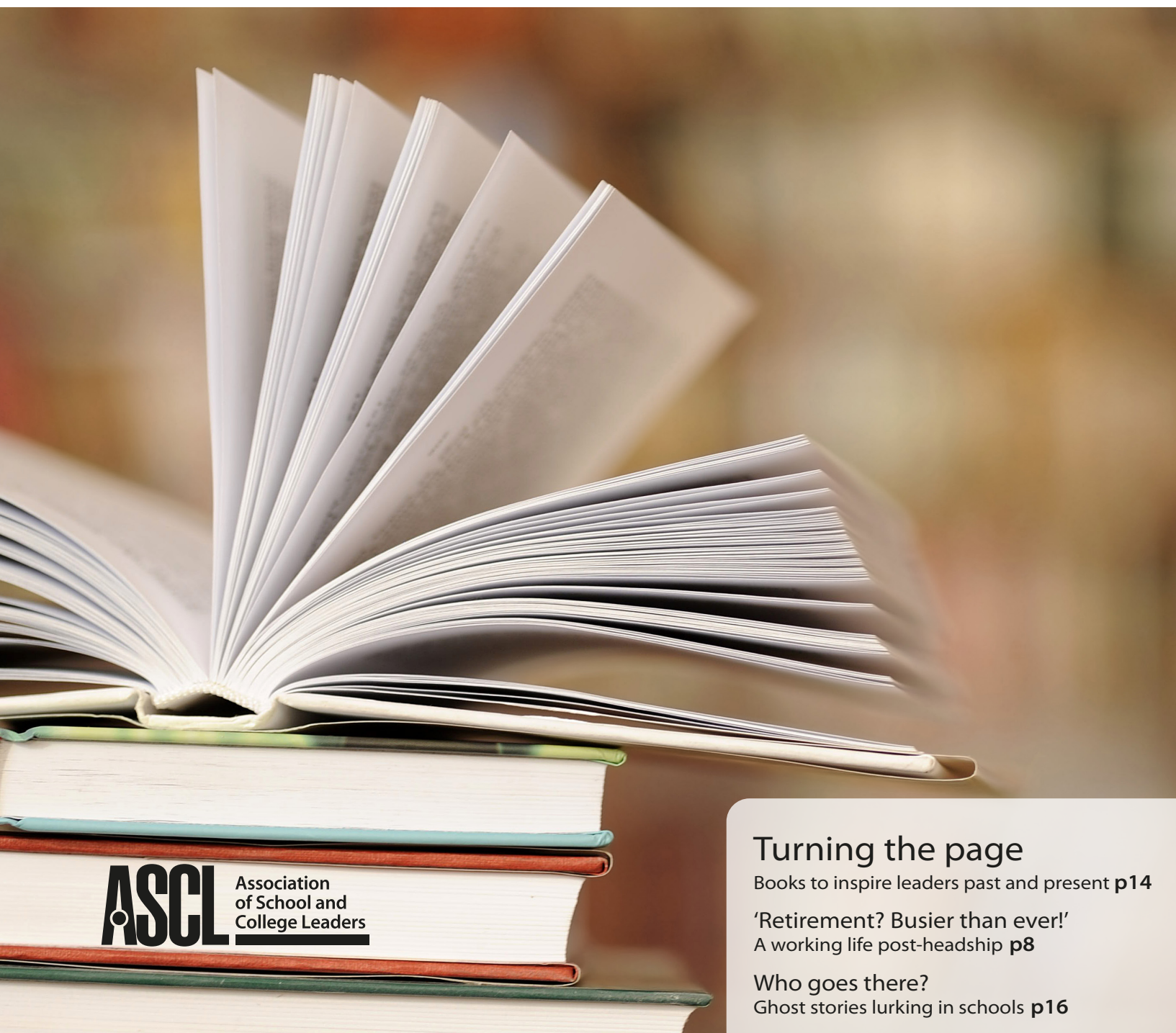


ISSUE 59 | SUMMER 2021

ASSOCIATES NEWS



ASCL Association
of School and
College Leaders

Turning the page

Books to inspire leaders past and present **p14**

'Retirement? Busier than ever!'

A working life post-headship **p8**

Who goes there?

Ghost stories lurking in schools **p16**

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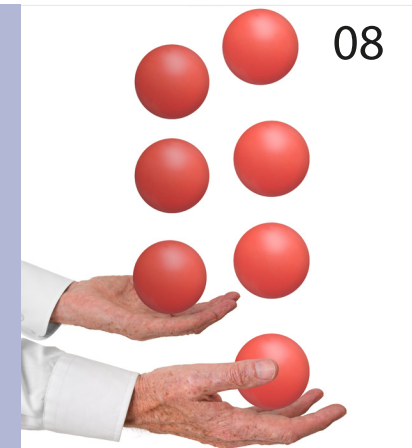
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THE DIGNITY OF ACHIEVEMENT

The Covid crisis has had many damaging and reductive results but it has also shone a light on our education system as it is now ... and how it could be, says Geoff Barton



If you are a regular reader of Associates News, you'll know that, just like you, I'm also a regular reader.

And, in a way, why wouldn't I be? My dad was a librarian. Our house contained lots of books. I went from school to study English at university and then became an English teacher.

As my own English teacher said when I told him of my choice of career: 'Wonderful. You'll spend the rest of your life reading stories.'

For me, books aren't just books. They are friends. When my wife looks at my various media appearances and sees how haphazard the books on my shelves are, she looks on critically whereas I look on with affection.

I like the quirky, random nature of how these old friends have positioned themselves.

And my view of why books matter to our lives isn't just anecdotal or sentimental.

Having spent more than 30 years as an English teacher – and having written many English, literacy and grammar textbooks – I realise that reading books is about much more than reading books.

The eyes of others

Reading is how we shape who we are, deciding what we agree with and what we don't, and connecting ourselves with other human beings who, like us, like books.

Books lift us beyond our current selves and into the eyes of other people in other places and other times.

