

ISSUE 57 | WINTER 2020

ASSOCIATES NEWS



ASCL
Association
of School and
College Leaders

Life lessons

Carry on learning online **p8**

Interview - ASCL President Richard Sheriff
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Inspiring stories from the
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RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

Let's take a moment to appreciate the Herculean efforts of our nation's leaders in education who are doing their best in unprecedented times, says ASCL General Secretary Geoff Barton



In the giddy days of social revolution, back in the late 18th Century, William Wordsworth wrote:

"Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive but to be young was very heaven."

He was celebrating the excitement of a world changing fast as the tectonic plates of an old society shifted to become a new and improved one.

It's worth remembering, of course, that the way we do things always changes, for better or worse.

Here we are in a period of convulsive change – a pandemic most of us didn't see coming which will leave our economy, our way of life and our sense of who we are irreversibly transformed.

The new language and customs – social distancing, self-isolation, facemasks, test-track-and-trace – have entered our vocabulary and our bloodstream.

Against that backdrop, how does it really feel to be a leader in education today?

Previous crises

I had originally intended to write a philosophical column, reflecting on how the COVID19 generation of leaders and pupils might compare themselves to those who dealt with previous crises such as the First World War in which so many bright young lives were lost.

Or, perhaps, the Second World War – during which so many children were evacuated – or even the new educational landscape of RAB Butler's Education Act of 1944.

But as I was writing, I received this message from the leader of a trust running a number of schools:

On Sunday morning, one member of staff declared a positive test result at 9am. This led to me spending five hours on this yesterday and most of today. This one case yesterday led to:

- Two members of staff self-isolating
- 21 students self-isolating
- 21 letters to parents regarding the self-isolation instruction
- 1,300+ letters to parents regarding the positive case in school and for them to not self-isolate
- Approximately 60 minutes on the phone to the DfE yesterday

The message goes on far longer. The head contacts parents of children who are vulnerable, deals with parents who are anxious about the wearing of facemasks and the parents who hate the thought of facemasks while fending off the local media to try to keep things calm.

I receive dozens of emails like this every day, accounts of great leaders doing their best in the face of unprecedented challenges.

They are weary and yet, as the best public servants always do, they plough on relentlessly.

This is an unusual period for our association. We are proud to have gained so many new members, proud to have tried to articulate their concerns in the media, proud to have tried to maintain a voice of calmness amid the swirling turmoil.

But chiefly, in truth, we are proud of them – our members on the frontline, the COVID19 generation, doing extraordinary work in extraordinary times.

- Challenges past – Associates recall their experience of managing in a crisis, p12

LOOKING TO THE ONLINE FUTURE

Associates' first video gathering could herald the shape of things to come as the pandemic reshapes how we're all meeting and working

Virtual retirement seminars, online lunches and an Associates' slot at a redesigned ASCL Annual Conference could be on the horizon as changes wrought by the Covid-19 pandemic continue to unfold.

Members of the Associates' Committee, who gathered via Microsoft Teams video conferencing for the first time in October, heard that, alongside the havoc wrought by the virus, the use of new technology was opening up ways to make ASCL's work more accessible for all.

There were now more opportunities to showcase what the committee could offer said Annette Wade, ASCL's Director of Marketing and Membership.

Plans for virtual retirement seminars could include more input around 'Bridging the gap' – coping with the transition from one's school role to the new opportunities available once the day job ceases – or setting up a business, as Associate member Peter Crowe has done.

Festival feel

The conference may well take on a more festival feel and be spread over a longer period of time, with some pre-recorded input and some live events. It would be a more inclusive event, as all members could dip in according to their interests with the potential for an Associates' slot.

Other virtual suggestions included the chance for Associates to access webinars, 'virtual' walks and lunches shared online.

It was the Associates' second remote committee meeting but the first via video, providing real faces to attach to ethereal voices. There have been two trial meetings to make sure the technology worked and the dozen or so people attending, navigated the system effectively.

Vote of thanks

Other items on the agenda include a vote of thanks for Stephen Casey, ASCL pensions guru, who has retired. The committee were unanimous in thanking him for his work, especially in guiding Associates through the maze of current

pension law. Jacques Szemalikowski is taking Stephen's place and the committee sent him their best wishes for the role.

