

ISSUE 66 | WINTER 2023

ASSOCIATES NEWS



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Association of School and College Leaders, 2nd Floor, Peat House,
1 Waterloo Way, Leicester LE1 6LP | T: 0116 299 1122

Contact us

Editorial correspondence: associatesnews@ascl.org.uk

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Membership queries: membership@ascl.org.uk

Twitter: [@ASCL_UK](https://twitter.com/ASCL_UK)

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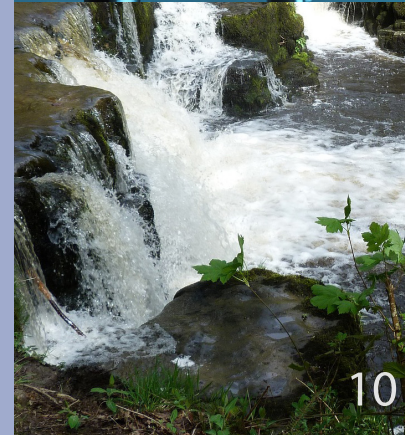
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Cover image credit: Dores Beach, Loch Ness. Credit: Visit Inverness Loch Ness

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LIFE SENTENCES

You can use any words you like but leadership is all about managing the unexpected, says Geoff Barton

There's a theory in linguistics that says most times when we speak, we deploy a combination of words that no one has ever used before in that particular order.

Apparently, almost every sentence we say is unique.

Of course, there are some sentences and phrases that are so familiar that they have become clichés such as 'thank you', 'have a nice day', 'I love you', plus a feisty combination of more pithy words we use when we curse.

But, in general – so the theory goes – we create long and often rambling sentences that no one on the planet will ever have previously uttered.

This reminds us of our uniqueness as individual human beings; we take our common language and we use it to express personal thoughts, feelings and insights in brand new ways.

In an age of algorithms and robots, how liberating is that? We humans are still humans.

I was thinking about this back in September as a new school year began. As a veteran teacher, deputy, then headteacher, I always

'I thought I could look forward to not being wheeled out onto the nation's TV screens'

found the start of the autumn term the most optimistic of times.

Of course, there was the trepidation of the year ahead, the guilt of work not completed over the summer. Then came the ubiquitous training day, when everyone asked everyone else how their holiday had been, knowing that no one was really that interested.

The term truly began, however, with the arrival of the important people – the pupils.

Shimmering new exercise book

Young people would walk through the school gates, fresh-faced, awkward in new uniforms, compliant as they listened to our start-of-year exhortations and dutifully writing

the date at the top of the first page of a shimmering new exercise book.

The sun invariably shone and leaves were not quite on the verge of yellowing. Education rarely felt more morally driven by the central purpose of we (the older generation) preparing them (the younger generation) to take their place one day as the nation's future citizens.

However, this year's start of the new autumn term has been different. The exam results season was calmly behind us and I thought I could look forward to a period of not being wheeled out onto the nation's television screens or radio stations.

I thought we could leave our members in peace to focus on establishing those familiar and reassuring rhythms of the way schools and colleges work.

Medieval punishment

But then, instead, I found myself reflecting on that linguistic theory about new and old words.

I was suddenly using sentences that were most definitely including words

and phrases that I'd never used before – in particular, the term 'Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete'.

I'd always thought that RAAC was some mishearing of a medieval punishment. Now, it transpired, it was a building material of the 1950s-1980s that wasn't designed to last more than 30 years... and it was beginning to show its age.

So, at the end of the summer break, when the ceiling collapsed at a school in Kent which had been deemed low-risk, you can see why the Secretary of State had to act.

Some schools closed. Leaders were suddenly asked to carry out inspections to check whether any concrete in their schools resembled the inside of a Mint Aero.

This wasn't quite the start of the year we might have expected. But, then again, that's what leadership is about – dealing with, and managing, the unexpected.

And, over the Covid years, our members have become exceptionally adept at doing so.

Distinctive voice

Dealing with and commenting on the unexpected is what we at ASCL will do in the year ahead, as we hurtle towards a General Election, face all kinds of unexpected issues, and do our best to represent the views and aspirations of our members.

We have a manifesto which sets out what we propose any incoming government should tweak, reform, cancel, and change. But we also have a list of what they should simply leave alone.

Because, for all the carping, we have a good education system in the UK. It's just not yet good enough for every child from every background.

So, as the election approaches, that's the story we'll aim to tell, sometimes in sentences that have been used many times.

But mostly we'll use the distinctive, original voice of ASCL, doing what we've always done – 'Speaking on behalf of members; acting on behalf of children and young people.'

ASCL is 150

ASCL celebrates 150 years of representing school leaders in 2024 and we're looking for your recollections of the association and its predecessor organisations.

Do you recall a major policy victory or a clash with government? A fiery Council meeting, something entertaining, bizarre or ridiculous happening at conference? An inspirational moment at an event or a celebrated turning point?

Whether it's a great leap forward for the association, a difficult challenge or just your own personal memories, we'd like to hear from you. And if you have pictures of people and events please share them, too.

Send your stories to associatesnews@ascl.org.uk and mark them 'ASCL 150' and we will publish a selection in Associates News in 2024.

Reunion update

Despite a few public transport hitches due to the rail strike, the Associates' annual reunion in Bristol in October 2023 went ahead as planned. Look out for a full write-up with pictures in the Spring issue of Associates News

Podcast round-up

In the latest ASCL Leadership podcast, ASCL General Secretary Geoff Barton talks to Matt Hood, Chief Executive of Oak National Academy.

Oak was established during the pandemic in 2020, bringing schools together to share online lessons while the lockdown was in place. Building on the first effort over that summer, they worked with 500 teachers to create 10,000 lessons to support teaching for key stages 1 to 4.