More than that, it's about achievement. A background in reading – for all kinds of reasons – shapes our success in the future; it gives us the vocabulary and cultural heritage to navigate the years ahead.

I mention this because as we emerge from the pandemic there's far too much talk of 'catch up'.

We know that too many children and young people have missed far too much time from school, but we also know that education isn't something easily quantifiable.

So now, as we emerge from this wretched pandemic, I would suggest that it's time to learn from the past.

I've recently been reading Craig Brown's magnificent biography of The Beatles, *One, Two, Three, Four*.

In it he says:

These days, Ringo is a byword for good luck, but his early life was riddled by misfortune. At school, Ringo was placed in the C-stream, where he was regarded as unexceptional or – to quote one or two of his reports – 'honest, cheerful, and willing and quite capable of making a satisfactory employee'.

Ringo said: "I started to be an engineer but I banged my thumb on the first day. I became a drummer because it was the only thing I could do."

What an indictment of a state education system.

I really hope that the pandemic has lifted us well beyond any thought that seeing children written off by education at 16 or 18 is any longer acceptable. 'Ringo' may be a byword

for good luck, but for far too many young people over far too many years, our education system has appeared to say that what matters is academic success and nothing else.

Mainstream debate

That's why over the coming months you'll hear ASCL speaking more strongly for those whose voices aren't heard in the mainstream education debate. It isn't in any way about lower standards or dumbing down.

It's about the dignity of achievement – believing that after 12 years of education, every young person

should leave school with a qualification that says 'Here's what I can do' rather than 'Here's what I can't'.

Ringo escaped his educational destiny and achieved global success. But for too many other young people in the past, the Beatles anthem to describe their educational experience may have been 'Help!'.

We are determined that ASCL will be part of making our already-good education system work for all children and young people, whatever their background, their postcode, and indeed their drumming skills.

Geoff Barton is ASCL General Secretary.

For more on the joy of reading see p14

Engagement with policymakers

ASCL's frequent engagement with ministers, civil servants and advisers continues, although the focus is beginning to shift from short to medium term public health issues to longer term educational ones.

Julie McCulloch, ASCL's Director of Policy, says topics under discussion include:

Relaxation of system of controls related to Covid in schools and colleges – ASCL was asked to gather views from members on when controls might start to be relaxed and the responses were shared anonymously with the Department for Education, along with an analysis of key points.

2021 and 2022 grading – detailed discussions about the later stages of the grading process and how appeals will work continue. ASCL has been pushing back strongly against any move to put more of the burden of the appeals process on to schools and colleges, including anything which means subject leads needing to be in school or college in August and schools and colleges being asked to re-grade students.

Education recovery – ASCL's impression is that the DfE's thinking here is less developed than one would hope. The Department is considering a range of policies under Education Recovery Commissioner Sir Kevan Collins' "three Ts" – time, teaching and targeted support. They are looking at these separately for different phases, so while policies under 'time' for post-16 settings might include longer days, those

under the same heading for early years settings are likely to focus on encouraging families to take up funded places.

The ASCL team has told civil servants that any policies which come with additional costs will need to be fully funded, and that any which would require changes to staff terms and conditions would need to be properly consulted on. They are also urging a joined-up approach between the teams looking at education and those focused on wider services for children and families.

Academisation – ASCL Trust Leadership Consultant Rob Robson and Julie McCulloch meet the DfE academy strategy team every month, enabling them to have input into a range of policies, including trust partnerships and the new proposal to require schools with triple RIs (requirement to improve) to join trusts. The DfE also welcomed ASCL's offer to bring together a group of representative trust leaders to advise them.

Sexual harassment and abuse – following the issues exposed by the 'Everyone's Invited' website, ASCL has worked with a number of organisations to compile resources to help members to handle allegations against their school or college and to review their broader approach to the issues.

Blueprint – work on the *Blueprint for a Fairer Education* is progressing well with a final report due at the beginning of July.

'Positive' mood, despite Covid, at Associates Committee

Meetings of the Associates Committee have continued virtually during the lockdown and members were delighted to see each other again, albeit remotely, when they met on May 12.

"A positive feeling ran through the meeting. It was a real boost to know that candidates for the committee elections had come forward in droves, and that the Associates' 'slot' at the virtual ASCL Conference in March had had plenty of log-ins," said committee member John Caperon.

All this may be a sign of the times, according to ASCL Vice-President Pepe Di'lasio, who said that, at his school, parents were rushing in unusual numbers for election as parent governors after the last, dismal year.

Sharing the benefits of Associates' membership remains a key committee priority. There was general agreement that *Associates News* is now a lively and very readable publication. Associate members are offering articles and others are being commissioned, there is coverage of up-to-the minute concerns, and a strong link between the Association's past and present has been established, underlining ASCL's ongoing commitment to young people and their education.

ASCL General Secretary Geoff Barton's recent on-line briefing for Associate Members drew a big audience and similar events are in the pipeline (see story, right).

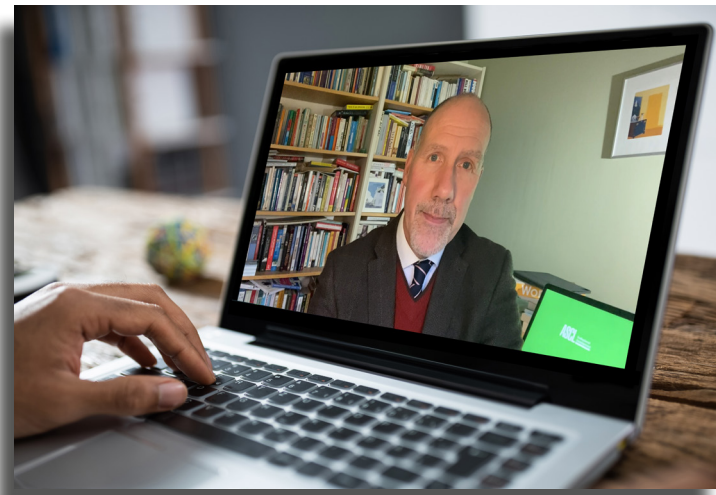
Covid had prompted creative solutions to some issues such as how to continue with social events and the recent 'virtual' walk along Regent's Canal in London, arranged by Pat Sales, was a good example (see p12-13).