The meeting was also joined by the current ASCL Vice President Pepe Di'Iasio from Wales High School in Sheffield, South Yorkshire. (There was a digression at this point for a discussion about the best schools in the Rotherham area, Robert Godber supporting Wath-upon-Dearne, and some input on the drinking establishment, The Bridge, also in Rotherham.)

The latest edition of *Associates News* was highly praised for its format and use of illustrations but there was a plea for more ideas for stories as the store cupboard of articles is empty and committee members were urged to contribute.

Ideas included Q&A session with the General Secretary, President and new pensions advisor.

A report by Annette on the current state of Associate membership highlighted that there were now fewer colleagues from the professional associates category as consultancy was declining.

Benevolent Fund update

In an update on the work of the Benevolent Fund, Tony Richardson reported that the anticipated upsurge in demand during the pandemic had not materialised and that cases were in line with 2019 but there was concern that there were significant numbers of requests from younger colleagues in need of support. Currently the fund distributes £60-70,000 a year.

There were some concluding observations, mostly about the different wines being drunk by members... They included a *Vino Rosso* by Paul Baker ("It was a Cabernet Sauvignon, 2018, Los Vascos, Cuvee Especial from Chile, the best New World country for wine, in my opinion," he says) and he was urged to suggest a wine for the February Associates' Meeting.

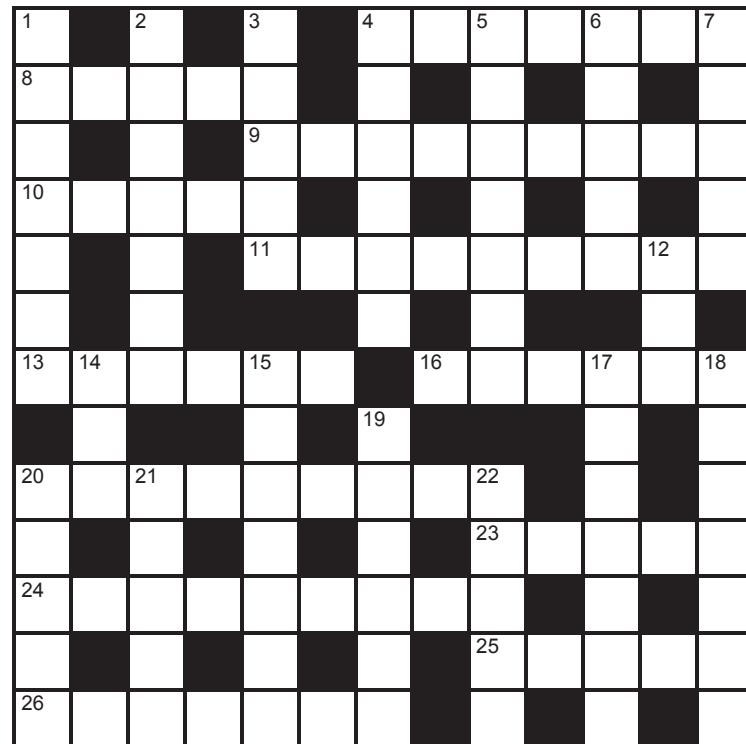
Thanks were given to Jane Belcher for her technical supervision and to Ann Mullins for chairing the meeting.

Across

- 4 Decapitates (7)
- 8 Seat (5)
- 9 Confidently aggressive (9)
- 10 Desert garden (5)
- 11 Exactness, accuracy (9)
- 13 Thin, scanty (6)
- 16 Revised before printing (6)
- 20 Spiny, ocean-dwelling creature (3,6)
- 23 South American mountain range (5)
- 24 In complete agreement (9)
- 25 In that place (5)
- 26 Line touching a curve (7)

Down

- 1 Eight-armed creature (7)
- 2 Variety of mandarin orange (7)
- 3 Clench, clutch tightly (5)
- 4 Woven shopping bag (6)
- 5 Rushed (7)
- 6 Defence plea of being elsewhere (5)
- 7 Lustre (5)
- 12 Source of metal (3)
- 14 Food in a pastry shell (3)
- 15 Conjecture (7)
- 17 Pressed down with the feet (7)
- 18 Written account (7)
- 19 Part of the neck (6)
- 20 Transfer to another track, of trains (5)
- 21 Once more (5)
- 22 Malicious (5)



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.

