that it has been given permission to film and to publish the transcript of this year's lecture.

The Foundation is indebted to all four speakers and has been delighted by both the quality and content of each of the four lectures that have taken place to date. It is keen to enter into a debate with those in the field of education and to exploring meaningful and well thought out programmes that improve the life chances of pupils and students living in London.

As the Foundation celebrated the tercentenary of the opening of Sir John Cass's School in the City of London in 1710, it has not only reflected on the past, but is clearly now looking ahead as well.

These are interesting times in education and Sir John Cass's Foundation will look sympathetically on new projects and ideas for the years ahead and is keen to engage with other high profile speakers so that the Sir John Cass's Foundation Lecture continues to be such a success.

Kevin Everett  
Treasurer and Chairman  
Sir John Cass's Foundation



# Introduction

**I am deeply honoured to be giving the fourth Sir John Cass's foundation lecture.<sup>1</sup>**

How could I not be conscious that I am following in the formidable footsteps of one former Secretary of State, Ed Balls, one who should have been Secretary of State, Andrew Adonis, and one who is currently Secretary of State, Michael Gove?

What possible hope have I to have an influence after these luminaries have spoken? What, if anything, has been left unsaid?

Well, history shows that it is rare for Education Secretaries to make much enduring difference, though all try.

When allied to *ideas*, however, and if the *circumstances* are right, as they were for R. A. Butler in 1944, or Kenneth Baker in 1988, then things can happen.<sup>2</sup> So this is my chance. Here goes.

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the following for reading and commenting on the text: Richard Foley, Geoff Lucas, Joanna Seldon, Alan Smithers, David Watson and Patrick Watson. The following also agreed to be interviewed: Steve Beswick, Mary Curnock Cook, Christine Ennew, Frank Furedi, Malcolm Grant, David Price, Steve Smith, Alan Smithers, Rick Trainor.

<sup>2</sup> See Anthony Seldon, *Ideas Are Not Enough* in David Marquand and Anthony Seldon, eds. *The Ideas That Shaped Postwar History* (Fontana, 1996)



# The aspiration *for schools and universities*

## **Schools and universities should be places of challenge,**

enrichment and deep fulfilment: where all the faculties that a student possesses are identified, nurtured and developed, and deep learning takes place.

They should open the minds, as well as the hearts, of the young. It is vital that they do this as many adults possess neither open minds nor open hearts. Our young should learn how to think and how fully to feel. Education is their greatest chance to learn how to live.

The world over, schools and universities seem increasingly to be closing the mind and the heart, not opening it.<sup>3</sup>

A school should be educating the young for life in all its fullness—not only for work, but for the twenty first century in all its unknowable dimensions.

Schools should be highly prized as they are in emerging countries like Vietnam and Uganda. The young at school in Britain should be grateful to learn in such well resourced environments, and their parents should be appreciative too, and readily support the school in educating their children.

The absence of gratitude often from our schoolchildren and their parents for the education they receive – whether free or paid for – is a key part of the British malaise.

Universities should be rounding off the education experience, taking undergraduates to new heights of scholarship, excitement and learning, and giving them the profoundest intellectual experiences of their lives.

Higher education should be stretching students *broadly* too, beyond the merely academic, preparing them fully for life. They should be turning out responsible, capable and deeply fulfilled young men and women

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Seldon, *An End To Factory Schools* (CPS, 2010). See RSA 'Open Minds' literature.

# The reality

**British schools should be leading the world** academically and in the provision of psychologically nurturing environments in which they develop their young. They are doing neither well enough.

British universities should be leading the world in teaching, research and innovation, as well as be chomping at the bit to export their unique qualities abroad. They are losing ground on the first and are failing to capitalise fully on the second.

British schools and universities are falling far short of what they could and should be.

Figures from a major analysis of OECD countries, the PISA study, published yesterday, show that the UK has dropped from 7th in 2000 to 25th in reading, and from 8th to 28th in maths, among the 30 'OECD' countries,<sup>4</sup> while some countries like Poland and Estonia have forged ahead.<sup>5</sup>

Britain, despite billions of extra pounds spent in the last decade, has stood still against our competitors. 'We are a C country with A\* pretensions', was the editorial verdict in the *Times Educational Supplement*.<sup>6</sup>

The sobering fact is that our schools are thus not even doing well enough at the one objective that all else has been sacrificed in order to achieve, securing good exam passes.

Our schools are ineluctably moving towards becoming exam factories, an unthinking batch process of rote-learning, with inert students and teachers moving along a mechanical assembly line from lesson to lesson until spat out at the end clutching in their anaesthetised hands a certificate listing largely meaningless exam passes.

<sup>4</sup> BBC news, 07/12/10

<sup>5</sup> Kate Loveys, *Daily Mail*, 08/12/10

<sup>6</sup> Editorial, *TES*, 10/12/10

Peter Abbs and Guy Claxton have for many years been two of the most persuasive voices decrying the impoverishment of education. The former writes: ‘the fear is that schools, colleges and universities have become no more than corporations run by managers... without character, charisma or charm.’<sup>7</sup>

Britain is not alone in this new ‘industrial revolution’. Tony Wagner of Harvard, author of *The Global Achievement Gap*, says that US schools are similarly failing because their passive learning environments and uninspiring lessons focus on preparing the young for tests which merely reward memory, not intellect.<sup>8</sup>

Schools indeed the world over are having the creativity and life-force sucked out of them as they dance to their governments’ demand for ‘exams, exams, exams’. The world over, governments equate good education purely with exam success. Parents, whipped up to believe their children might fall behind, clamber desperately onto the bandwagon.

Britain can’t even boast that its young people are content: it comes bottom in league tables for child well-being, most recently in a 2007 study of twenty one industrialised nations conducted by UNICEF<sup>9</sup>. What is truly shameful is that little or nothing has changed in response to devastating reports such as this. The coalition government shows little sign of responding to this indictment.

British universities, meanwhile, are similarly exam-drunk, and are slipping against overseas competitors, with funding levels considerably below the United States. This is madness. Almost alone in the OECD, Britain offers a fudge in its higher education, a root cause of our poor international performance.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Abbs, *Against the Flow*, (Routledge, 2003, p.27). Guy Claxton, *Liberating the Learner*, (Routledge, 1996)

<sup>8</sup> Tony Wagner, *The Global Achievement Gap*, (Basic Books, 2008)

<sup>9</sup> *Child Poverty in Perspective: an overview of child well-being in rich countries* (UNICEF, 2007)

British universities are slow to diversify abroad. For all the success of the top British universities, student achievement and wellbeing across the remainder persists considerably below what it should be.