"Evaluation showed we were [also] making a contribution to workload reduction and that teachers were appreciating . . . just seeing models and examples from their peers," says Matt. "So our focus has shifted over time to building and creating and sharing those models. We're still here for remote education. In any different week we have around 100,000 pupils who are doing some or all of their lessons with us and 30,000 or so teachers."

Geoff and Matt then go on to explore some of the criticisms of the Oak approach, including that it is a step

on the road to "nationalising and de-professionalising" the profession.

In another Leadership edition, ASCL Director of Policy Julie McCulloch talks about the key recommendations in the new ASCL manifesto for education, and how it will be used through the new school year to influence improvement.

"We may be soon looking at a very different government but whoever comes in will inherit a very difficult situation after a few very hard years," Julie says.

"It's a very pragmatic document," she adds. "It's really easy to get carried away by big ideas but we're saying that we should all primarily concentrate on the things that really need fixing . . . there are three things that an incoming government will need to focus on."

These are the recruitment and retention crisis, the widening disadvantage gap and the expanding expectations on schools and colleges who, Julie says, are having to take on a lot of the functions formerly carried out by other children's services, post-pandemic.

Geoff also talks to John Trueman, the new Director of ASCL Northern Ireland.

John describes his background as a music teacher in the north of England and director of a large academy before he returned to Northern Ireland to work for the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment.

He says that ASCL works efficiently and usefully in what is a political vacuum by maintaining relationships with other organisations.

"The government's not working but we are by keeping those conversations going," he says.

ASCL's Leadership podcasts are part of a range including Business, Primary and SEND issues, while in Leaders are Readers, Geoff talks to people in different senior roles about books that have influenced their work and life and hears from some about books they have written themselves chronicling their experiences.

Listen to all of the discussions at www.ascl.org.uk/Podcasts

Pepe Di'Iasio to be next ASCL General Secretary

Geoff Barton stepping down in April 2024

Pepe Di'Iasio will be the next General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders after Geoff Barton steps down from the role in April 2024.

Pepe, head of Wales High School, Rotherham and ASCL President 2021-22, was selected as ASCL Council's nominee and was confirmed after no more nominations were received from members.

He began his teaching career in Doncaster and has been executive headteacher and assistant director of education for Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council. He also chaired ASCL Equality, Inclusion and Ethics Committee.

He said: "It is a huge honour to have been selected as General Secretary and to have the opportunity to represent our fantastic members

across the UK in their work on behalf of children and young people.

"I will speak truth to power, with the courtesy and respect that is a hallmark of ASCL, but with an absolute determination to produce a better settlement for education. Our schools, colleges and trusts simply must have the funding and staff they need to produce the successful educational outcomes we want to see for all our children and young people.

"I look forward to leading a superb team of highly committed and talented ASCL staff and working alongside our elected members on ASCL Council whose invaluable work ensures that the association is able to represent the voice of leaders accurately and authentically."

ASCL General Secretary Geoff Barton said: "I am absolutely confident that



Pepe will take ASCL from strength to strength. He is an outstanding leader with a deep belief in the power of education to transform lives, and a total commitment to support and represent our members in their vital work in the nation's schools, colleges and trusts. He will be an eloquent advocate for the profession who speaks from the heart."

ASCL Association of School and College Leaders
ASCL'S MANIFESTO FOR THE 2024 GENERAL ELECTION

ASCL launches General Election manifesto

Calls to extend pupil premium and widen access to free school meals

The pupil premium should be reformed and extended to more children, including 16-19-year-olds, to help disadvantaged pupils overcome the challenges they face in education, ASCL has said.

Its manifesto for the General Election expected in 2024 highlights the "longstanding attainment gap

between pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers", and how the impact of the Covid pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis have exacerbated the disparity.

"The pupil premium can be a useful tool in this fight but needs to be weighted so that pupils in persistent poverty . . . attract a higher premium

in recognition of the additional challenges they face. The premium must also be extended to include 16-19-year-olds," it says.

Other measures called for in the manifesto include:

- Giving free school meals to all children in families drawing universal credit and automatically enrolling them in the system
- A government commitment to an annual pay increase in line with inflation for all staff in schools and colleges

- A review of the teacher and leader pay framework
- Action to reduce teacher and leader workload, including national standards around maximum working hours
- A review of how schools and colleges are expected to meet the demand for mental health support and social care for pupils

ASCL General Secretary Geoff Barton said tackling "the scourge of child poverty" must be a priority of the next government.

"This is an enormous task but there are also simple steps that can be taken, whereby a small amount of investment can have a really positive difference. These policies will help to give children and young people a more equal chance of thriving in education, but pupils will only do so if there are also enough teachers. This is why any incoming government must address the worsening recruitment and retention crisis as a matter of urgency. Teachers are the foundation upon which the education system is built and that foundation is currently crumbling."

For more details of the ASCL manifesto, go to www.ascl.org.uk/Our-view/General-Election-Manifesto

Committee report

A new ASCL leader and a new head of marketing were key items for discussion at the Associates Committee when it met virtually and in person.

Members expressed their appreciation of Geoff Barton, who is stepping down as ASCL General Secretary in spring 2024.

“He has been an outstanding General Secretary,” chair Ann Mullins said. “On the other hand, we were delighted to hear that he will be succeeded by Pepe Di’lasio, who worked closely with us during his three years as a member of the Presidential Trio.”

They also discussed the “excellent” report on the survey of Associates carried out by marketing director Annette Wade-Clarke and work on the outcomes will proceed next year.

Annette has now moved on and the committee welcomed her successor, Cat Hepton.

Pat Sales was thanked for arranging the reunion in Bristol which, although the rail strike prevented some from attending, was enjoyed by those who made it.