S	4				5	1			
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D	1				2		5	8	3
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K	5	6						3	7
U		4	9	7		6	8	1	
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				1	6				4

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

ASCL influence

ASCL has been lobbying hard over the last months to put school leaders' issues and concerns to the government, a pursuit that Director of Policy Julie McCulloch says has required swift reactions and close scrutiny of detail.

Funding for reimbursement to schools and colleges for additional expenses incurred as a result of Covid, lost, operation of the national free school meal voucher scheme and changes to the National Funding Formula for 2021/22 are just some of the funding topics that have been on the agenda. Assessment and qualifications, inspections, and raising awareness of the unmet needs of pupils identified with a special education need or disability (SEND) have also been key areas of discussion with the Department for Education.

"The Prime Minister famously equated the government's approach to dealing with Covid-19 with a game of 'Whack-A-Mole,'" says Julie. "Liaising with the government over the

last few months has felt rather like being stuck in our own, never-ending Whack-A-Mole game. We've needed not only to be poised with our mallet ready to knock back some of the government's less helpful ideas (no, school and college leaders wouldn't really welcome you publishing different re-opening models in August), but also to coax some particularly shy moles out of their holes in the first place (but they would quite like more clarity on the use of face coverings).

"We've had to determine and communicate our views on a whole range of subjects at an unprecedented speed. I'm immensely grateful to our Council members who, at a time when they'd never been busier themselves, took part in fortnightly committee meetings to help the policy team to think through many complex issues, and to ensure we were representing members' views in all our dealings with government."

In the media

ASCL leaders have also in demand for media appearances and contributions. General Secretary Geoff Barton appeared on *BBC Breakfast* in October to discuss the decision by ministers in Scotland to cancel the National 5 exams and has been heard frequently on radio as well as continuing his blog for the *TES*. See <https://www.ascl.org.uk/News/ASCL-in-the-News> for more on ASCL's media coverage.



Stay in touch!

All Associate members are urged to update their contact details and communication preferences to enable us to stay in touch and help you more efficiently.

This annual statutory membership audit is undertaken to allow us to retain our trade union status and, as it is now just over two years since the introduction of GDPR, we also need to refresh members' consent for us to communicate with them.

If you have any questions, please contact membership@ascl.org.uk or call 0116 2991122.

New online presence

The new Associates website launches this autumn with brand new content designed to both keep members up-to-date and also to promote the benefits of membership to colleagues approaching retirement.

The site will be regularly updated, and we will welcome your feedback as well as news items about activities and information you'd like to share.

Past editions of *Associates News* will also be available on the site which can be visited at www.ascl.org.uk/associates. Please send your contributions to website@ascl.org.uk.

BORED AT HOME? SWITCH ON TO LEARNING

If you're staying in at the moment or just want to expand your mind, the world of online education offers a wealth of free courses

We've all been 'confined to barracks' a little more than expected this year, to say the least, and while baking, gardening and even DIY have kept much of the nation busy, opportunities to stretch one's grey matter a little further are worth exploring. Online learning, after all, is not only for school children and university students; for some years now, some of the world's leading educational institutions have been offering courses free online to anyone with a computer and the time to learn.

The choice is limitless; there's a subject out there for you whether you want to become a better cook, photographer or jewellery-maker or if you want to trace your family tree, learn a new language or explore the ethics of the heritage sector.

OpenLearn

A good place to start looking is OpenLearn (www.open.edu/openlearn/free-courses), the Open University's (OU) online presence.

If you've undertaken OU courses in the past, you'll know their model is distance learning with people studying predominantly at home in their spare time and they

adopted the same approach for Open Learn, which offers an enormous choice of free courses over a mind-boggling range of subjects. You could, for example, get in tune with Schubert's Lieder and the Settings of Goethe's Poems, study



Art in Renaissance Venice or take The Science Behind Wheeled Sports for a spin.