At worst, British universities are becoming thoughtless factories: peopled by undergraduates with little idea why they are there, save as a stepping stone to a job, taught by academics with little interest in or ability at teaching, whose research, especially in the humanities and social sciences, is taking us no closer to true knowledge. We may be some way off the dystopian vision – ‘universities should be blown apart’ – described by Simon Jenkins in a damning indictment last month,<sup>10</sup> but all is not well, especially beyond the unloved STEM subjects. Alain de Botton writes forlornly of his hope that the humanities at university will allow students to become less ‘selfish, unempathetic and blinkered human beings’ of greater benefit ‘not only to the economy, but also to our friends, our children and our spouses’.<sup>11</sup>

Yet we are not preparing them well enough even to manage their lives while at university. A *YouGov* survey, conducted amongst undergraduates exclusively for this lecture, showed that 25% report themselves as actively stressed, with financial anxieties ranking high.<sup>12</sup>

Let me clarify at the outset what this lecture is not: it is not an attack on teachers in schools, nor on academics in universities. It is not an attack on school students nor undergraduates.

It is most definitely not an attack on the state sector in Britain, from whom the independent sector could learn so much more. Much good has happened in the state sector in the last 15 years. Indeed the independent sector has lagged behind the state sector in innovation and professional development.

<sup>10</sup> Simon Jenkins, *Guardian*, 04/11/10

<sup>11</sup> Alain de Botton, BBC, ‘A Point of View’ 07/01/11

<sup>12</sup> ‘Student experience of university life’ – *YouGov* poll conducted in Nov 2010 for the Sir John Cass’s Foundation Lecture

School leadership has in my view been superior in state than independent schools, helped in part by the greater emphasis on professional leadership associated with the National College of School Leadership (NCSL) and the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT). In independent schools, school leadership is often mere management of existing *status quos*, with a desire not to offend tradition, governors, parents, teachers, pupils, alumni. Anyone.

The independent sector has conspicuously failed to use its independence to be innovative or imaginative.<sup>13</sup> Year after year, it has trotted out the same formula. Despite PR-fuelled appearances, the reality is that most independent schools are much like each other.

Most offer an excellent education, as good as any in the world, but few have used their opportunities, as Bedales and Gordonstoun have done, to offer pupils and parents different and distinctive offerings. Some, like St Paul's School in London, Manchester Grammar or King Edward's Birmingham, are making brave efforts to move in the direction of being 'needs-blind'.

The independent sector in general has remained too much in a cocoon, with little attempt to learn even from the innovative approaches such as those adopted in Steiner schools, or the marvellous collaborative and inquiry-based approach to learning pioneered in Italy's Reggio Emilia schools and taken forward by different institutions including Harvard's 'Project Zero'.<sup>14</sup>

Ideally, all state schools will soon become independent. Till then, independent and state schools urgently need to work even more closely together, following the lead of many existing partnership projects, often funded by the schools themselves.<sup>15</sup> All independent schools should fund, or partner with, academics.

**13** HMC, the senior association among independent schools, had tried in the last five years in particular to encourage innovation, inspired in particular by its high calibre secretary, Geoff Lucas.

**14** For information on Steiner Schools, the Reggio Emilia approach and Project Zero, see the internet.

**15** See Antony Seldon, *Public and Private Education: The Divide Must End* (SMF, 2001), Antony Seldon and Antony Edkins, *Partnership Not Paternalism* (IPPR, 2002), Anthony Salz, Keynote Address to the HMC Conference, London, 27/09/10

What this lecture is saying is that we have lost sight of what schools and universities are *for*. It is saying that British schools and universities are overwhelmingly the products of nineteenth and twentieth century thinking and preoccupations, and need dramatic reconfiguration if they are to triumph in the face of the challenges of the twenty-first century.

The lecture is posing the most fundamental question of all: what is the purpose today of schools and universities? Come Labour, come Conservative, come Coalition, the *status quo* trundles on. Cameron and Clegg join Blair and Brown in believing ‘education, education, education’ is the most important policy of their government.

John Major was hurt when he heard Blair list these as his top three priorities: ‘actually, they were my three priorities too’, he said, ‘but not necessarily in the same order’. But did they ask what their favoured education was for? Not one.

Politicians, civil servants and leaders in universities and schools have become so deeply imbued with conservatism and orthodoxy they do not even realise how tired and uninspiring their vision is.

So let me tell you straight – our schools and our universities no longer have a clear vision of what they are doing, they are no longer maximising their potential, and this needs urgently to change.

# Is the *status quo* popular?

**Many are happy with the status quo.** Shame on them.

Governments, who trumpet on high year-on-year improvement in exam results, are happy. As are heads, as are many teachers, as are exam boards.

It is commonplace for heads to denounce league tables, GCSEs and A Levels. But almost all play the game.<sup>16</sup> Adopt a different curriculum and exam system? Not on your life.

Growing numbers are, however, unhappy with the *status quo*.

Universities express mounting concern about the school leavers they receive. They say they cannot think independently, solve problems nor indeed write English.

Inspectors are not happy. Last month, retiring Head of Ofsted, Christine Gilbert, said “the levels achieved by many children at the end of primary school fall stubbornly short of what is achievable.”<sup>17</sup>

Employers are not happy. Caroline Waters, Director of People and Policy at BT, speaks for many when she said: “young people who join us from schools and universities lack many of the skills that are an everyday requirement in the world of work.”<sup>18</sup>

“We need problem-solvers, people who can cope with uncertainty, people who can work with others who are different, and who ask the sort of questions that challenge not just what we do but how we do it.”

Or as CBI Director General, Richard Lambert put it in January 2010, we should be ‘ashamed’ of school results and the failure to do more for poorer children in particular.<sup>19</sup>

Companies like CISCO and Microsoft are already reporting schools are voting with their feet – they are finding that employers prefer qualifications given to school students by companies to bland GCSE or other existing qualifications.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> For example, Dr Martin Stephen, High Master of St Paul’s, quoted in the *Sunday Telegraph*, 21/08/10

<sup>17</sup> BBC news, 14/11/2010

<sup>18</sup> Caroline Waters, Whole Education Conference, London, 06/12/10

<sup>19</sup> Anthony Seldon, *An End to Factory Schools*, [CPS, 2010] p17.

<sup>20</sup> Interview, Steve Beswick and Ray Fleming of Microsoft, 03/12/10

# Why change the *status quo*?

**So pressure for change is building.** The 2010 PISA results further suggest that the *status quo* in schools must be changed.

Five additional factors suggest that the time has come for radical re-thinking for schools. I touch on these only briefly: a vast literature underpins each.