Elsewhere, Tony Richardson, chair of ASCL Benevolent Fund, said the fund was continuing to support Association members in need or distress, making life possible for some, manageable for others and helping others still to recover energy and conviction for renewed work in schools. In 2020, it made £85,000 of grants in total to 40 people, a rise of £7,000 on 2019.

Overall, the meeting was highly successful, said John Caperon.

"Members were keenly aware of the difficulties facing ASCL members in such a testing time for education and there was admiration for the clear leadership the Association had been offering and for school leaders who have kept schools running through the last year. This generation of leaders is certainly meeting the challenge."

Meet the General Secretary



Geoff Barton will share his 'end of term report' with associate members at an online meeting in July.

At his first virtual event with Associates in March, ASCL's General Secretary gave an insight into the current issues in education and explained how ASCL is responding.

The meeting is on Monday 12 July 2021 at 3pm via Microsoft Teams.

If you would like to join, register your interest by emailing corporateadmin@ascl.org.uk and send any questions you would like to ask.

You will receive a link which will take you straight to the meeting (there is no need to download software).

Share your story with Associates website

The dedicated Associates website is up and running with information about the benefits of associate membership, events and webinars. It also highlights Associates' work and support for members, including the ASCL Benevolent Fund, Associates Committee and Associates Voluntary Service (AAVS, see story, right).

The site is at www.ascl.org.uk/Associates

ASCL's marketing team are looking for more people to feature as case studies on the site. If you would be willing to share your experiences since retiring and talk about why you chose to be an Associate member contact website@ascl.org.uk

Tune in to podcasts



More podcasts have been added to the list on ASCL's website.

The Business Brunch, which began in February 2021, features policy specialists and former school business leaders Hayley Dunn, Louise Hatswell and Julia Harnden discussing the issues school business leaders are facing.

Policy experts also feature in the Specialists podcasts produced ahead of ASCL's Annual Conference in March 2021, while people who lead across a number of sites and organisations in education, other public sector institutions

and the commercial sector, or who have studied system leadership, share their thoughts and experiences of leadership with Rob Robson, ASCL Trust Leadership Consultant, in the Trust Leadership podcasts.

To listen to any ASCL podcast, go to www.ascl.org.uk/Podcasts

What leaders are reading – podcast, see p15

Volunteer with Associates

The Associates Voluntary Service (AAVS) is a little-known part of the Associates' work but it provides valuable help for members working in schools and colleges as well as other Associate members.

Volunteers have supported members coping with illness, anxiety post-redundancy and other personal difficulties.

Although the service is only called on occasionally – and volunteers may be on the list for several years and never be contacted – members always appreciate the support when it is there.

If you are an Associate member and would like to volunteer, you can register your interest by completing the contact form on the website at www.ascl.org.uk/aavs



WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Should heads worry about how to feel useful when they call time on their leadership careers? Not if they follow Peter Crowe's example. His coaching and consultancy work and time spent chairing governors and helping charities mean he's never been so in demand

I finished full-time work with a bang in July 2014, soon after the completion of our brand new 11-16 school for 800 students.

The £18m building, financed by Derbyshire County Council, was just over half a mile away from our old school site on 'virgin farming land' at the western edge of the village.

It had opened for business in November 2013 following the amalgamation of two older establishments that had been six miles apart but were now on one brand new, purpose-built site.

Ofsted arrived, like an unwelcome maiden aunt, six days after we moved in!

Having fought so long and hard to get the new school it was a wrench for me to walk away but, after 15 years in post, it was the right time to go.

So what next? For busy heads, the prospect of suddenly doing nothing – controlling nothing – is terrifying. What is more, happy and fulfilling marital relationships are often based on rarely seeing each other and my long-suffering wife Julie would readily attest to that.

In the event, I was deeply indebted to an old friend and colleague, Alan Wayment, who had retired from Woodlands in Derby in the mid-noughties.

Coaching opportunity

He encouraged me to apply for a coaching opportunity with Teaching Leaders (now Ambition Institute). It was a strange feeling to be seated on the other side of the desk

having spent so many years sitting in judgment, with governors, on myriad nervous applicants to my school.

Since then I haven't looked back and have coached an average of 15 or so middle and senior leaders annually across the country.

For the first two years, coaching sessions were face-to-face with colleagues in schools as far apart as North Notts to Peterborough and from the Lincolnshire Wolds to Walsall.

My class of coaches were initially sceptical when introduced to 'remote coaching' in 2016, though all quickly embraced it. Most of the time it is conducted by telephone, Zoom or Teams.

It continues to be a real honour and a total pleasure to work with such dedicated, hard-working and enthusiastic people who staff the middle and upper echelons of our state schools. So many talented teachers are working tirelessly to improve the lot of our most disadvantaged students.

'It continues to be a total pleasure to work with such dedicated people'

The mission of Ambition Institute, in supporting a network of more than 6,000 educators at all levels, is to encourage its participants to constantly strive to improve and attempt to eradicate educational disadvantage. They play a vital part in the CPD and improvement journey of so many gifted teachers.

I was fortunate to be able to continue my work with ASCL as a branch secretary (now local rep) supporting ASCL members through many redundancy and restructure procedures as well as attending regular schools joint consultative committee for Derbyshire meetings and working parties in Matlock.

From October 2014, I also started working as a consultant for various academy trusts across the Midlands – principally, though not exclusively, Ormiston Academy Trust.

Consultancy work

In order to carry out consultancy work, I had to 'set up shop' as a sole trader though it soon became clear that some trusts would only work with people operating as a small business. It was, therefore, a fairly small step to become a limited company in the autumn of 2015.

Once again it has been incredibly rewarding for me to work with principals and their staff in some large academies in the Walsall/Birmingham area even though the regular travelling was, at times, a bit of a bind. I became very familiar with five junctions of the M1 and most of the M42.