FutureLearn

FutureLearn (www.futurelearn.com), meanwhile, is a website offering lots of free courses from universities around the world. You learn through recorded videos and other online elements and you can usually start at any time while the course is running.



There's been renewed interest in the natural world this year, both through concerns over climate change but also the physical and mental health benefits of getting close to nature, whether through gardening or exploring the countryside. The University of Leeds runs Ecology and Wildlife Conservation, a two-week FutureLearn course (two x two-hour sessions) focused on learning how to protect our natural environment.

Interested in fashion? Or history? You can combine both in A History of Royal Fashion, offered by the University of Glasgow and Historic Royal Palaces and examining the sartorial choices of five British royal dynasties from the Tudors to the Windsors (five weeks, four-hour sessions each week).



Udacity

Many people use their new-found time at home to brush up – or, indeed – to properly get to grips with their computer skills; a career in a classroom or office can provide you with the basics but there's always more to learn about digital technology.

Udacity (www.udacity.com) offers a range of free courses on subjects ranging from an introduction to programming and how to build a website, to cybersecurity and artificial intelligence (AI). These courses do assume a degree of basic knowledge about the online and computing worlds and they are geared towards people in the job market but the skills could be useful if you are looking to develop an online presence for a club, professional group or just out of personal interest.

Your local college

Finally, most local colleges provide online learning in the technology field. Derby University (www.adult-learning-derby.org.uk/courses/what-you-can-learn/ict-courses), for example, offers courses from entry-level computing for beginners seeking more confidence when using IT to advanced areas of digital literacy, including understanding spreadsheets – that will make you the life and soul of the party of six – PowerPoint and social networking safety.

Happy learning.



If personal development and enlightenment is more to your taste, then the Universidad of Palermo invites you to explore The Path of Happiness and Good Quality of Life (four weeks, around three hours of study per week).

Free courses tend not to include formal exams, the joy of learning being its own reward. But if you want to prove to your friends and family and yourself that you really were studying with a purpose, you can upgrade, pay a fee and then sit tests leading to a Certificate of Achievement.



Virtual U3A

Our Autumn 2019 issue featured an article on members' experiences of U3A or University of the Third Age (<https://www.u3a.org.uk/>), the self-organising body for older people keen to learn from each other and share their own knowledge and skills.

Virtual U3A (<http://www.vu3a.org>) is its digital offshoot with activities taking place online, rather than in person, but with the same ethos of groups identifying the topics they are interested in exploring and then organising the learning themselves. It is aimed at those who either don't live in large cities or would rather stay at home to seek self-improvement – and older people who are isolated for different reasons are a key target group – but all are welcome and it has members around the world.

As well as enabling you to tackle traditional academic subjects along with activities such as crafts and gardening, VirtualU3A also offers the Coffee Shop, where members 'meet' to chat via the Comments section. It is a membership body and there is a £12 annual fee

THE REGENERATION GAME

Richard Sheriff has begun his second stint as ASCL President. The Executive Headteacher at Harrogate Grammar School and CEO of the Red Kite Learning Trust talks about his theme for the year ahead and staying positive during a pandemic



Are these interesting times to be in office?

The profession has obviously gone through the mill over the last six months or so, dealing with the initial lockdown, partial re-opening, the exams debacle and the return to school which sounds simple but it's now about operating on a day-to-day basis depending on how many children or staff are being confined with the virus. We all recognise that dealing with a pandemic is difficult but the communication between the DfE and schools has been fraught at best with announcements made to the Daily Mail invariably resulting in official guidance a few days later. The consultation and debate that goes before policy implementation has not been happening and that makes life difficult.

How does this compare with the last time you were in post?

I remember sitting back in the months before my first stint thinking through what we wanted to achieve, the main policy initiatives we wanted to push with the Government, what we wanted to say with the speakers and content at the conference. Those days of 'that's what we do around here' are gone. The last six months have been very reactive and team ASCL has risen to the challenge of supporting members with a very visible presence in the press and regular in-house briefings and videos. My theme for the next year is regeneration; we have the chance to renew

the system as we have recently learned so much about what works and what doesn't. I spoke to three heads just this morning about schools in times of limited movement, for example, and we agreed that the new thinking had created calmer buildings in which children felt much safer. ASCL's Blueprint will take recent experience on board to put us more on the front foot when it comes to leadership.