First, finance. Labour 's annual average rate of increase in spending, of 6.8% on schools, is not continuing. We need to find fresh solutions for schools to do their job better within the money available.<sup>21</sup>

Second, mounting pupil, teacher and parental discontent. Children no longer want to be in monotonous exams factories, teachers no longer want to teach in them, and parents increasingly no longer want their children to attend them.

Third, the twenty-first century. The writing of A level and GCSE answers as the sole end of schools has little or no relevance to the skills required in the new century. Exams in present form as sole validator have failed. They are broken. Kaput. Finished.

Fourth, the digital revolution. Though it has yet to touch schools fully, in the next ten years it will, profoundly.<sup>22</sup> We are showing little sign of comprehending what it will, and what it will not do. Microsoft's 'School of the Future' in Philadelphia, opened in 2006, shows what may be achieved.<sup>23</sup>

But already the experience for many children is that lessons are slow and dull compared to the world they inhabit for hours each week on their own computers.

<sup>21</sup> Greg Hurst, *The Times*, 02/12/2009

<sup>22</sup> See Joe Nutt, *Professional Educators and the Evolving Role of ICT in Schools* (CfBT, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> For a critique, see Meris Stansbury *School of the Future: Lessons in Failure*, eSchoolNews, 01/06/09.



Jane McGonigal of the Institute for the Future in California estimates that we are spending up to 3 billion hours a week on computer games. We must emulate the imagination and involvement of this activity in our classes if we are not to lose the attention of our young.<sup>24</sup>

Julia Hobsbawn of Editorial Intelligence says schools must teach ‘total literacy’ about social media, and networking face-to-face as well as virtually.

Fifth, research on the brain. This vast and growing field of research internationally does not support the continuation of passive learning in arid, emotion-free classes, in schools where teachers are afraid of teaching imaginatively or making mistakes, and where heads are dull operatives acting out the instructions of bureaucrats in far away capitals.<sup>25</sup>

**24** Jane McGonigal, *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*, (Jonathan Cape, 2011).

**25** John Abbott, *Overschooled but undereducated: How the Crisis in Education is Jeopardizing our Adolescents* (Network Continuum, 2009).

# The narrowness of British schools

**The root problem** is that schools should be educating the *whole child*, not just instructing them for tests. This approach crucially is not at the expense of an academic education, and, properly done, it will enhance it. At Wellington, we say that each student possesses ‘eight aptitudes’, which can be seen as four sets of pairs making up an octagon – the logical and linguistic, creative and physical, moral and spiritual, personal and social.

Taking even just the two intellectual aptitudes, the logical and linguistic, schools do not even properly encourage the young to *think* or reflect deeply in these two areas. Schools no longer teach *academic subjects*: they teach *exams*: not *history*, but *history GCSE*; not *mathematics*, but *mathematics AS Level*; not *chemistry*, but *chemistry A Level*. Schools are narrowing the young.

Schools engage too little in scholarship. They have become a derelict ship.

Rote learning and instruction has taken the place of genuine learning and imaginative individual responses. Teachers are being reduced to technicians, students to secretaries, schools to factories.

An IB student in a German sixth form class said to me last week: ‘IB is so much harder: we never had to think at GCSE: we just had to learn and repeat the answers’.

I applaud the drive to bring in excellent teachers in Michael Gove’s Schools White Paper<sup>26</sup> of last month. But until teachers are trusted to *teach*, a factor it insufficiently addresses, the profession will never attract nor retain the brightest and most creative minds.

As for the other six aptitudes, the government and educational powers in Britain do not seem to ‘get it’. Not even the aptitude most traditional in schools, the physical aptitude. Michael Gove’s attempt to scrap the £162 million school sports strategy, and apparent lack of appreciation of the importance of sport in schools, is troubling in its ignorance.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Schools White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (The Stationery Office Limited, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> Toby Helm and Anushka Asthana, *Guardian*, 21/11/10.

Over 200 schools and community playing fields were sold off under Labour after 2007, despite repeated promises to protect them.<sup>28</sup> Sheer folly. Expect the rhetoric on sport to change as we approach 2012. But a solid grounding and education in sport is not just for the Olympics but for life.

In my school this Saturday, there will be some 40 teams playing rugby and hockey, with other girls and boys involved in shooting and a host of other sporting activities. Every child who wants to play competitively can do so in a whole range of sports.

The exercise helps their physical health. The students learn about teamwork, leadership, and risk. Above all, they have *fun*. Why should sport be the right of the few rather than the many?

What of creativity, another of the eight aptitudes? Every child while at school should have the opportunity to develop all of its branches: music, creative writing, drama, dance and visual art.

Ken Robinson, author of the report *All our futures: creativity, culture and education* of May 1999, subsequently binned by the Labour government, says ‘the case for creativity increases every day. The world is changing faster than ever. Our children are facing a world completely different from the one in which my generation grew up. Creativity is not a whimsical additive to education. It is as central as literacy and numeracy’.<sup>29</sup>

Creativity is not something that should exist in isolated lessons or activities: every single lesson should creatively engage our children and teachers.

All children in state schools should have the chance to learn musical instruments, and all should have copious opportunities to act, to dance, to paint and to write prose and poetry.

**28** James Chapman, *DailyMail*, 03/08/09.

**29** Sir Ken Robinson, Creativity Accelerators Conference, Wellington College, 19/11/10.

Yet despite Michael Gove's aspiration for every child to learn an instrument, there has been a significant reduction in local authority budgets. In Bedfordshire in April, the local authority reclassified the service as 'leisure' rather than 'education' in an attempt not to be seen to be cutting frontline education.<sup>30</sup>

Learning an instrument is becoming an elitist privilege, not the right of all. So is dance, so is acting. The Federation of Music Services found that many of the 158 music services in the UK were having to cut their provision.<sup>31</sup> The Simon Bolivar orchestra alone shows the transformative power of music for non-privileged children.

Trips, outdoor adventure and Combined Cadet Forces (CCFs or ACFs) all develop the personal and social aptitudes, and should equally be part of school life for every single child. The government should be emulating the independent sector, where this breadth is the experience of every child.