By 2016, consultancy work was beginning to dry up as school budgets became progressively tighter but the academies I worked with, and had got to know so well, really wanted me to stay on in some capacity.

I became a remunerated chair of governors in two Midlands academies. At the time, I was keen to ensure the arrangement be a temporary measure for them as I felt that a chair of governors should have expert local knowledge and contacts.

However, such was the strength of the bond between us, I stayed for four years in one and three in the other; I finished both, with reluctance, in the summer of 2020.

Since September 2019 I have also been voluntary chair of governors at my local academy and am heavily involved in a local charity, Maun Refuge, that supports a dozen Syrian families in the local area.

Our own adopted Syrian family is growing with child number two due this month although our attention is increasingly drawn to northwest Leicestershire where our third grandchild has recently arrived.

I will continue my work as chair of governors locally for a while yet, and my work for Ambition Institute will continue as long as they will have me.

Alan Wayment is also still going strong as an outstanding coach some 15 years after retiring from headship. He is a wonderful role model and a total inspiration to me.

Julie is glad to see the back of me as often as possible; if my coaching calls dry up at certain times of year I am kicked unceremoniously, though not unwillingly, out on to the golf course.

Retirement is still not really a notion I have embraced; working when, how and where you want to is genuinely fun.

Peter Crowe was head of Tibshelf School in North-East Derbyshire until 2014.



Peter with colleague Sue Allen, head of PSHE and Citizenship, and headboy Andrew Aldis in 2013-14 receiving the International Schools award in London for Tibshelf's ten-year post-tsunami project in Sri Lanka

There is information and advice compiled by members of the Associates Committee on preparing for retirement on the Associates website. Go to www.ascl.org.uk/movingon

A FRIEND WITH BENEFIT NEWS

If you're puzzled by the Deferred Choice Underpin, bemused by the McCloud/Sargeant ruling or plain behind-the-times when it comes to government pronouncements, don't worry. ASCL Pensions Specialist Jacques Szemalikowski can explain.

Associates may well remember changes that were introduced to the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) back in 2007. At that time, you would all have belonged to the normal pensionable age (NPA) 60 scheme.

As I am sure you now know all too well, this was a defined benefit final salary scheme. Your annuity (annual pension) was determined by your years of pensionable service, your age relative to the NPA and your final year's salary.

This scheme had an accrual rate that was based on 1/80th of your final salary. I am sure you were relieved that when things changed on New Year's Day 2007, this only applied to new members and that you were kept on your original scheme.

This is probably because even though the new defined benefit scheme has a far more generous accrual rate of 1/60th, the NPA was raised to 65 and it no longer attracted an automatic lump sum.

Widespread reform

Ten years ago, when austerity was the zeitgeist, the government asked Lord Hutton to further explore pensions across the entire public sector. The aim, in their view, was to ensure that they were sustainable and affordable in the long term.

The subsequent Hutton report, while maintaining the defined benefit principle, resulted in widespread reform across the sector including, of course, the TPS.

Primarily, this again increased the NPA to align it to the rise in the state pension age and moved from a final salary scheme to a career average revaluation scheme.

This argued that it would better benefit those whose later careers were perhaps not as stellar as others'. This meant that, rather than being dependent on a time-served proportion

of final salary, members would now "bank" a proportion of their salary every year as a tranche of their annuity.

In its favour, the accrual rate was increased markedly to 1/57 for the TPS, alongside a strong compound annual revaluation of inflation plus 1.6%.

Unlike the 2007 change, however, this wholesale approach was intended for almost all TPS members. Colleagues who were aged roughly 46, were transferred straight across when it came into play on 1 April 2015.

However, concessions were made for older members, in that those within 10 years of NPA in their original scheme on 1 April 2012, (so 50 and above), were totally protected in their legacy scheme.

To avoid a cliff-edge, teachers who just missed out on the protection were tapered-in on a sliding scale as they transitioned into the reformed scheme. The older you were, the more protection you were afforded.

However, subsequent action brought in relation to the firefighters' and judges' pension schemes (the McCloud/Sargeant case), judged the approach to be age-discriminatory to those younger members who were simply switched straight over with no protection or tapering.

Having been denied appeal against this judgement in the High Court, the government now must fix, or remedy, the situation by removing the discrimination.

The remedy period being addressed is 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2022, and it may well be relevant to ASCL Associate Members who retired after 2015.

This is because the remedy will apply to all members of the Teachers' Pension Scheme who were in post on the 31 March 2012 and still in post on 1 April 2015, whether they are currently still in the scheme or not or, indeed, have retired.

- ◇ BAMBI
- ◇ BATMAN
- ◇ BLOSSOM
- ◇ BUBBLES
- ◇ CHARLIE BROWN
- ◇ DUMBO
- ◇ GOOFY
- ◇ GUMBY
- ◇ MOWGLI
- ◇ PLUTO
- ◇ SCOOBY DOO
- ◇ SMURF
- ◇ SPIKE
- ◇ STIMPY
- ◇ TIGGER
- ◇ TOM
- ◇ TOP CAT
- ◇ UNDERDOG

N	N	B	G	Q	Y	N	H	P	O	J	G	T
A	W	L	F	Q	J	R	O	J	G	T	X	
M	K	L	O	O	F	Z	D	P	L	A	G	F
T	R	K	M	R	S	Y	W	N	C	Q	E	B
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B	C	R	U	O	Y	E	O	S	S	Q	L	N
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Y	S	I	G	Y	E	Q	E	O	R	J	R	V
O	T	U	L	P	F	L	M	D	Y	A	M	F
S	I	K	N	G	Y	X	B	V	N	O	H	G
L	G	C	K	U	O	H	B	B	T	U	M	C
O	G	D	F	R	B	O	B	M	U	D	N	W
J	E	Z	P	W	W	F	F	F	K	B	T	S
F	R	B	A	M	B	I	D	Y	D	A	Y	G

Binary choice

In line with ASCL's response, the government's chosen route, as delineated in the recent Queen's Speech, will be the Deferred Choice Underpin (DCU).