How can Associates help?

Using their own experience, I believe they can have a positive influence on the wellbeing of members which has never been under such pressure. They can help highlight potential problems and needs and can provide us with a real opportunity, for example, to give the Benevolent Fund a re-birth, to bring it into line with modern charitable practice and enable us to do the best for people who have endured so much and are really struggling.

Any other positives from the pandemic?

We have to embrace the potentially revolutionary things that we didn't do before because we were so busy with the day-to-day. The use of technology, for instance. I stood in the rain during break time this morning before spending most of the rest of the day on Microsoft Teams with people from the Trust and beyond and ASCL members. We knew that sort of thing was possible ages ago but never got round to doing anything about it. While it's good for transactional work with people we know, however, we must recognise its shortfalls in terms of getting to know new people. I had a virtual meeting with new ASCL council members recently which was hard to chair as there's not the opportunity to develop real partnerships. Everybody – heads, deputies and teachers – will be having their own personal experience of this time which will shape how things will be done in the future. It can be worrying to look at the cover board each day to see how many infections have been notified across a Trust of 1,300 staff and 8,000 children. Thankfully, the number of positive cases so far has been extremely low. The joy is often hard to find but it will return. The greatest positive has been the brilliant response of staff and leaders across our schools, we can be proud of the response from our profession.

What sort of pupil were you?

I was well-behaved in the lessons I liked and a bit of a pain in the ones I didn't. I remember the day my German teacher took me aside to say she had spoken to my father at parents' evening and he'd told her in his old-fashioned Scottish way 'if he gives you any trouble, give him a clip round the ear'. She took his advice and my German went downhill even further.

SOLUTIONS

CROSSWORD

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GRACE UNDER PRESSURE

Coping with everything the current COVID crisis can throw at them, schools are resilient institutions that learn lessons – and derive confidence – from life’s setbacks. Here, two members describe how their schools rose to two very different challenges.

Late on New Year’s Eve 2001, I was told that two of our students, one in Y11 and the other in Y10, had died of meningitis within hours of each other and that there might be a third.

Two days later, area health representatives explained that to prevent a spread they needed to give antibiotics to all our 1,750 students, their parents and siblings and then vaccinate them all the following day.

Senior staff, the chair of governors and the caretakers devised a plan to prepare the site; the assembly hall became a registration area, the library and lower gym vaccination stations and a one-way system was developed so that we were ready for the influx of nursing teams.

Unbidden, many staff came into school to help in any way they could – re-assuring anxious parents, guiding them along the route, offering hot drinks, marshalling queues; on the second day they came again.



A health authority bigwig urged me to request a police presence as ‘there will be disorder

as people scramble for the vaccine’. I assured him that our people did not behave like that. Into a seated queue they came, anxious, calm, stoical, subdued – but never disorderly – afraid of a spread into their families, but steady and unemotional.

The media were all over us and, because I felt they had a legitimate interest in this story, I welcomed them into school, gave them a base (and coffee) and spelt out the limits to what they could do. All but one complied – he was removed by a deputy, a former head of PE.

Term was due to start the day after vaccinations, but the local education authority readily agreed to my suggestion that we take an extra day’s holiday for families and staff to reflect and draw breath.

We were then straight into mock examinations; the first paper was GCSE RE and when its worried head of department had realised that there was a question on bereavement, which could upset our Y11s, I said I would have a word at the start.

Almost immediately, I could read on their silent faces: ‘It’s OK, boss, we can handle this’.

I never felt prouder of our school community because, in those dark days, I saw so much that was good.

Robert Godber

We took on the council - and won

In 2015, my local state secondary school, Gwernyfed High School, found itself the subject of an attempt by Powys County Council to close it and merge it with a school in difficulties, 12 miles away.

This, the third attempt in seven years, was quickly thwarted by a campaign team applying for a judicial review. The result was that the local authority, when confronted with the evidence, realised it could not win and withdrew its closure plan.

Six months later, the local authority announced that it was bringing back the same plan and this time decided it would carry out a statutory consultation process.