The next date in the diary for Associates is a virtual meeting with ASCL President John Camp on November 20.

Pensions update

ASCL Conditions of Employment Specialist Jacques Szemalikowski explains the transitional protection remedy – known as ‘McCloud’ – as it applies to retired members of the Teachers’ Pension Scheme

Associates will recall that, from 2015, changes were introduced to the Teachers’ Pension Scheme (TPS), moving it from a legacy final salary scheme to the reformed career average revaluated (CARE) scheme. Some members moved to the new reformed CARE scheme immediately, some over the ensuing seven years and some (protected members), not at all.

This approach was based on how old you were and, consequently, was illegal on age discrimination grounds.

The transition protection remedy, (commonly called the McCloud remedy), on which ASCL has been consulted throughout, is designed to fix it.

This only affects Teachers’ Pension Scheme (TPS) members who were active or deferred members of the TPS on 31 March 2012, and still in at any point between 1

April 2015 and 31 March 2022, known as the remedy period.

It does not affect Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) members in the same way, because everybody was moved across together, with an underpin guarantee for members within 10 years of retirement.

A two-part remedy

The Public Sector Pensions and Judicial Offices Act outlined two parts to the remedy.

Firstly, the legacy TPS scheme closed to further accrual by any members on 31 March 2022. As of April 1 2022, all active (or subsequently retired) members of the TPS are now in the reformed scheme; legacy scheme accrual is fully protected and linked to members’ real final average salary in the usual way. That’s good news.

Secondly, Associates who have retired by taking their pension, yet fall within the scope of the remedy as above, are catchily known as Immediate Choice (IC) members. IC members will be provided with a Remediable Service Statement (RSS) designed to inform their aforementioned choice by delineating their accrued benefits in the remedy period under both legacy and reformed schemes.

IC members will then be asked to make a one-off, no-detriment free choice within 18 months (so, sort of ‘immediate’) as to which scheme, the legacy one or the reformed one, they wish their accrued benefits for the remedy period to be allocated to.

Affected Associates will, therefore, be able to choose either the legacy final salary scheme with its associated benefits, or if it is better, the reformed CARE scheme with its associated benefits for the remedy period. ➤



Eligible decision-maker

Where the member has died, the IC will be provided to an eligible decision-maker. As some decisions may involve funds flowing to or from the member, tax due or tax refunds – including possibly on annual allowance with Scheme Pays Election – and interest

may be applicable. (Scheme Pays is an option for members who owe an annual allowance tax. TPS pay the tax due upfront to HMRC and then claim it back over the lifetime of the pension.)

Teachers Pensions will be writing to affected IC members shortly, outlining these options. At the moment,

therefore, no further action needs to be taken except to be ahead of the curve and engage with the comprehensive guidance available on the TPS website.



Policy update

ASCL Director of Policy Julie McCulloch highlights key developments this year and looks ahead to where work will be focused ahead of the expected 2024 General Election

As usual, ASCL attended the autumn party conferences, hosting our own fringe events, speaking on panels, and meeting with MPs, councillors, advisor and other organisations.

Wherever possible, we aimed to focus these discussions on the priorities in our own manifesto for the upcoming General Election – most likely to take place in autumn 2024. We were heartened by how much these proposals appeared to resonate with many of the people we spoke to.

Below are some of our achievements with government and opposition and a quick look at policy work ahead.

Current government

We have achieved a number of important policy wins in the last 12 months, in particular, the successful resolution of the industrial dispute, and the resulting pay increases for teachers and leaders. Other key victories included an additional £4.6bn for schools over two years in autumn statement this time last year. This is far from enough but it was certainly better than the alternative at the time, which we thought might be a reduction in the overall education budget.

However, the flagship policies announced at the Conservative party conference this year have done little to convince us that the government recognises – and is prepared to act upon – the three key challenges in our manifesto. The Prime Minister’s proposed new ‘Advanced British Standard’ qualification is an interesting idea but it will not address the most pressing problems facing our education system.

Opposition

We’re not convinced by every idea being put forward by Labour but we’re increasingly pleased by the extent to which ASCL’s priorities and proposals are being reflected in their policies.

These include:

- An increasing recognition of the scale of the recruitment and retention challenge
- A major reform of inspection, including a commitment to implement some recommendations in our ‘future of inspection’ paper, including replacing headline grades with ‘report cards’.
- A commitment to a full review of curriculum and assessment

Labour’s biggest challenge will be their determination to enact change without increasing public service spending. Some of their proposed changes will cost little but it’s hard to see how they can really address recruitment and retention, or the state of school and college buildings, or our woefully underfunded SEND system, without increased spending.

Policy aims

The ASCL policy team will be spending the coming months adding more flesh to the bones of some of the key proposals in our manifesto, including what changes school and college leaders want to see on curriculum and assessment (and what they’d like any incoming government to leave well alone).

We’ve started to work on all of these projects with ASCL Council, in order to provide the next government – of whatever change to party – with ready-to-implement plans for how to deliver them.

This is where ASCL can make the biggest difference: by drawing on the expertise of our members to inform constructive, non-partisan engagement with policymakers.



GO WITH THE FLOW



From waterfalls spilling down rugged rockfaces to the peace and quiet of bird sanctuaries, here are some suggestions for bracing days out in the British countryside. (Remember, there's no such thing as bad weather, just unsuitable clothing)

Whether it's a meander through the mists and mellow fruitfulness of an autumnal landscape or a walk through a winter wonderland, a canter around the countryside can really raise the spirits towards year's end.

Not only is the scenery – particularly in the parks and woodlands – looking its very best, there's a far greater chance of finding peace and quiet as well as the opportunity to see some fantastic flora and fauna.