Members in scope will be asked to make a one-time binary choice at the point they take their benefits from the scheme, usually retirement.

The choice will be whether, for the remedy period, to take their benefits in line with either their legacy scheme, or the new reformed scheme.

Consequently, associates who were in the scheme from 31 March 2012, and still contributing on 1 April 2015, and who have subsequently retired, will be among the first to be offered this binary, no-detriment choice.

What should you do now?

There is no need to do anything now as the implementation of these changes requires primary legislation, which will probably take over a year or so. There will also be the need for scheme-specifics, as the remedy applies to all Public Sector Pension Schemes. However, Associate Members who have already crystallised their benefits will be amongst the first to be contacted.

I shall provide further information once the dust settles.

SUDOKU

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.

5	6	2				4		
	1				5		2	9
				3	8			6
		1	6	8		3		7
4			7		9			5
9		6		2	3	8		
6			1	4				
3	9		8				1	
		4				5	7	8

Puzzles supplied by Puzzle Press Ltd (www.puzzlepress.co.uk)



TALES OF THE RIVERBANK

Image credit: Jen Pedler

Pat Sales charts the course of the eight-and-a-half mile virtual stroll along London's Regent's Canal recently enjoyed online by members, partners and friends

Our Zoom 'walk' began by the Spice Warehouse in Haggerston in Hackney where we learned the canal, which was opened fully in 1820, was owned privately with access to the actual canal paths limited to commercial companies only.

In the 1850s, there were up to 12,000 horses stabled at stages along the canal to service the barges, long boats and the local horse-drawn public carriages/buses.

We set off towards Kingsland Road Bridge and came to the Laburnum Boat Club which provides long boats for private hire for the community and visitors.

We were shown colourful mosaics on the towpath wall by Laburnum Bridge which told the story of Miss Hewlett, the headteacher of Laburnum Primary School between 1958 and 1982. The primary school was demolished in 2005 and the area is now the location of The Bridge Academy, opened in 2007.

Decorative railings

Our attention was drawn to the special decorative railings as we passed under the bridge to the TYPE Arts Project with paintings and sculptures along the towpath, the work of local schools and artists.

Jen Pedler, our Footprints of London guide, pointed out the names of local places which reflected the history of the canal; Acton's Lock, named after William Lock, and the

Lockkeeper's Cottage lived in for generations by the Woods family. The last lockkeeper's widow lived there until 2020.

This lock is famous because it was built as a 'double lock' system which used new water management technology in the 1880s.

Onwards to the Cat & Mutton Bridge Pub and the local Broadway Market in Bethnal Green near to the Hackney Road. The canal passes by Haggerston Park and the eye-catching gas holders, both landmarks developed and built between 1860 and 1880.

This is an area for a major housing scheme; currently it has attractive Georgian-era Cambridge Cottages which are to be demolished to make way for high-rise flats.

These Georgian buildings and local old commercial units have been a location in many films including John le Carré's Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy which was filmed there in 2011.



Passing Mare Street, the canal comes to Victoria Park and the Victoria Regina Bridge near to Bonner Gate. This park was opened in 1845 as a result of popular demand when 13,000 people petitioned Queen Victoria for a People's Park.

This was supported by the local Bishop Bonner. Its design with a large lake and fountain resembles that of Battersea Park.

Narrow boats

Many residential narrow boats are moored in this area. Each boat owner must hold a 'Continuous Cruising Licence' at an annual cost of £500.

Prices vary according to the length of a boat which may be moored in one place along the Regent's Canal for just two weeks at a time, having to move to another area each third week.

Jen explained that the Covid-19 restrictions on travel had provided some stability to owners as they were not allowed to move.

Onwards in the direction of the Old Ford Lock with its stables for the two canals' horses and at the end a short Hertford Union Canal/Duckett's Cut link between the canal and the River Lea and the River Lee Navigation. The change of spelling from Lea to Lee was done purposely to avoid confusion over the parallel stretches of the river and canal water systems.

At this point, the canal enters the Olympic Park in Hackney Wick and heads south-westwards towards Mile End Park in Bow. The park of 90 acres was created after the Second World War following extensive bombing of this area of East London.

Alongside for a while is the Roman Road thought to be the route taken by Boudicca and her Iceni Tribe to trounce the Roman occupiers of East Anglia.

The canal runs along the eastern boundary of Queen Mary, University of London located in Mile End, and the road was originally known as Aldgate Street in Mile End Hamlet and marked the point one mile point east of The City of London.

'Reformed pub'

A notable public house, The Palm Tree, was designed and built between the two World Wars as a 'reformed pub' with a restaurant and function room in addition to the drinking bars in order to combat drunkenness in the local dockworkers' community.

There is a second 'double lock' system and a canal keeper's cottage at Mile End Lock where the Queen Mary postgraduate Humanities Faculty is now based.

Very close to the canal in the southern area of the Mile End Park is the Ragged [Free] School Museum. The school was

originally opened in 1877 by Dr Thomas Barnardo, originally in three former warehouses.

Unlike a normal day school, it schooled more than 1,000 children during weekdays and up to 2,400 on Sundays! It provided



basic education for the poor prior to the establishment and provision of free primary/elementary school education in the area before closing in 1908.

The museum has kept many of its original features and is set up with a Victorian-style school classroom and kitchen from the 1870s.

Near to the canal at Mile End is a very tall chimney originally built to provide an outlet for the smells in the East London sewers.

Continuing the walk, we went under a bridge built for the Great Eastern Railway for trains heading for Liverpool Street Station. Nearby is Salmon's Lane named after Robert Salmon who worked for the East India Company and a 'double bridge' near to the Commercial Road Lock which was the very first lock to be built along the canal.

The oldest and longest Grade II-listed railway viaduct then comes into view; it was designed and built by George Stephenson in 1839. This is now used as part of the track for the driverless Docklands Light Railway.

Limehouse Basin

Walking under the viaduct we entered the Limehouse Basin, located on the northern bank of the River Thames with its tall Victorian octagonal hydraulic accumulator water tower.