It is important to say at this stage that the school itself was small at just over 350 pupils because local parents were reluctant to send their children to a school which the local authority was making repeated attempts to close.

Over the next six months a major campaign was fought, with the entire school staff determined to make sure that, whatever happened, the young people in their care would receive the best education they could provide in difficult times.

To cut a long story short, a public consultation meeting was called and more than 1,000 people turned up

with more than 800 people making written representations arguing why the school should remain open.

When the GCSE and A level results arrived, they were the best the school had ever achieved and were in the top group in Powys. The Welsh Government considered naming it a pioneer school and the local authority had no choice but to withdraw its closure plan.

What this demonstrated was not just the school’s resilience, but that of its staff, pupils, parents, the 12 communities that made up the schools’ catchment area and the 35 community organisations embedded within the school, all of whom came together and played a major part in bringing about a decision that would ensure the future of the high school.

It has since gone from strength to strength and, when confronted with major problems, has the confidence to act to solve them

knowing they have exceptional community support. This has played a significant part in enabling the school to cope with whatever COVID has brought by showing a ‘can do spirit’ to

add to the support of our communities that has been so important for pupils, staff and local residents alike.

John Fitzgerald

It demonstrated not just the school’s resilience, but that of its staff, pupils, parents, communities





A LIFE TURNED AROUND

ASCL Benevolent Fund trustee Philip Johnston shares an inspirational story highlighting how the fund continues to help those in need

My wife and I have visited Wendy Alun-Jones, for the last 11 years.

Her husband, Peter, had three headships before retirement, his last being the opening of a large, non-selective school outside Stratford-on-Avon. It was clearly a successful school which was not without cash.

Sadly, one of Wendy and Peter's grandsons is severely disabled and they took advice about how to provide both for him and themselves in retirement. Their large Victorian house in its own grounds seemed to offer scope for division into separate households. Additionally, they took what was considered to be a waterproof scheme to provide for minimal payments under Inheritance tax.

It was shortly after this that Peter fell seriously ill and, by the time I came on the scene, the pair were in a somewhat precarious financial state with Peter requiring 24-hour care in a nursing home. Tears brimming in her eyes, Wendy told me that she had even rented out the floor of her home which housed Peter's library in order to boost her income (Peter was a notable geographer in his time and author of several well-known textbooks).

Provision unravelling

Their provision for the future began to unravel, with the combination of having to pay nursing home fees and home help for their grandson and no help available from the local authority for either.

I had been taken aback when I first met her; only 70, she was frail and worn-though. She had written to ASCL HQ to seek financial help and she was travelling some distance every day to the nursing home, describing her husband as desperately ill, unable to cope with his daily food and – eventually – not recognising her.

She was clearly losing patience with the NHS and just had no one to whom to turn. Supported by her medically-qualified daughter she had a DNR (do not resuscitate) notice issued, despite which Peter was revived during an early hours' emergency.

I arranged for an initial grant to be paid by the Benevolent Fund, as well as a hamper sent – the kind of gesture that the Fund offers which can simply cheer people up and distract them for a few moments from distress

Meanwhile, the Fund's pensions officer was alerted, and he discovered that not only were there difficulties over the compilation of Wendy's pension but also that she had inadvertently run up large debts to the Department for Education which sought repayment. The Fund promptly cleared these for her.

I was recently delighted to find that the local authority had found a home where her grandson was happily housed, with no costs apparently falling on the family. It meant that Wendy's son and daughter-in-law could visit family in New Zealand last Christmas, for the first time ever.

But what struck my wife and I, on our recent visit, was the realisation that Wendy's life has been completely turned around through the help given to her over the last decade by the Fund's actions.

I had persuaded her to sell her rust-bucket BMW, which was replaced by a Honda, more suitable in the traffic near her home. She is again baking and cooking for herself, and for those she describes as "less well off than herself".

She now seems to have resurrected a position in life which she had ten years ago, visits the theatre and is a volunteer to the Guildhall and other historic sites. She is always delighted to see visitors and is fulsome in her grateful thanks to the ASCL Benevolent Fund.

Philip Johnston, then head of Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School, Blackburn, became a trustee of the ASCL Benevolent Fund in 1992 and later served as treasurer for more than a decade.