Here are four suggestions covering all corners of the UK to get you moving this year; dubbin up your boots, unpack the pack-away waterproofs, fill your flask with a little of what you fancy, and head outside.

Loch Ness

If you're off in search of elusive or endangered species, you might as well start at the top and head for Loch

Ness, the alleged freshwater home of Nessie which is – according to who you believe – a prehistoric subaquatic dragon or a rarely-spotted shadowy creature that brings in gullible tourists.

That famous picture of Nessie looking like a poorly-lit upturned showerhead was snapped in the early 1930s, although locals tell tales of a not-so-wee or timorous beastie dragging a monk underwater for a spot of the seventh century lunch.

As recently as August, new photos emerged of what an amateur smudger claimed was a serpent; to the untrained eye, however, it looked like binbags. Similarly, reported 'animal noises' could just have been excited longhorn cattle.

Whatever your thoughts on the subject, start your expedition at the Loch Ness Centre where you can review the scientific findings of the Loch Ness Project which has been looking at the local environment for 30 years.

Further along the shore, you'll encounter a building that looks like a film set – it's the very spooky Urquhart Castle which dates back to the 13th Century. It has an atmospheric prison cell – so take care that the most annoying member of your landing party doesn't get locked in by mistake – a great hall and enormous tower which offers views across the loch towards the Highlands.

www.visitinvernesslochness.com

Farlington Marshes

If, on the other hand, creatures of small proportions – and proven veracity – are more your thing, head out for a trail across Farlington Marshes in Hampshire, one of the UK's least-trodden but most rewarding treks.

The circular route is entirely flat and coastal, meaning that the going is easy and the wind rarely

drops but the two-hour walk is an absolute treat for birdwatchers.

Migratory geese can be seen in great numbers at this time of year but you should also find room in your notebooks to sketch teals and avocets, redshanks and wigeons (which is actually a duck with a small bill rather than a mad scientist's attempts to create a pigeon widget).

Farlington Marshes is an RSPB Nature Reserve with a huge body of water in the middle where the birds nest. You can walk along the wall, on the path or through the grass – whatever floats your boat.

No dogs are allowed and there are no facilities en route like toilets or gift shops. It's just you, the birds and the breeze . . . and, on a clear day, views across to Portsmouth with the famous Spinnaker Tower in the background in one direction and Hayling Island in another.

www.hiwwt.org.uk/nature-reserves/farlington-marshes-nature-reserve

Elidir Trail

Open the metal gate behind the Angel pub in the Welsh village of Pontneddfechan and you're into Waterfall Country, a magical trail of ancient woodlands, abandoned silica mines and spectacular gorges.

You're in the picturesque Bannau



Brycheiniog, formerly Brecon Beacons.

The Elidir Trail follows the route taken by a local chap who discovered a cave that led to a fairy kingdom . . . and, apparently, he hadn't even had one or two in the Angel on the way.

Following the tracks of horse-drawn trams that once transported silica from mines along the gorge, look out for 'Farewell Rock', a slice of sandstone that towers above you while the Nedd Fechan river rumbles below.

The first part of the walk to Sgwd Gwladys (Lady Falls) is suitable for most walkers – but, perhaps, not for children – but things become a little trickier after that and care is needed as the rocks around the gorges can be very muddy and slippery.

It's worth the effort, though; Sgwd-y-Bedol (the Horseshoe Falls) are shaped semi-circular terraces while water cascades over Sgwd Ddwli Isaf and Sgwd Ddwli Uchaf (the Lower and Upper Gushing Falls) at a rate of knots.

From there, continue on to the picnic area at Pont Melin-fach or retrace your steps back to Pontneddfechan around



in front of a directional hand drier in the Angel.

Giant's Causeway

Rock fans should, of course, head for the coast of County Antrim in Northern Ireland which is well-known for its beauty and world-famous for the Giant's Causeway, 40,000 hexagonal basalt columns formed 40 million years ago when lava from a volcanic fissure solidified vertically when hitting the sea.

Or, if you're of the more romantic Nessie-hunting persuasion, the rocks were the handiwork of third-century warrior chieftain Fionn Mac Cumhail who used them to cross the Irish Sea to meet up with his wee lassie without getting his feet wet. Or something like that.

The Visitor Centre is the gateway to the famous Giant's Causeway, semi-hidden in the hillside, and provides information about the myths, legends, social history, wildlife and conservation.

There is, of course, a gift shop selling all sorts of promotional knick-knacks, souvenirs and local crafts.

Happy walking!

two-and-a-half miles in the opposite direction for a warming drink and ten minutes

Image credits: (top left) Waterfall Country, foothills of Bannau Brycheiniog. (Top right) Giant's Causeway. Credit Paul Hampshire @ Pixabay Credit Peter/Meatle @ Pixabay (bottom left) Urquhart Castle, Loch Ness. Credit: Visit Inverness Loch Ness

GREAT MINDS

Pauline Thomas meets incoming ASCL President John Camp OBE, a self-styled ‘servant leader’ with a passion for making connections, creating happy atmospheres and enabling talented people to shine



John Camp’s election as president marks a milestone in ASCL’s history as he is the first member from the primary and special school sector to be chosen to represent the organisation in this role.

His record shows a determination to improve education. He became head of Deansfield Primary School in Eltham, south London in 2008 and set up a partnership with Willow Dene Special School up the road in Plumstead which eventually blossomed to become the Compass Partnership of Schools in 2017.

The original federation of seven maintained schools evolved into the charitable trust of today, consisting of 13 schools – 12 primary and one all-through special school – across the Royal Borough of Greenwich and Essex with John as its CEO.

He prides himself on all the schools developing a positive atmosphere and a standard of courtesy and helpfulness that is maintained by all the members of the school communities.