Volunteering opportunities develop the moral aptitude, and should be expanded hugely in schools: in the US, 46% of secondary schools involve their pupils in curriculum-related service activities. Littlehampton Academy and Sevenoaks School are examples of schools that offer excellent volunteering. Research in the US shows how it improves young people's moral and educational progress as well as school attendance.<sup>32</sup>

Britain lags a long way behind. Dame Elisabeth Hoodless, the long-serving head of Community Service Volunteers, deplores the lack of progress since 2000 in Britain: 'The UK has a long way to go to catch up with the impact and benefit of the US approach'.<sup>33</sup> As I argued in my book *Trust*, Britain should introduce a national community service programme for all.<sup>34</sup>

**30** Email, Hannah Gommersall to author, 03/12/10.

**31** BBC education, 19/11/10

**32** See, for example, the 1990s Teen Outreach Programme on The National Campaign website: <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/ea2007/desc/top.aspx>

**33** Email, Dame Elisabeth Hoodless to author, 11/12/10

**34** Anthony Seldon, *Trust*, [Biteback, 2009] p.188–89.

# Drawing the correct lessons from abroad?

**The schools' White Paper** has much praise for Singapore, Sweden, and Alberta. The argument is that these have excellent education systems because they secure excellent results.<sup>35</sup>

Probe more deeply in these three schools' systems, however, and one finds that schools in each lay great store by eight aptitude enrichment. Lim Lai Cheng, principal of Raffles Institution, at the apex of Singapore's school system, says '40 or 50% of a student's time at Raffles is devoted to holistic development'.<sup>36</sup>

Raffles helped pioneer the 'Integrated Programme' where students in Singapore have protected time for enrichment activities, and which forms a key part of Raffles 'graduation'. In the 1990s, the Singapore education system broadened out to offer its young people education far beyond exam passing. Its schools give real importance to producing good citizens.

Singapore found, as does China today, that its students may be excellent on paper, but are low on imaginative and creative thinking, and are deficient in problem-solving and collaborative skills. Some leading companies including Goldman Sachs have been reluctant to employ such students because of deficiencies in these.

Sweden abolished formal exams forty years ago and replaced them by a grade system. Parents in Sweden seem positively to favour breadth of education for their children. Anders Hultin, the architect of the country's voucher system, said 'the experience of Sweden shows that parents positively want their children to play music and sport at schools, and for their broader abilities to be nurtured'.<sup>37</sup>

In Alberta too, schools are renowned for their breadth of provision.<sup>38</sup> Jim Brandon, a senior leader Alberta's school districts, says that 'our kids at 12 learn socially, aesthetically and problem solving, as well as how to pass exams'.<sup>39</sup>

**35** Cheryl Lim and Chris Davies, *Helping Schools Succeed: Lessons from abroad*, (Policy Exchange, 2008).

**36** Interview, Lim Lai Cheng, 25/11/10.

**37** Interview, Anders Hultin, 03/12/10

**38** Teachers TV, 'Lessons from Alberta', 02/11/10 (available on the teachers.tv website).

**39** Interview, Jim Brandon, 06/12/10

# Five solutions for Britain's schools

**Something far more radical** – and fundamental – is required to ensure deep learning than anything envisaged so far by the Coalition government. The November 2010 White Paper document contained much that was valuable, including the encouragement of academies and free schools.

Allowing schools to be more autonomous, a move backed by bodies as diverse as the World Bank and management consultants McKinsey, is indeed vital.<sup>40</sup>

More autonomy will let school leaders lead – it will encourage able people to become heads. Agility and continuity of school leadership are identified by McKinsey as core attributes for successful leadership in their latest study *How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better*.<sup>41</sup>

But it is naive to believe the current malaise will be solved by more autonomy alone.

Because the malaise is so deep that a *systemic* solution is needed, one where academic standards and scholarship in schools are, at last, taken seriously, where technical skills become regarded highly and are better taught, and where young people are given appropriate vocational skills in a way that engages them.

Remedies are at hand, and come in five areas.

First, government should divide schools into three roughly equal-sized streams at 14, an academic, technical and vocational stream. The academic stream would ensure that all pupils who have genuine academic ability and interest could be again stretched at school in a scholarly manner.

The technical stream in the middle would offer a blend of an academic and vocational curriculum. The third element, the vocational stream, would consist predominantly of practical-based learning.

<sup>40</sup> Patrick Watson, Montrose blog, *School Based Management*, December 2010

<sup>41</sup> *How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better* (McKinsey & Company, November 2010).

Universities would be heavily responsible for overseeing the curriculum in the academic stream, the professions in the technical stream, and employers in the vocational stream.

This model echoes the ‘tripartite’ model introduced after the Second World War which failed on at least three counts: the technical stream in the middle was never adequately funded, while the third stream, the secondary modern, was seen as the dumping zone for children of low ability, as opposed to a flourishing option for those whose gifts were primarily practical rather than academic. Dividing children at 11 was too early and penalised late developers: 14 is much better.

Second, Britain badly needs an overhaul of its outdated school exams, which have changed little in fifty years. We do not mean more exams, as the government seems to be thinking in response to the latest PISA bombshell, but *different* and *better* exams.

As a purely interim measure, with immediate effect, all January modules should be scrapped at AS levels and A2. AS Levels should be sat only at the end of the lower sixth, carrying 30% of the final mark, with A-Levels at the end of the upper sixth year, carrying the remaining 70%.

The government should promote a diverse exam choice for schools. High among those systems it should be championing is the *International Baccalaureate* (IB), consistently the most successful exam system in the world. The IB exists at three levels: the primary years programme, up to age of 11: the middle years programme, for 11 to 16 year olds, and the IB diploma, for 16 to 19 year olds.

In the new system I propose, new exams would be held at 16 and 18: GCSEs and A Levels in current debased form would be abolished. In the academic stream, students at 16 would sit either the Middle Years Programme of the IB, or ‘MAs’, standing for ‘Mid Level Academic subjects’, which would replace GCSEs. Each student in the academic stream would sit, on average, ten MAs.

Students in the technical stream would sit a mixture of five MA subjects, consisting of the core of 2 Sciences, Maths, English and a foreign language, as well as five ‘MT’ subjects, standing for ‘Mid Level Technical subjects’.

The vocational stream would sit five MTs and five ‘MVs’, which stand for ‘Mid Level Vocational subjects’. All of these new exams would be based on problem-solving, and application of knowledge to fresh problems, rather than mindless repetition of pre-learned answers.

At 18, students in the academic stream would all take four or five ‘HAs’, i.e. ‘Higher Level Academic subjects’, which would take the best of old style academic A-Levels. In addition, all would sit a ‘theory of knowledge’ paper on critical thinking and philosophy, and would deliver an extended project.

As an alternative in the sixth form, students could sit the IB ‘diploma’ programme, which offers six subjects, a theory of knowledge paper and an extended essay.

Students in the middle stream would sit a mixture of HAs and ‘HTs’, standing for ‘Higher Level Technical subjects’.

Students in the vocational stream would sit two ‘HV’ subjects, standing for ‘Higher Level Vocational’, and could additionally sit HAs and HTs.