For more information on the ASCL Benevolent Fund, go to www.ascl.org.uk/About-us/Who-we-are/Social-responsibility-and-projects/ASCL-Benevolent-Fund

NINE DECADES OF SUPPORT

The ASCL Benevolent Fund has pre-Second World War origins

Pastoral visits to beneficiaries had been the hallmark of the former Headmasters' Association Benevolent Fund (HMABF) since the 1920s.

But a decision by the Charity Commission to require trustees to have been members of the former Headmasters' Association – which was itself absorbed into the former Secondary Heads' Association (SHA) in 1977 – meant the trustees themselves steadily became older as a body and less able to travel.

Alan Barnes former SHA President and chairman of HMABF for 30 years, followed by Rowland Brown, persuaded fellow trustees to continue as a separate entity until formal amalgamation with the SHA/ASCL Benevolent Fund was feasible.

By this time, HMABF had amassed considerable funds – it lent money to SHA to facilitate the move to Leicester – but the appointment of John Sutton, former General Secretary of SHA, as chair greatly assisted with the amalgamation of the two benevolent funds in 2015-2016. He undertook the not inconsiderable legal work involved with our legal advisers for the merger.

Much HMABF documentation was deposited in the Archives of the Institute of Education, London. After John Sutton's death, the trustees elected Tony Richardson, former head of Ormskirk Grammar School and then a SHA/ASCL field officer for Lancashire, as their new chair in May, 2018 with a much broader brief for a hugely increased membership of ASCL and an enormously wider need for Benevolent Fund help in a variety of ways.

And the Fund still helps – in both practical and financial ways – seven people who were beneficiaries of the original Headmasters' Association Benevolent Fund, four of whom are now in their nineties.

COME TO THE PARTY

Peter Downes retired from headship nearly 24 years ago and he's just about to retire again . . . this time after 23 years as a councillor. Here he recommends fellow former heads should also consider the 'demanding, frustrating but rewarding' life in local politics.

When I retired from the headship of a large comprehensive school, I was fortunate to be able to find quite a lot of educational work to do in the first few years – consultancy in school funding issues or modern languages teaching, NPQH training, educational publishing.

I gave most of that up after six years as I was beginning to feel that I was becoming increasingly out of touch with day-to-day developments in schools.

As it happens, I had another quite separate line of activity – becoming an elected local councillor. That was not a sudden impulse – I had been interested in politics for many years but never had the time to get much involved.

In 1976, Liberal leader Jo Grimond came to speak at a small meeting in the Cotswold village of Burford where we were living at the time and I had what might be called a 'light bulb moment'.

Centre ground

His calm, intelligent and rational exposé of the centre ground of the political spectrum won me over and I joined the Liberal party.

Once I retired, I decided to try to get more involved in local council work. The snag was that, by that time we were living in Huntingdon, John Major's constituency, where he had the largest majority in the entire country. So getting elected as a non-Conservative would not be easy. I was eventually elected as a Huntingdonshire District councillor and, in 2001, as a Cambridgeshire County councillor.

During my time in office in Cambridgeshire, the Liberal Democrats have always been the main minority party but never in power.

The best years were 2013-17 when there was 'no overall control' as people of all parties had to find ways of working together and we came to realise that there were good and well-informed individuals on all sides.

An important aspect of the work of a county councillor is the expectation that you will attend the parish council meetings in each of the villages in your county council 'division', as the constituencies are called.

Parish councillors are very committed to the wellbeing of their own community and expect the county councillor to achieve all the detailed improvements they want for their community. This is an understandable aspiration but mainly an unachievable one.

Parish councillors expect, for example, that potholes will be filled, pavements re-surfaced, streetlights repaired, bus services provided and road signs cleaned.

All these quite reasonable expectations cost money and the money comes mainly from the council tax payer especially as central government grants to local authorities have been reduced over recent years.

So, the life of a county councillor is demanding, frustrating and at times depressing but it is also quite rewarding in that there are social benefits and improvements you can actually help to bring about.

The work of the last 20 years has given me a much wider experience of the difficulties that many people face in their lives. Now I realise more clearly how fortunate I have been; most people do not have the advantages and opportunities I have had.