While many multi-academy trusts have a mix of primary and secondary, John is in no doubt that primary is his focus, thanks to the happy experience of his formative years at school.

“I never wanted it to end,” he says, “and, from an early age, I wanted to relive that particular, heady atmosphere.”

‘Profound influence’

His mother encouraged him, making it clear that he was expected to work hard at school and take A-level exams.

“She was a profound influence; coming from a poor family herself, she had been unable to take up the place she earned at grammar school,” he remembers.

“She went out to work at the age of 14 and worked hard all her life to enable her children to have the best possible education.”

There was, however, some initial hesitation over John’s wishes to go to university but, despite his mother’s concerns, he got his wish when his head of sixth form sent off an application form without his knowledge.

He completed his first degree at Thames Polytechnic, then moved to Aberystwyth for his teaching qualification, all with the aid of grants. His mother was very proud of his achievements, particularly when he landed his

first teaching job in Southwark.

“I loved it; teaching transformed my life, no doubt about it,” he says.

Without the connections made with other teachers and the way they conveyed humanity and togetherness, he would, he acknowledges, have been unclear what career to pursue.

Nurturing background

As a result, he is focused on how education can be a leveller and lift people above their context to enable them to embrace the world. His financially poor but loving and nurturing background makes him determined not to be judgmental about personal circumstances.

“Financial poverty doesn’t mean poverty in other respects and that drives me on,” says the man who instilled three great values in driving the Compass Partnership forward.

“Ambition for all children and nurturing a sense of self-determination.

Secondly, optimism, because even in times of difficulty young people need to be surrounded by happy, positive adults and we mustn’t let our anxieties impact their hopes for the future.

“Lastly, resilience in ensuring that there is always a great school at the heart of the

‘Children need to feel the school will always be able to help them’

community, making sure there is always good leadership rather than a series of peaks and troughs. Children need to feel the school will always be able to help them.”

John’s involvement with ASCL was led by the then-Director of Policy, Leora Cruddas, when the association opened up to primary membership in 2016. He invited her to talk to the federation of seven schools he was then leading about the future and the ASCL Blueprint.

Another connection was made when she noticed some of the work he was doing around leadership. This resulted in an invitation to be seconded to ASCL Council with two other primary members to represent the primary sector. Not surprisingly, John loved Council and was strongly motivated by the connections he made with Council members.

He became Membership Officer and learned a lot from the way ASCL worked to influence the system.

After an unsuccessful first effort, he was elected President at the second attempt and recognises the huge responsibility that comes with the role.

Reforms to Ofsted

John is keen to pursue the current aims of ASCL while in office – meaningful reforms to Ofsted being one of the major issues as there is now general recognition something needs to be done.



He is hoping primary membership will continue to grow and that government will listen to the sector.

“While we are still dealing with post-pandemic issues, one of the things we need to invest in is getting early years right,” he says.

“There is a need for ambition among our policymakers rather than them simply treading water.”

John describes himself as a servant leader, a leader who will allow talented people to flourish in teams rather than take the limelight himself.

“The values of ASCL are a real driver for me and I appreciate the ideas other people present,” he adds.

“One of the core principle of Compass is that environment drives behaviour; if you surround people with a beautiful, engaging environment then they flourish, because environment drives motivation.

“Learning is monitored closely but children are not rewarded extrinsically. Intrinsic motivatio is the way we do it.

‘Never put things off’

“There are a great variety of teaching methods that can be used. If children are happy and flourishing, then that is the method works for them.”



John’s success has been shaped by many things but one of his principles is “never putting things off and getting them done straightaway.”

It’s also useful to recognise that we can all learn from those who have gone before us, he adds.

“You know, the problems leaders face today are often similar to those of the past,” he says.

“It is worth listening to how they were solved rather than always looking for new ideas.”



GOLDEN YEARS

Ahead of ASCL's 150th birthday in 2024, we're inviting Associates to share their stories of working with the association and its predecessors. Below Jane Traies recalls the invaluable help in sensitive situations offered by the celebrated Hotline, while Pat Collings (right) reflects on dissecting the sexism she experienced in early headship for one of ASCL's publications

I joined the Secondary Heads Association (SHA) in 1994 when I took up my second headship. Berkshire secondary heads were all SHA members and it seemed only sensible to join them.

It was a good move. The support and solidarity our heads' group had through SHA were particularly valuable when, in 1998, Berkshire County Council ceased to exist and was succeeded by six unitary authorities with only a tiny handful of secondary schools in each.

Personally, too, I have much to thank SHA/ASCL for. The great thing about a professional association is that they are there for you at those moments when you can turn to no one else. I still remember, vividly, two such occasions. On both, I was saved by the SHA Hotline.

I admire, and rejoice for, the many openly LGBTQ school leaders of today but back then times were different and I never felt able to be officially 'out' at work. So when, in 1998, I published an overtly lesbian novel (albeit under a pseudonym), I was suddenly seized with blind panic about the possible fall-out. Not a problem I could share with the leadership team; somewhat apprehensively, I rang the SHA Hotline.

The phone was answered by the General Secretary himself, the great John Sutton.

I stuttered out my problem. (I hadn't had much practice in coming out, let alone to such an august person.)

Unflappable calm

He, with unflappable calm, simply asked, "Miss Traies, does your local authority have an equal opportunities policy?"

I replied that yes, of course they did, though, since they had only been in existence for a matter of months, I had no way of knowing whether it was worth the paper it was written on.

"Rest assured," he replied, "that you have SHA's full support. And should you ever feel you do not have the support of your authority, please ring me *at once*." Exactly what I needed.