Students in all three streams, to qualify for ‘graduation’ from school, would have to pass a ‘diploma’, in which they showed levels of proficiency in the eight aptitudes, including physical activity, the arts, volunteering and personal skills.

The tripartite division beginning at 14 is advocated by many wise figures, including Professor Alan Smithers and Geoff Lucas of HMC, and alone will provide the solutions that Britain needs.<sup>42</sup> The new ‘technical academics’, beginning at 14 and pioneered by Kenneth Baker, are showing the way.

A third major area for change, where Coalition thinking is again currently deficient, is in its inadequate valuation of the broader purpose of schools, to prepare young people not only for higher education and work, but also for life.

<sup>42</sup> See Geoff Lucas, *Conference and Common Room*, January 2011. Warwick Mansell, *Times Educational Supplement*, 29/10/10.



The eight aptitude approach, derived from the work of Howard Gardner, on multiple intelligences,<sup>43</sup> which underpins this approach, has been attacked by John White and others in the educational establishment for lacking empirical evidence.<sup>44</sup> To this I would respond that 65 years of empirical research in university education departments has failed to produce much incontrovertible information about schools: whether classes should be single-sex or mixed, streamed or mixed ability, small or large, didactic or child-centred.

The failure of the education establishment to deliver on its promise to provide a more scientific underpinning for schools calls into question the grounds for university academics decrying what professionals who work in schools know to be intuitively correct. My own experience, leading schools for fifteen years, and as a parent of three children, tells me education should be holistic, not just based on exam-passing, as schools should be preparing young people for life.

Every school in Britain should thus follow the holistic model. Where children come from less advantaged backgrounds, it is all the more important that school provides this breadth of education, because the opportunities for holistic development, including cultural enrichment, sporting opportunities, leadership and character development, may not exist to the same extent at home.

I often reflect on the experience of my father, who attended state schools in east London: he loved cricket and opera, yet I don't believe ever had the chance to play cricket at school, nor to learn an instrument. His only singing experience came in the choir of his synagogue. Throughout his life, he never participated in playing sport or making music.

**43** Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The theory of Multiple Intelligences*, [Basic Books, 1983].

**44** See, for example, John White, *Howard Gardner: the Myth of Multiple Intelligences*, Institute of Education Lecture, 17/11/04

**45** See the work of Demos on character building. For example Jen Lexmond and Richard Reeves, *Parents are the principal architects of a fairer society...* *Building Character*, [Demos, 2009].

‘Character building’ can, and should, lie at the heart of every school.<sup>45</sup> The ‘moral’ aptitude requires the young to understand clearly the difference between right and wrong, and allows them to discern for themselves which actions they might or might not want to commit. Schools are shirking moral education.

Missing from many schools too is development of the ‘spiritual’ aptitude. Researchers David Hay and Rebecca Nye find that by primary school age children demonstrate a natural spiritual awareness. But subsequently, lacking encouragement, spiritual awareness in many cases has begun to wither by the teens.<sup>46</sup>

I have been arguing for several years now about the necessity for schools to provide holistic development, including wellbeing. This vision is dismissed by educational conservatives, such as Toby Young or Frank Furedi, as at worst ‘psycho-babble’, at best distraction from the ‘real learning’ of academic subjects.<sup>47</sup>

To the left, the holistic model may work fine for privileged children in independent schools, but is often seen as an indulgence for the great majority. This critically misses the key point which is that what is not developed when young will often lie dormant for the rest of a person’s life.

Given the centrality of holistic education and well-being in the two schools that I have run, and the repeated accusations that they are anti-intellectual and indulgent, it is important to point out that in neither was it at the *expense* of exam performance.

A-Levels at Brighton College, from 1997 to 2004 went up from 55% to 81% of passes at A and B grades, at an average rise of 4% a year, and at Wellington they have increased from 65% to 93% from 2005 to 2010 at a rate of nearly 5%, well above the trend rate of increase of 1–2% per annum.<sup>48</sup>

**46** David Hay and Rebecca Nye, *The Spirit of the Child*, (Jessica Kingsley Publications, 2006). See also Larry Culliford, *The Psychology of Spirituality: An Introduction*, (Jessica Kingsley Publications, 2010).

**47** See Frank Furedi, *Wasted, Why Education Isn’t Working* (Continuum, 2009).

**48** The AB pass rate fell back to 77% in my final year at Brighton in 2005, when the first ‘post-assisted places’ year sat A Level.

One cannot point to a causal link between holistic education and exam results: what one can say is that offering a broad education and teaching wellbeing need not be at the expense of exam performance.

Fourth then, well-being needs to be taken much more seriously in all British schools. The debate has been characterised as a choice between well-being or academic standards. But the experience shows that, done properly, it should be well-being *enhancing* academic standards.

To imagine all young people will learn healthy habits of body and mind, without any programmed input from schools, is naive. Some children benefit from excellent parenting from which they imbibe psychologically healthy attitudes for life. Many children, even with the most loving of parents, do not.

The consistently high rates of poor adolescent mental health, and the worrying abuse of alcohol and drugs, alone suggest the need to take adolescent mental health seriously.

Since 1998, the field of ‘positive psychology’ has centred around the work of Professor Martin Seligman, and the University of Pennsylvania where he is based. In Britain, the aptly named Professor Felicia Huppert has been running The Well-being Institute at the University of Cambridge since 2006.

It is no longer tenable for government, the medical profession and schools to continue to ignore the growing body of evidence that good mental habits and resilience can be learnt in school.<sup>49</sup>

Children are being sold short because of the innate conservatism of the medical and educational professions. This has to be wrong at a time when our young people’s well-being is ranked so low internationally, and when suicide rates amongst young people are tragically on the increase again by 16% in the last five years.

<sup>49</sup> See Tal ben Shahar, *Happier*, McGraw Hill, 2007, and Ian Morris, *Learning to Ride Elephants: Teaching Well-Being and Happiness in Schools*, Continuum, 2009

Dr Raphael Kelvin, a senior advisor on mental health to the government, insists, ‘the emotional and mental pathways laid down in childhood and adolescence, are crucial for adult mental health. Listening to young people is critical’.<sup>50</sup>

From the top down, the emphasis has to be on an orderly environment in schools where all parties are respected and listened to, where there is a culture of affirmation and praise, and one free of fear and menace. To facilitate this, schools should be broken up into smaller pastoral units called ‘houses’. Schools need ‘human’ scale.

Learning about well-being at school will not prevent reversals or tragedies occurring in the lives of young people, but it will give them skills to cope better with life’s inevitable misfortunes when they arise.