The basin contains a working harbourmaster's building with a footbridge over the lock entrance from the River Thames into the Regent's Canal.

This building was designed by Nicholas Hawksmoor and mirrors the design of his nearby 1730 St Anne's Anglican Church.

On completing the journey, associates asked Jen Pedler questions and people talked about their memories and experiences of times spent in these areas through which the Regent Canal runs.

Pat Sales is a member of the Associates' Committee and organiser of the London Reunion Walks

A further Virtual Themed Walk in July and an Actual Guided Walk in London in October 2021 are being arranged.

Members will receive news of these via email throughout June, July and August.

These emails will give you the details of the walks and booking arrangements.



BOOKS

Inspired by ASCL's podcast series *Leaders are Readers* (see opposite), Associate Maureen Cruickshank selects her own list of books that have provided welcome distraction from the past year

Hamnet by Maggie O'Farrell (Hachette UK, 2020)

I bought this award-winning novel on October 16 but didn't read it till November 9. Why not?

I guess it was because it concerned the death of a child I avoided it.

However, when I started I was gripped by the richness of the language almost as if it was inspired by proximity to the Bard.

It is about Shakespeare's family life and the death of his only son and brings the richness of the 1590s wonderfully to life.

I knew:

- that Shakespeare's wife was older than him
- that it was a shotgun marriage
- that she stayed with the family in Stratford while he was away in London
- that they had twins and a child who died
- that after a while they became rich

Whether other details are true I care not.

The character I love most is Bartholomew, brother of Agnes, Shakespeare's wife. Don't we all deserve such fraternal support? Always ready to help out in a crisis.



All the while quotes from Shakespeare floated through my mind. Was he thinking of *Hamnet* when he wrote for Prospero those sublime words in *The Tempest*, "We are such stuff as dreams are made on: and our little life is rounded with a sleep"?

Light Perpetual by Francis Spufford (Faber, 2021)

A signed copy of this novel arrived as an unsolicited gift from the Hay Festival. I had not heard of the author.

I generally read very quickly so I read half one afternoon and evening and thought, 'I don't like this'. Not sure what happened overnight as next day I became gripped and raced to the end.

It has a strange beginning surmising that a German rocket strikes London and five children in a classroom are killed – 'atomised' in an instant. Then it changes tack so that the rocket never lands and it follows the five young lives of Jo, Valerie, Eric, Ben and Vernon into the unimaginable changes of the 20th century.

A rich tapestry of twists and turns, full of warmth and beauty, a sweeping intimate celebration of the gift of life. I recommend it.

Lady in Waiting by Anne Glenconner (Hodder & Stoughton, 2019)

My last book is an autobiography by Anne who was lady-in-waiting to Princess Margaret. I'd seen it as a hardback in the charts and then continuing to appear when in paperback.

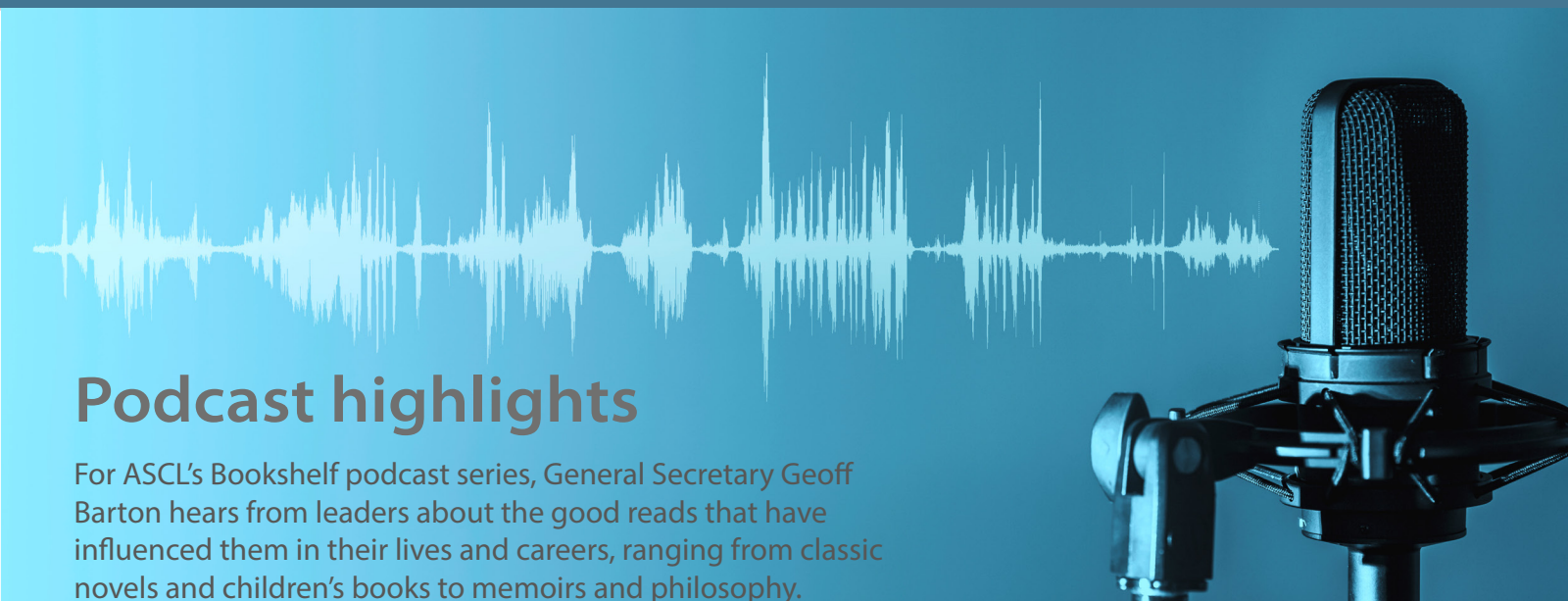
A friend whose opinion I respect recommended it. It is my most 'lent out' book having gone to four other friends who all loved it. Unputdownable.

First born of the future 5th Earl of Leicester ("I had tried so hard to be a boy") she lived to see Holkham Hall the family home in Norfolk, pass to a distant male cousin.