'I hadn't had much practice in coming out, let alone to such an august person'

My second Hotline call was years later. Close to retirement, after 17 years of headship in a couple of contrasting schools, I had begun to feel that nothing could surprise me any more. How wrong I was!

An incident arose which was 'X-rated' and, for the people involved, potentially life-and-career-wrecking. Although it was deeply shocking, no crime had been committed, so this wasn't something I could hand over to the police or social services. I had to act quickly and was terrified I would get it wrong.

To my amazement, it was once again John Sutton who answered my call. I told him exactly what had happened and I had to go into some quite explicit detail in order to convey the seriousness of the incident.

There was a noticeable pause (was he looking me up on his database?) before he said, "Well, Miss Traies. You don't ring the Hotline very often but I must say that, when you do, it is certainly . . . colourful!"

And then, of course, he helped me to see what I had to do.

Happy Birthday, ASCL!

Jane Traies was a secondary head in the South of England from 1984-2001



REFLECTIONS ON 'PAPER BAG SYNDROME' . . .

Last summer, there was a debate around why the prize for the highest number of top A level grades in English schools has returned to male students.

The proportion of boys achieving the A* grade in 2023 was 9.1 per cent – 0.3 points higher than the girls. During the lockdown years of 2020 and 2021, when exams were cancelled, girls were ahead and they kept the lead into 2022, overturning eight years of dominance by boys.

The debate reminded me that the issues around pupils' gender and performance differences are still alive and kicking. Then I heard of the death of Sir Michael Parkinson. Excerpts from some of his most famous TV interviews included one from the 1970s with a youthful Helen Mirren – now Dame Helen – delighting in exposing the full-blown sexism of Parkinson's questions about her physical 'attributes'. I am sure that a similar interview question would provoke even more complaints, dismissal even, if repeated today and rightly so.

I wrote about sexism in an article titled 'The Paper Bag Syndrome' for *Headlines*, which went to ASCL members, in November 1990. The title referred to a question from a fellow female head whose glamorous looks were always the focus when she was introduced by a man to other people: "Do they want me to put a paper bag over my head?" she said with weary exasperation.

My piece highlighted my experiences of dealing with colleagues, fellow heads, council officials and others who were clueless as to why their comments about clothes and looks, assumptions that I was 'the wife' or questions about child-care arrangements to female job

applicants were inappropriate. Worse, though, were the incidents involving female pupils who claimed to have been harassed or even inappropriately touched by male teachers which were not dealt with seriously; one teacher who gave unwelcome attention to girls was vigorously defended by his union rep who said it was 'just his way'.

Re-reading it now I guess I would not care a jot about things like whether my first name was used on a first encounter, though I would definitely remove the word 'fondling' and replace it with 'groping' when referring to unwanted physical, sexual contact.

A more inclusive society?

So has the wheel turned? Are there clear signs of a more inclusive society? After all, only around 38 per cent of secondary heads are women, despite female teachers outnumbering male, while decisions about gender nomenclature and behaviours can be a minefield.

When I was elected to the Secondary Heads (SHA) Council in 1989 it was very white and very male! A woman head of a school serving a challenged community was assumed by some to be less able than, for example, grammar school heads.

I was ably supported in attempts to have more female representation by the then-deputy General Secretary, Kay Driver, while other competent women staff in headquarters were central to the success of the organisation.

It took a couple of years and welcome assistance from other women (and some men) for Council members to have an official slot to meet as a Council group. Even then the meeting

was to be held during the sacrosanct Friday evening pre-dinner bar time.

Arriving in the dining room when all the men were already seated, we found ourselves obliged to dine as a group seated at one table. What fun we had suddenly being the focus of attention! If we were chortling we must surely have been talking about the men . . .

Thus was born the Women's Group of Council; this quickly morphed into an inclusive Equal Opportunities Standing Committee which I chaired from 1991 to 1993.

By 1994 we were planning a Celebration of Women in Education Management to include trailblazing politician Shirley Williams, a woman (deputy head even!) had been elected as SHA President, people no longer thought the appointment of a woman must be only be so that the LEA could tick the right box.

Maybe the wheel had turned a fraction?

Pat Collings was headteacher of Sinfin Community School, Derby from 1984 to 1997. She served on SHA National Council from 1989 to 1995, chaired the Equal Opportunities Standing Committee and was a founder member of the Women's Group.

LESSONS LEARNED?

Michael Howells shares on his experience as a school governor in Catholic schools and colleges – both as a head and in retirement – since the 1980s and describes the insights more than 40 years in the role have taught him

How the role has changed

The first governing body I attended, as a newly appointed headteacher, had six parish priests – from the parishes, which the school served in the West of Cardiff – and just one woman and no staff representation.

When the first major decision was to be taken, I was asked to leave. It was the last time that occurred! For the last 10 years or more, there has been no clergy on the governing bodies I have chaired in the voluntary sector.

Gender balance change

There are 85 Catholic Voluntary Aided schools in Wales. 68 are Primary, 14 are secondary, one Sixth Form College (St David's Catholic Sixth Form College in the FE sector). One 3-16 school and a second just established and just one independent school.

Eleven of the 14 secondary schools have a male head or principal. The two 3-16 schools are led by a female headteacher. Of the 68 primary/infant schools, only about a dozen have a male head.

When I was appointed head in 1980 all but one of the 28 South Glamorgan secondary heads were men. The composition of staff and governing bodies surely has similar statistical

parallels. In my experience over the last 25 years, the women have outnumbered men in primary school staffrooms and on governing bodies.

What has stayed the same

Headteachers who manage governors as they manage staff!

Clerks are no longer simply minute takers. The role is subject to regulation and training. It has expanded to a professional role which requires a knowledge of the key Welsh Government regulations and the law affecting governance in education as well as employment in the sector

The chair-headteacher-clerk relationship is a key factor to good governance.