More important than having specific well-being lessons is for the whole school to have all-pervasive psychologically healthy attitudes.<sup>51</sup>

The approach is not only about helping people get from ‘-5’ to ‘0’, to a life which is tolerable: it is about getting from ‘0’ to ‘+5’, a life which is flourishing. What are our schools for if they are not helping our young to flourish?

Teaching young people to be still and ‘mindful’ is a core part of well-being.<sup>52</sup> All schools could have stillness ‘slots’. So too is helping them learn about leadership, beginning with learning how to lead themselves, and be in charge of their lives.<sup>53</sup>

At the heart of the whole ‘positive psychology’ approach is service – looking after others. It is the very opposite of selfish hedonism. This again speaks of the need for volunteering.

Serving others not only makes students happier – it resets their default switches to make them realise afresh how much they have to be grateful for.

**50** Email, Raphael Kelvin to author, 01/12/10.

**51** See official website, *Action for Happiness*

**52** See John Kabat-Zinn, “Wherever You Go, There You Are”, Little Brown, 1994.

**53** See ‘Wellington Leadership Institute’, on Wellington College website

Fifth and finally, schools need to change in a host of other ways too to enhance ‘active’ learning. The work of John Hattie of Auckland University shows that what really matters for learning is whether teachers themselves are learners, with a profound commitment to their own professional development, and whether the young are being engaged as active learners and thinking why they learn.<sup>54</sup>

This has been known about for many years. Jonathan Smith, author of the *Learning Game*, one of the best books on teaching, quotes A C Benson from 1902 decrying teachers who allow themselves to be dragged down ‘in a stream of mechanical duties’ rather than remaining ‘fresh and active-minded’.<sup>55</sup>

If the renowned 1999 ‘hole in the wall’ project in India showed anything, it was the innate curiosity of young people and their desire to learn. Teaching in schools and dull regimentation too often impede learning and stunt that natural curiosity among the young.<sup>56</sup>

The layout of classrooms needs to be changed, certainly in the sixth forms, with ‘Harkness tables’ introduced. Philanthropist Edward Harkness first introduced them in St Paul’s School, New Hampshire, in 1930. They are now used in some of the world’s greatest schools, including Phillips Exeter in New Hampshire, Phillips Andover in Massachusetts, and Lawrenceville in Princeton.

In Harkness lessons, the students no longer rely on the teacher as the source of knowledge: they must rely on their own resources. Prep thus becomes what it should be, i.e. ‘preparation’ (rather than mindless ‘gurge’ or regurgitation) for the lesson ahead: the students have to find the answers to questions the teacher has posed, and having reflected on and researched them, they debate these during the lessons.

Learning becomes active rather than passive; the skill of the teacher is as the facilitator of purposeful and intelligent discussion, not the source of all wisdom.

**54** See Professor John Hattie, *Influences on Student Learning*, Inaugural Lecture: Professor of Education, University of Auckland, 02/08/99.

**55** Jonathan Smith, *The Learning Game*, (Little, Brown and Company, 2000) p. 111.

**56** See the Hole in the Wall official website: [www.hole-in-the-wall.com](http://www.hole-in-the-wall.com)

The same spirit of enquiry should be found in all science lessons, grounded in experiment and discovery, in studying Shakespeare, vital for all, but built around acting out scenes, in history with a solid linear thread to it<sup>57</sup> and where the imagination is actively engaged, in languages including Mandarin begun at an early age, and in philosophy. Yes, all students, including the less academic, should study philosophy, the queen of academic disciplines.

None of the gains will flow unless schools are consistently more orderly places than at present. Discipline needs to be better in all schools, but not necessarily in the Robert Gordon's College sense, the school attended by Michael Gove, which, as he said in his Cass lecture last year, had 'influenced me more than any other'.<sup>58</sup> It is not all about school uniform and rules. Genuine respect for others and valuing of one's school is more important than outward shows of discipline and the wearing of clothes, valuable though they can be.

Students should value their schools, and if that means that they must face the ultimate sanction of being ejected from the school, then that must be the penalty, when the child and the parent show they do not respect the school and its values.

Students themselves should be closely involved in the drawing up of the rules of their school. In the best, it is clearly understood that an offence is not only one against another child or adult, but against other students and the good name of the school to which they belong.

The practice of restorative justice championed by Charles Pollard when he was chief constable of the Thames Valley Police in the 1990s, should be adopted throughout British schools.<sup>59</sup> In this, the perpetrator and victim of a school crime are brought together. The offender has the chance to learn, grown and make amends.

**57** See Simon Schama, *My Vision of History in Schools*, *Guardian*, 09/11/10.

**58** Michael Gove, *The Democratic Intellect – what do we need to succeed in the twenty-first century?*, Sir John Cass Foundation Lecture, 2009.

**59** John Braithwaite, *Restorative Justice and responsive regulation* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

No one is more important in promoting active learning in schools than teachers. Yet heads regularly find it hard to improve or, where necessary, to dismiss teachers. Unions, to their shame, have put the interests of (unsatisfactory) teachers above those of children at schools, who have no second chances.

The NCSL should also license heads every five years, and refuse to support those performing poorly. Poor heads, like poor teachers, wreck children's chances.

In all these five ways, none costing vast sums, schools can be immeasurably improved, and at last succeed properly in educating the young for life.

# What are universities for?

**My comments on universities** are necessarily even more perfunctory than those for schools. The focus again relates to the purpose of the institutions.

In his 1963 Reith lectures, Albert Sloman, Vice Chancellor of the newly-opened Essex University, said universities had two primary functions: to teach and to engage in research (that is what ‘marks them out as universities’, he said).<sup>60</sup>

Sloman gave weight to the role of universities in helping produce “the kind of man we believe that industry needs” as well as affording them a role in helping produce “rounded human beings”, as when he spoke about the role of the university in the “fulfilment of lives”<sup>61</sup> This was encouraging.

The same year saw the publication of the *Report of the Robbins Committee on Higher Education*, which envisaged the doubling of university participation from 7% to 15% in 1980.<sup>62</sup> Nearly fifty years after Robbins’, the higher education sector has expanded a further three times, and it is unrecognisable from what it was back in 1963.

Ivor Crewe, until recently a successor of Sloman as Vice Chancellor at Essex, has described the almost impossible demands on universities.

“Universities” he wrote are now expected to “create apparently useful knowledge and transfer it to businesses... [be] providing the professional training for almost all the public services ...helping local schools to raise their standards and ambitions ... [and] to promote social mobility by widening participation”.<sup>63</sup>

In trying to achieve everything, universities are in danger of achieving nothing.