As a child she socialised with the Royal Family so that she was chosen to be a maid of honour at the Coronation in 1953. She married Colin Glenconner who bought the island of Mustique and gave Princess Margaret land to build a house there. Later in life her two grown-up sons died and her husband cut her out of his will. And yet throughout, she is devoid of self-pity.

On the contrary, in fact, the book is life affirming.

Maureen Cruickshank was Principal of Beauchamp College, Leicester, 1981-2003



Podcast highlights

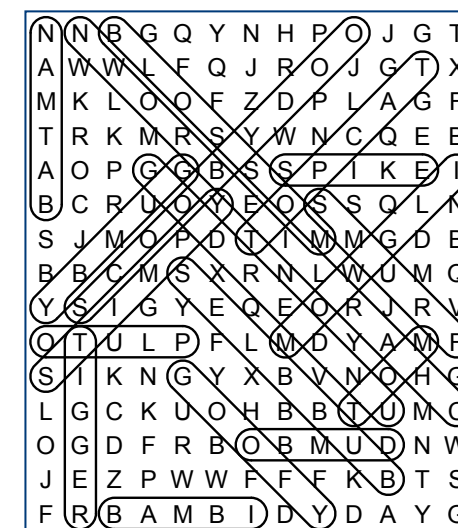
For ASCL's Bookshelf podcast series, General Secretary Geoff Barton hears from leaders about the good reads that have influenced them in their lives and careers, ranging from classic novels and children's books to memoirs and philosophy.

- Tanya Douglas, head at Chace Community School in Enfield, north London and ASCL Council member, said she was influenced by African-American authors early in her life and had then "stumbled upon an amazing book" by the Anglo-Nigerian author Bernadine Evaristo. The Booker Prize-winning *Girl, Woman, Other* features individual black women who are all connected. She also chose Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*.
- Donna Stevens, CEO of the Girls' Schools Association, included former junior doctor's Adam Kay's *This is Going to Hurt* in her list, which also featured Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Christo*. "If you want escapism, this is a very easy read with moments of laughing out loud," she said, though there were also "moments of sheer sadness and moments that make you feel in awe

- of what medical staff are dealing with every day."
- Alongside Carol Dweck's *Mindset and the Collected Poems of Sylvia Plath*, Chris Hildrew, head of Churchill Academy and Sixth Form in North Somerset and another ASCL Council member, chose Dr Seuss's *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*, a poem he now reads to every departing Year 11 class. "I think it speaks to the wide open vistas that our secondary students step out into as they move from being children to being adults. It paints a really balanced picture, talking about the things that are going to go wrong . . . but that if you keep going with determination and self-confidence you can weather those storms and go through and be successful."

To see the full range of ASCL podcasts go to www.ascl.org.uk/podcasts

WORDSEARCH



SUDOKU

5	6	2	9	7	1	4	8	3
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THAT'S THE SPIRIT!



Eerie nuns, unearthly caretakers and things that go bump in the science block . . . some schools delight in the chance of a ghost, says Will Daunt

Don't Google "educational ghost stories" if you crave a quiet life. Thousands will try to persuade you that their particular school of ghouls excels in its ability to chill.

I can't pretend that poltergeists or phantoms vied with more earthly matters in my various incursions into leadership planning. But perhaps it's time to correct such grave oversights.

One or two shady characters deserve particular mention, if only because they were expelled during the same school rebuild.

No block or atrium could accommodate the White Lady. This fleeting apparition had apparently spooked some of our Year 11s after revision classes in science (where there seemed to be a permanent shortage of lab coats).

Unholy demolition

"Sir, sir! Perhaps she's a nun!" This was a fine acknowledgement of the school's previous life, under holy orders. And only a particularly unholy demolition could bury that spine-shiverer.

Then, of course, it was a cleaner (early morning and late-night guardian of the school's immaculate soul) who saw the soldier by the tills in the old dining room. "With a full great coat and helmet, as sure as I breathe!"

Shortly afterwards I set the head of music a new performance management target: by all means arrive early, but not via the costume store. And have breakfast at home.

Writing this, I was reminded of when I had to speak to the caretaker who would wait until solitary staff were availing themselves of the fitness suite. So that he could tap them on the shoulder. Wearing a sheet.

At another time, colleagues had been unsettled by a fiendish rattle that echoed through the vents above the science department.

After a couple of weeks, something possessed our resident ornitho-biologist to come and see me, with a large net and a degree in clairvoyance.

"Problem solved, sir. Mallard with her brood. Now safely in the brook." In brief: ducks in the ducts.

Years earlier, as a callow English teacher, I engineered a project where several pupils visited a local primary, weeks before it would shut forever. The building crouched on the crest of a hill, its 1960s architecture concealing the original schoolhouse.

Museum piece

Within the main building you could proceed into the two-up-two-down headteacher's cottage which lurked there entombed like a museum piece.

Its final occupant had lived inside for decades and at a time when the house was visible from all sides. But one morning the children arrived to find the classrooms dark and cold. Their headteacher was lying in bed a few yards away, dead to this world.

The caretaker who walked us round that strange and zombified home stopped by its old threshold.

"You know," he said, "sometimes when I'm here at night, and all the windows and doors are closed, a very cold wind passes right through me when I walk past. It's him."

Living spectres are equally intriguing. The largest school I worked in had an in-out drive, which encircled a modest bungalow. This was the lonely haunt of a gentle chap known as The Guardian, who picked up any tasks avoided by the caretakers.

This he didn't mind, just as he seemed to accept the head's decision to re-house him to enable another building project. Unfortunately, as the new

term and the amicable exorcism approached, the bungalow remained comprehensively occupied.

I was summoned to the head's office. There was only a skeleton staff, and I knew what was coming. "Would you pop across the drive and see how the move's going . . ."

A polite welcome awaited me, but it would be an exaggeration to say that I was ushered in. I could not get much further than the doormat because the house was at bursting point.

Every room was full of furniture, submerged by a career's worth of hoarded magazines, books, papers, tools and clothes.