Serving and observing young people growing and maturing in a successful school because of outstanding leadership, ensuring high standards are maintained, working with committed 'stakeholders' whether parents/guardians, community, parish or local authority – these things all make the job so worthwhile.

We're all 'Zoomed' . . .

Less elevating is the paperwork and now the overuse of meeting via 'Zoom' and/or 'Teams' that masks the

observation of people's demeanour, that so informs the chair of what is really being felt in the room. Convenience sometimes lessens the quality of debate that is fostered when meeting in person.

Challenges we face

The role of the headteacher has increased immeasurably due to the increase in regulatory policies which governors have to support, and understand and of which they then monitor the implementation.

While falling within governors' collective responsibility, this means in reality that headteachers, certainly at primary level, have been required to take on more responsibilities that interrupt the core work of the day-to-day teaching and learning of children and their development.

This, in Wales, is apart from being expected statutorily to deliver a new curriculum under the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 as well as monitor its development and impact on learning. There is also the statutory duty to ensure that the Additional Learning Needs and Tribunal Act 2018 figures prominently in planning support for children with special educational needs. Resources do not match the requirements.



Business functions need support

The parallel administrative/business demands which stem from the curricular and regulatory changes, plus the implementation of new policies, has not been met with equivalent administrative/personnel support.

If schools were given the resources to appoint a business manager, someone who worked under the headteacher with a clearly-defined job specification to cover some of the key organisational functions that now fall to heads, it would considerably improve the chances of Welsh Government educational aspirations being realised.

Where is the training?

Over the last 20 to 30 years, there have been many meetings of governors, whether organised by

local authority, consortia or dioceses, that are advertised as 'training' for governors, but in reality, are 'briefings'. Training does not occur, as there is no follow-up or analysis of outcomes from the 'briefings' that may or may not be reported to schools.

Measuring accountability

'Evaluation' and 'Accountability' are the current key words in governance in Wales but how are they assessed outside Estyn inspections? Does a personal written review by the chair count? Should the governing body hold a separate meeting to determine evaluation of what it does?

And yet . . . working in education is STILL a joy

Working in the education sector and, hopefully, providing some positive

assistance to former colleagues who have who have become senior leaders and headteachers gives me great satisfaction. We see people, parents, who want the best for their children and they are the same mix of character and personalities as when I was a head, even if the institutions, rules and structures are so different.

Michael Howells was a headteacher from 1980 to 1998 and clerk to the governing body of St David's Catholic Sixth Form College, Cardiff, from 1999 to 2019. He was also the first Cymru field officer for ASCL in 1999 when it was the Secondary Heads Association.



PUZZLES

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- ◇ BEER
- ◇ CASCADE
- ◇ CREAM
- ◇ EDDY
- ◇ GRAVY
- ◇ JUICE
- ◇ LAVA
- ◇ MILK
- ◇ PARAFFIN
- ◇ PETROL
- ◇ RIPPLE
- ◇ RIVER
- ◇ STEAM
- ◇ TRAFFIC
- ◇ WATER
- ◇ WAVES
- ◇ WHIRLPOOL

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S Place a number (from 1 to 9 inclusive) into each square in such a way that every digit appears once in each horizontal row, each vertical column and each box of nine squares.

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THE HISTORY MAN

Since retiring from the headship of King Edward VI Grammar School, Chelmsford in 1999, Tony Tuckwell has advised institutions on appointing the senior leaders of the future . . . and gone back in time as an author and local antiquity buff

Did you have an idea of what retirement would be like?

I knew I would stop being tired of going to work feeling tired, that I was going to write my first book – a history of my old school – and that I wanted to resume choral singing; the idea of being able to commit yourself to being free on any given night had not previously been an option. I was subsequently asked to write the history of New Hall, the oldest Catholic boarding school in the UK dating back to 1799. It's on the site of one of Henry VIII's old palaces so when TV's *Time Team* came to investigate, I got involved with that, too.

How did your relationship with Chelmsford Cathedral start?

I knew the former Dean, Peter Judd, quite well and he asked me to join the board of the Chelmsford Festival. It was a bit like running a parents' association; everyone's a volunteer and should be valued. I remember one guy, an ex-engineer with Marconi when they were in the town, whose capacity for DIY was extraordinary. He was always up ladders or erecting marquees. I used to say 'Brian, you've been fantastic', and he'd say 'no, Tony, I'm just an

old fart. But a quality old fart.' Peter Judd then asked me to write a book celebrating 100 years of the cathedral.

It has an unlikely history, doesn't it?

It's a small parish church which basically became a cathedral by winning a strange Eurovision-type competition. Around a century or so ago, the old St Albans diocese saw a huge population increase in Essex after the expansion of east London through the docks. Three-quarters of worshippers then lived in the county which clearly required its own diocese to provide a mission in the areas that were then known as 'unchurched'. The Bishop wanted a cathedral in West Ham – can you imagine?