<sup>60</sup> Dr Albert Sloman, *A University in the Making*, (Reith Lectures, 1963).

<sup>61</sup> Dr Albert Sloman, *A University in the Making*, (Reith Lectures, 1963) p.63.

<sup>62</sup> *Higher education: report of the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins 1961–63* (Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1963).

<sup>63</sup> Professor Ivor Crewe, *The Role of Universities in the 21st Century*, HMC, 06/10/2009



# Who is happy with universities?

**There is much to praise about British universities.** According to the *Times Higher Education's* world university rankings for 2010, Britain has three universities in the top ten, Cambridge (sixth), Oxford (seventh) and Imperial College London (ninth), with University College London following not far behind at twenty-second.<sup>64</sup>

Much of the teaching across the university sector in Britain is first class, despite the comparatively low levels of remuneration received by academics. Open the pages of any scientific or research journal and you are likely to find them packed with the names of British scientists, academics and universities.

British universities are cost-efficient and are enduringly popular with both British students and those from abroad: the top British universities are heavily oversubscribed with overseas applicants.

<sup>64</sup> World University Rankings, *Times Higher Education*, 2010.

# Problems with British universities

**For all the bright stories**, there is a malaise as deep as there is in schools, and again it is being insufficiently addressed by the Coalition government.

First, spending is far too low. The average expenditure on higher education in the OECD is 1.5%, whereas Britain is currently spending just 1.3% of GDP on it.<sup>65</sup>

Second, universities have far too many functions thrust upon them and in trying to be all things to all people, universities are ending up as satisfying too few.

Third, government is too intrusive. British universities are tightly controlled by central government with fees fixed for home students, and in terms of numbers. Vernon Bogdanor complains that government treats universities like ‘nationalised industries’ and that they have been damaged by ‘managerial philosophy’.<sup>66</sup> Crewe castigates government for its ‘forays into micromanagement and impulsive but ill-thought out initiatives’.<sup>67</sup> Or as Simon Head put it in *The New York Review of Books*, ‘British universities, Oxford and Cambridge included, are under siege from a system of state control that is undermining the one thing upon which their worldwide reputation depends: the calibre of their scholarship’.<sup>68</sup>

The quality and depth of academic life at university is impoverished by exams in much the same way as it is in schools. The quality of academic research suffers too much at the hands of the ‘research assessment exercise’, and by pressures to show ‘relevance’. The joy of learning, the freedom of the mind and the purity of academic subjects have all been sacrificed in the ‘quantitative dance’.

Fourth, British universities are too insular. Many are reluctant to set up offices and even branches abroad, following the excellent lead of Nottingham University under its pioneering Vice Chancellor, Colin Campbell. Nottingham are in Malaysia and will be moving into Shanghai, and UCL plan to go in to Qatar.

<sup>65</sup> Simon Baker, *Times Higher Education*, 07/09/10.

<sup>66</sup> Vernon Bogdanor, *New Statesman*, 29/10/09

<sup>67</sup> Ivor Crewe, *op cit*

<sup>68</sup> Simon Head, *The Grim Threat to British Universities*, NYRB., 13.01.11

Up until 2009, higher education institutions from 22 countries had established branch campuses abroad. The US has started 48% of them, followed by Australia and then the UK with just 8% of the total.<sup>69</sup>

Fifth, the experience for undergraduates falls far short often of what it should be, with unsatisfactory levels of contact with academics, too little pastoral care resulting in unacceptable drop-out rates, and too narrow a range of activities on offer in many universities, especially in contrast to those in America. Disappointment among undergraduates was reflected in the student *YouGov* poll commissioned for this lecture. There is far too little emphasis on holistic development in young people in the university sector of Britain as a whole.

Sixth, they are insufficiently good at preparing their students for work. Employers complain that young people coming out of university are in insufficient numbers and quality to fill their needs, particularly in STEM jobs: an estimated 775,000 places are required for graduates in these areas by 2014<sup>70</sup> Yet the proportion of UK graduates taking STEM degrees has declined by 22% since 1999.<sup>71</sup> Wider concerns from employers are expressed about literacy and numeracy and collaborative and problem-solving skills of graduates.

Seventh, universities have a detrimental effect on school life by failing to recognise more fully broad student achievement at schools.<sup>72</sup> Little credit is given to holistic achievement, whether a student has been a student-leader, played in the orchestra, in school teams or participated in volunteering. There is thus no positive incentive for young people at schools to devote their attention to these areas. Exam passes and a narrow notion of academic ability are all most universities care about.

**69** Rosa F. J. Becker, *International Branch Campuses*, (International Strategic Information Service, 2009).

**70** CBI Higher Education Task Force, *Key Facts 1*, (CBI, 2008).

**71** CBI Press Release, 21/09/2009.

**72** Anthony Seldon, 'Why universities are damaging the achievement of schools', University Admissions Conference, Blackpool 28/03/07.

Anecdotally, one of our students trying for Oxbridge two years ago was told by a tutor, “We don’t value breadth here”. The don continued, ‘Actually, we’re not broad people ourselves’, to general guffawing by his fellow interviewers.

Mary Curnock Cook, chief executive of UCAS, believes much of the problem is caused by adapting to a mass system. When the UCCA process began in the early 1960s, there were only 80,000 applicants, of whom 30,000 accepted: now there are 640,000 applicants with 481,000 accepting.<sup>73</sup> The difficulty of valuing breadth on the basis of a highly subjective personal statement, she believes, is the problem. “The personal statement is at present a very weak indicator of genuine breadth”.<sup>74</sup>

**73** See data summary available on the Ucas website:  
[http://www.ucas.ac.uk/about\\_us/stat\\_services/stats\\_online/data\\_tables/datasummary](http://www.ucas.ac.uk/about_us/stat_services/stats_online/data_tables/datasummary)

**74** Interview, Mary Curnock Cook, 01/12/10.

# Solution to the problems for universities

**First funding should be increased**, initially up to the OECD average which is 1.5% by 2015, and then moving on to the US figure of 3.1% of GDP by 2025.

A far more persuasive case needs to be made for public funding of higher education, which according to Steve Smith, vice chancellor of Exeter University, is “a battle we have lost”.<sup>75</sup> If Britain is to continue with a world-class university sector, and if our industry is to compete in the technologically sophisticated 21st century, a vibrant university and research sector is *sine quo non*. More money too needs to come from the beneficiaries of higher education themselves, proportional to the sums they later earn.

Second, universities need to clarify what they are doing. The sector needs to be split up, to match the tripartite split advocated above for schools. This could entail either entirely separate universities, or three separate strands within existing universities.