A family might keep as much in a large house. All this would have been accumulating under the noses of the generations of staff and pupils passing those net curtains.

He went quietly. His possessions, less so.

Havisham moment

There was another Havisham moment when I visited one of our local parishes, its church about to close for demolition. The genial priest asked me in for coffee, but as I sat at the dining table I realised the only space was barely wide enough for a plate. The rest of the room was a dusty, chaotic, wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling newspaper archive.

It was somewhere to serve out the creeps, in large portions.

In schools these days, I guess that memory and imagination have to work a little bit harder. Is there still room to exhume the phantasmagorical?

Will Daunt was a headteacher in the North-West of England, 2003-2015

Write for Associates News!

Associates News is looking for more contributors.

If you have an experience about retirement life to share, if you're active in an organisation or advisory body, if you're fundraising for a good cause or if you are making a splash in a new career field, we'd like to hear about it.

We're also keen to receive contributions for our Time of My Life slot (see page 19), highlighting memorable career or life moments for members.

Associates News is published three times a year in March, July and November but contributions are welcome at any time.

Send your contributions, with images if available, to associatesnews@ascl.org.uk

(We reserve the right to edit copy for length.)

OBITUARY: MARGARET NICHOLLS

Everyone who knew Margaret Nicholls, who has died aged 79 after a long period of ill health, admired and respected her. She was a warm, kind, supportive and loyal friend to many and will be greatly missed.

Margaret was a pioneer headteacher: the first female head of a Coventry Comprehensive School – Woodway Park – in the era when, outside London, there was only a tiny number of such appointments.

The school had community school status and served a stressed, disadvantaged neighbourhood. Margaret successfully steered the school through a series of challenges but never lost the ability to see the funny side of life.

She was elected to serve on the Council of SHA (Secondary Heads Association, ASCL's predecessor) in the early nineties and is remembered with affection by colleagues for her significant contribution to the Equal Opportunities group and the Professional Development Committee which she chaired.

She was a generous mentor to women joining Council which was very much a male bastion at the time. She and I attended annual national conferences from Birmingham to Bournemouth, sharing transport and rooms to get the

best accommodation deals. Margaret never came without her small picnic basket complete with all that was needed for elegant gin and tonics without going to the bar.

Margaret always worked long hours but managed an active social life, parenting and caring for very elderly parents, and was always a wonderful hostess. She was always extremely well organised and beautifully groomed.

After headship Margaret was an active consultant for SHA mainly assisting governing bodies with headteacher appointments, a role which she thoroughly enjoyed.

She was a committed Francophile and virtually bilingual having spent long periods with a French family in her youth. She and her husband, Philip, bought a house in France, where they spent several months of the year in retirement. She was delighted to become a grandparent.

Margaret endured frequent and lengthy hospital stays without complaint.

She is survived by Philip and their son Christopher.

Margaret Nicholls born January 28 1942, died April 6 2021.

Pat Collings

TIME OF MY LIFE

Kcarrie Valentine recalls being impressed by the enthusiasm for mass morning exercises on a school visit to China, less so by the smog. And then there was the terracotta plate . . .

I will start with an admission. I had never heard of Chongqing. My geography is quite good, I take an interest in what is happening around the world, I am sports mad but Chongqing? Never heard of it. So, when the opportunity arose in 2006 to spend a week there as part of a British Council-sponsored teacher exchange programme I was intrigued.

I assumed it was a small town in China. A quick search on Google proved me wrong. Chongqing is a sprawling municipality in south-western China with a population in 2006 of just over 30m people: it has almost four times the population of London and most people in the UK will never have heard of it.

The teacher exchange saw around 20 teachers from various parts of England come together in Barking Abbey, London for a crash course in what to expect from the experience. In no time at all we were off to China.

Upon landing in Chongqing, the first noticeable thing was the smog. It was incredible. This was 14 years before Covid but many people were wearing facemasks to protect themselves from the polluted atmosphere.

Driving to our hotel you saw how many of the locals lived: densely-packed flats with little green space, and streets crowded with people selling goods on every corner.

My colleague and I were attached to Yugao Middle School. A large red banner with our school name acted as a warm welcoming sign and we were greeted by staff and students. As a Head of Key Stage at the time, it was enough to make me feel special.

I had arrived with a clear sense of what I wanted to achieve from the project. Student Council links, some inter-department connections with our science and geography departments, and to build a lasting relationship between my school and Yugao. Many of these were achieved as our Chinese counterparts were also keen but however technology (and constraints within the Chinese system) in those days meant that forging strong email exchanges between my students and those from Yugao were wildly optimistic on my part.

Experiencing lessons at Yugao, and some primary schools we visited, was quite an incredible experience. Classes of 60 or more were commonplace. Lessons were very teacher-led. Those at the front of the class performed well, those towards the back were left behind. School days were long with staff and students sleeping at school (please do not suggest that to those in our government looking at 'catch-up' strategies). Staff and students wore uniforms. Things were predicably neat, highly disciplined, and orderly.

There was a huge sense of collegiality, particularly during the morning exercises which the whole student body engaged in enthusiastically on the school sports field. I did take that back to my school and attempted it during some outdoor assemblies with maybe less impact than I witnessed in China.

My colleague and I taught a lesson to a large group of students. Possibly



the most comical element was having to wait for what I was saying, in my Scottish accent, to be translated into English and then into Chinese for the students to understand.

That, however, was nothing compared to the problems that arrived at the end of our time at Yugao, the ceremonial exchange of gifts. We gave our hosts signed Nottingham Forest and Notts County football shirts, whereas we were presented with an enormous, and enormously heavy, terracotta plate (pictured). Lovely. But somewhat over our baggage weight allowance . . . Not wanting to seem disrespectful, I arranged for DHL to courier the plate back to Nottingham at a cost of £80 which did not go down too well with my school business manager when the invoice arrived a short time later!

Kcarrie Valentine is Director of ASCL Professional Development and was previously Head of School at Bluecoat, Wollaton, Nottingham



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