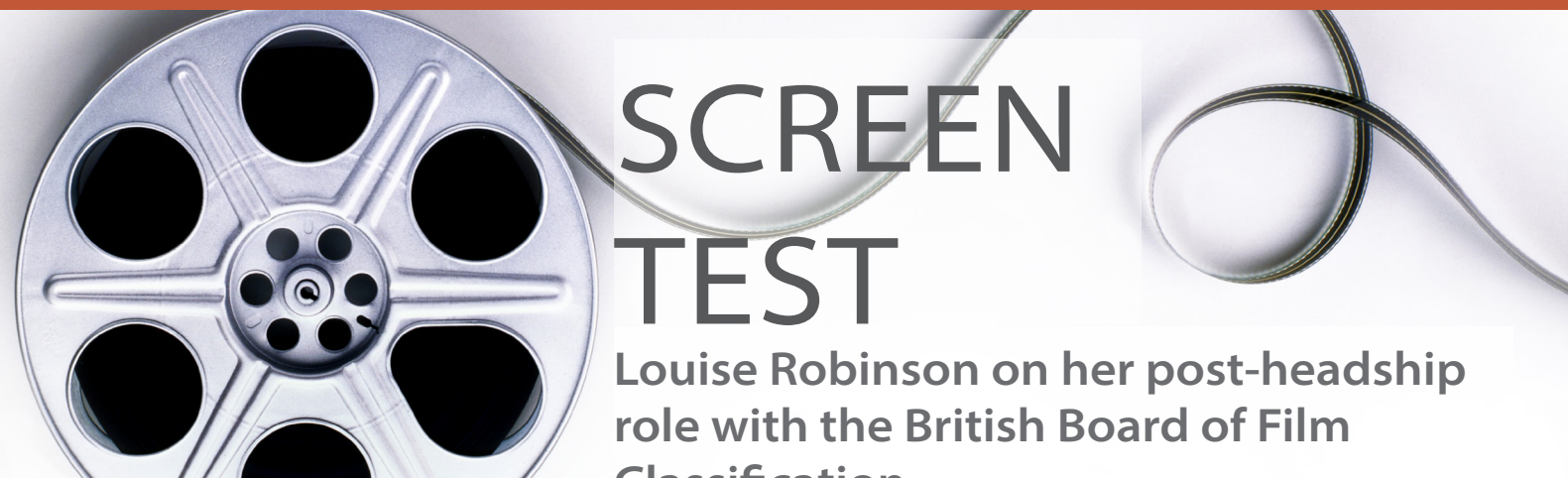
Eventually, a competition was devised in which parishes put themselves forward and voted for the best option. Novelist Anthony Trollope, obviously, lived 30 years too early. He had to invent Bassetshire and he would have loved this. Seven parishes came forward, some with magnificent churches, but Chelmsford won because it was accessible from everywhere. There was, of course, a huge row about the result because of the disparity of numbers of voters in rural parishes and those

in industrial areas. The archives also revealed some suspicions over voting patterns in some places. There was a lot of politics but not a lot of Christianity.

How were the everyday country folk on the Essex Rural Commission?

I'd known Paul White, the old leader of Essex County Council, for years as he was involved with the school. When his assistant rang to ask me to join the commission, I said that I was a townie and that I felt a lot of people in rural areas were NIMBY types. They said that was why they wanted me. It was chaired by Professor Jules Pretty of the University of Essex, and writer Germaine Greer was a member so I thought it would be independent enough.

Just after we presented our recommendations, Paul White, who sat in the Lords as Lord Hanningfield, was caught up in the parliamentary expenses scandal in 2011 and was sent to jail for false accounting for claims for overnight accommodation. I later came across him several times in town when he went to collect his dry cleaning and we would have a chat. It was sad to see a man brought low, even when he has been the author of his own downfall.



SCREEN TEST

Louise Robinson on her post-headship role with the British Board of Film Classification

What led you to apply for a role at the BBFC?

As well as a keen interest in films, I knew that a lot of my headteacher skills would come in useful such as understanding regulation and standards and the ability to produce reports. I knew I could talk to them, for example, about how schools had introduced new sex and relationships policies, things everyone used to shy away from years ago. The British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) produces free PHSE resources for Key Stage 2 and 3 with emphasis on issues significant to those age groups such as consent, mental health and diversity.

What does the role entail?

I am a member of the Children's Advisory Board. It tends to look at a film after it has been released to comment on any challenges that might have been made against it. In recent years, for example, we were asked to judge whether the BBFC had made the right classification decision about *Suicide Squad*, the DC Comics super-villains film, and discuss how different children may have viewed it in very different ways. We also looked closely at *Jojo Rabbit* a comedy about a German boy whose imaginary friend is a version of Hitler. At one point, it shows the feet of a hanged woman and we discussed whether young viewers would have understood what was happening. The Jimmy McGovern film *Anthony* was about the black Liverpool schoolboy Anthony Walker who was murdered in 2005 and showed what

his life could have turned out to be. It's a really challenging film and we talked for ages about how different children would view it and how schools might use it in their discussions about equity, diversity and inclusion.

Has the work changed how you watch films?

Very definitely. This year I've specifically gone out to see *Barbie*, *Oppenheimer* and the latest *Mission Impossible*, three films I would normally have waited to come on television. Film classifications have changed in recent years and, as a result, it's noticeable that British films show far more in terms of physical violence and rather less of the psychological threat and danger than the Americans tend to prefer. Attitudes change; the Carry On films used to be accepted as childish humour but not anymore. You now have to ask whether movies pass the Bechdel Test which looks at the representation of women in films and fiction. Are there, for example, more than two women in a film and do they talk to each other about something other than a man or are they just accessories? Interestingly, *Oppenheimer* failed the test because the two women in it don't talk to each other at all.

How has your experience as a head informed this role?

As a head, part of what you do is analysis of how your decisions affect the pupils and reputation of your school. You make analytical judgments based on regulations and facts

while ensuring that both sides of an argument are heard. We all watch films from alternative viewpoints and find aspects funny or not. It helps having been a head. I'm giving back some of my knowledge and understanding.

Did you ever watch an inappropriate film when you were a young girl?

Looking back, I now realise I was a nerdy people-pleaser. I can't remember seeing a film I shouldn't have but I do recall being banned from reading Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* so I devoured it under the covers by torchlight. Films have always affected me, though – as a girl, I cried my eyes out at *Bambi* and *Gone with the Wind*.

SUDOKU

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WORDSEARCH

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