*Academic* universities would offer courses in ‘pure’ academic subjects, such as the natural sciences, English, the humanities and social sciences. These would offer world class teaching and world class research. They would emulate Princeton University, arguably the world’s greatest, which has neither law nor medicine faculty.

*Technical* universities are the second strand, with students receiving training in professions such as medicine, engineering, law, dentistry, business, accountancy and marketing. There should be research components within these.

Technical universities would have major graduate schools, as in the United States, or as Melbourne is developing. Students could study a ‘pure’ subject for three years in an academic university, and then go on and study for an applied postgraduate degree in a technical university. The liberal arts programme at UCL starting in 2012 would be an ideal first degree for students before going on to study for a professional higher degree.

<sup>75</sup> Interview, Steve Smith, 06/12/10.

Vocational higher educational institutes should be the third discrete strand, offering one, two or even three-year courses for students joining them at a variety of different ages.

Third, universities should follow the example of Buckingham University, established in 1973, and become properly independent, able to set their own fee levels, and decide on how many students they are to take. Government should legislate to allow universities to change their legal status to become private limited companies.<sup>76</sup> It should make it easier for new private universities who merit it to be granted degree-awarding powers: there is a clear gap immediately for a major academic private university in London.

Independence would encourage universities to diversify away from the homogeneity, which is a chief limitation of British universities today.

Britain suffers from a comparative lack of innovation in its universities, and should emulate UCL with its four ‘grand research challenges’ which are based on innovative cross-disciplinary discussion and debate.<sup>77</sup>

A different kind of lead is given by the universities of Teesside and Northumbria, which are bonded very closely with the local communities and employers in a host of enterprising ways.

The Open University under its Vice Chancellor Martin Bean is becoming more innovative again: the opportunities for fresh distance learning in the digital age are many. David Watson’s work leading the University of Brighton until 2005 showed how an innovative vice chancellor can build the reputation of an entire university, not the least for its work in lifelong learning.<sup>78</sup>

**76** As advocated by Alex Massey and Greg Munro in *Higher Education in the Age of Austerity* (Policy Exchange, 2010). See William Richardson et al, ‘English Technical and Vocational Education’, Baker Dearing Educational Trust, 2010.

**77** Interview, Professor David Price, 05/12/10

**78** See David Watson, *Is HE worth it? Higher Education and Lifelong Learning*, The Lewes Lecture, 18/03/09.

Fourth, British universities need to emulate those in the US and elsewhere and be far more willing to open branches abroad, either through distance learning, as Liverpool are doing in China, or with programme mobility, as are Oxford Brookes and Reading universities.<sup>79</sup>

Fifth, universities should offer students a far greater range of extra-curricular activities, which might arrest what may be a growing exodus to American universities over the coming decade, where breadth of activity is far more commonplace. Students deserve far better pastoral care too, with one-to-one sessions with a pastoral tutor as the norm for all first year students to help them through the often difficult transition year from home life to university.

Sixth, many of the problems of business being dissatisfied with the number and quality of graduates would be addressed by the division into technical and vocational universities, allowing the professions far greater influence over technical universities, and employers over vocational universities.

Seventh, the problem of the very narrow assessment of the capability of candidates would be addressed by the new diploma proposed above at 18. UCAS too needs to reform itself from the ground up. It has barely changed over 50 years, and it needs to take account of genuine breadth of achievement and involvement among young people.

UCAS needs to move rapidly too to 'post-qualification' entry, where universities sieve results only after the students have taken the exams, removing all the uncertainties and injustices of offers made on the basis of predicted results.

China celebrates breadth. Why can't Britain? Its outstanding students, say in music or sports, receive exemption from standardised entry: Beijing University for example in 2010 had around 950 students exempted from standardised exams because of 'exceptional talents'.<sup>80</sup>

**79** Christine Ennew, *Times Higher*, 28/10/10.

**80** Email, Yunyun Tang, 03/12/10.

The proposals outlined in this lecture, will breathe new life into schools and universities, transforming 19th century institutions and mentalities into 21st century ones. They will be freer, more imaginative and more concerned with scholarship, and preparing the young for life as well as work.

At stake isn't whether we can afford to do all this but whether we can afford not to do so. Nothing is more important to invest in than education. It is the present. It is the future. We have no option but to change.

I call again for a 'great debate' in Britain about the purpose of schools and universities, far more far-reaching than that initiated by James Callaghan as Prime Minister at Ruskin Oxford in 1976. It will be the theme of the Sunday Times Festival of Education at Wellington College in June. Do join us.

We really can have schools and universities that are more scholarly, and which prepare students far better for life.

Not only the students themselves, but also society will benefit immeasurably from schools and universities producing rounded and responsible individuals.

We have to re-think our schools and universities from the ground up. The core question I have tried to answer is what is the appropriate role in the twenty-first century for schools and universities. Such an opportunity for a radical rethink occurs perhaps once in fifty years. Our young crave it. Our teachers deserve it. Our country needs it. This is the moment.

08.12.10



# Sir John Cass's Foundation

**Established in 1748**, and now a major educational charity benefiting London, the Foundation provides funding to schools and organisations, as well as individuals, via its scholarships and bursaries programmes. The Foundation takes its name from its founder, Sir John Cass. Born in 1661, he served as Alderman, Sheriff and MP for the City of London and was knighted in 1712.

Today the Foundation has links in the nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of education, supporting its primary school in the City of London and secondary school in Tower Hamlets, which was designated by the Department for Education as a Specialist Language School in 2000, as well as the Sir John Cass Department of Art, Media and Design within London Metropolitan University.

In 2001, the Foundation made a multi million pound grant to City University's Business School, which was subsequently re-named the Cass Business School, and continues to provide on going support, to this and five other establishments bearing the name of the founder.

In 2008, the Foundation awarded a substantial grant to the University of East London towards a new state-of-the-art teaching and resource centre in Stratford, which has been named the Sir John Cass School of Education and is already one of London's foremost centres for teacher training. Many of its alumni are working in local schools.

The Foundation was delighted to accept the honour of being the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust's Sponsor of the Year 2010, which was presented to the Foundation by the Secretary of State for Education before an assembled audience of educationalists and professionals at the Guildhall in the City of London on 21st January 2010. Support totalling £3m has been awarded by the Foundation to thirty four specialist schools, three academies and the United Kingdom's first parent promoted school.

In May 2010, the Foundation agreed to boost its support to needy individuals and announced a £1.5m Scholarships Programme. This is a new initiative with the Office of the Lord Mayor of the City of London and will commence in the 2011/12 academic year.

For further information please visit: [www.sirjohncass.org](http://www.sirjohncass.org)