Social inequality

Mostly, this is through no fault of their own. The social inequality in this country is a disgrace and improving opportunities for all, 'levelling up' if you like, ought to be a priority for all political parties.

So, for those readers who have just retired, I recommend that you consider local political involvement if you have not already done so. School leadership is a good preparation for the role.

As a head or deputy, you will have learned how to communicate clearly and concisely with people from a wide range of backgrounds; you will be used to 'multi-tasking'; you will have learned to balance policies and human needs; you will have grappled with budgets; you will have learned how to get people to think of serving the wider community; you will be patient and calm under pressure.

This experience could be put to good use for the wider community and, as a councillor you would probably find that you learn a lot, keep the mind active and gain a deeper understanding of the challenges facing our society.

Peter Downes was Head of Henry Box School, Witney, Oxfordshire and later Hinchingsbrooke School, Huntingdon in Cambridgeshire

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.)

GOOD HOUSEKEEPING?

A chance discovery gave modern man Tony Richardson an intriguing insight into what constituted the trophy wife of half a century ago

The restrictions on our normal lives occasioned by the coronavirus pandemic seem to have resulted in some odd housebound activities.

It has long been a source of annoyance to me that my bookcases have narrow shelves at floor level which means that it is not possible to see what is down there without some uncomfortable bending or grovelling.

An exploration of the secrets became the task for an afternoon.

As I pulled out books from the lower recess, a piece of paper fluttered across the floor. It read "To Rebecca, with best wishes for Christmas and the Coming Years! Love Auntie Edna, Christmas 1964."

Intriguingly, it added "...hoping this little book will prove useful when you get married!" Twenty-year-old-Rebecca and I were, indeed, to be married the following year.

What would this little book turn out to be? My first thoughts ran along the lines of advice about contraception or 'marital relations' as I think it was called at that time. No such thing – it was *The Good Housewife's Encyclopaedia*.

More than half the book is devoted to decorating and household repairs and the scope and complexity of some of the suggested jobs to be undertaken seemed to me quite astounding.

The chapter on home maintenance and repair – patronisingly titled *How to Hit the Nail on the Head* – starts by saying that it is helpful for the housewife to have her own work bench. However, it is not the end of the world if she hasn't got one, because it gives detailed instructions for her to make her own.

This good housewife appears to be happy to take on an ambitious range of maintenance tasks including, but not restricted to, adapting and mending doors, plastering, plumbing, glazing, pointing, rendering and so on. There are



instructions in how to lift flagstones with a crowbar, "using a small hardwood block to give the necessary leverage".

Nothing was beyond the reach of the good housewife, clearly.

Condescension and hubris

In the front of the book there is reference to a companion volume entitled *The Good Handyman's Encyclopaedia*. Goodness knows what he gets up to.

The good housewife is not averse to climbing on to the roof to effect necessary repairs and improvements and she is rather sternly advised that, before starting, she needs to understand something of the construction of a roof.

In a curious mixture of condescension and hubris, she is advised that before attempting any repairs she should first check that she has a ladder long enough to reach the roof. She is then given instructions as to how to make her own roof ladder "on which to stand while carrying out repairs."

The second half of the book covers cooking, entertaining (including a wedding buffet for 30), housekeeping, first aid and nursing, gardens and plants.

There is, however, no mention of marital relations or of going out to work.

TIME OF MY LIFE

Maureen Cruickshank remembers working with Estelle Morris, who went on to become Secretary of State for Education, when both were teachers in the 1970s

I first knew Estelle Morris when she and I were colleagues at Sidney Stringer School and Community College in Coventry in the early 1970s. I was head of house and taught humanities. Estelle joined in 1974 and was also in the humanities department as well as teaching PE, going on to become head of the sixth form.

When Estelle left in 1992, it was to follow her father and uncle into politics as MP for Birmingham Yardley and she rose to become a minister in the Labour government under Tony Blair.

Our paths crossed again in the early 2000s. I had left Coventry for Leicestershire to be vice-principal of Shepshed Upper School and then principal at Beauchamp College in 1981.

I met Estelle when she was presenting the first Teacher Awards at Alexandra Palace in 2001 where one of our staff won Best New Teacher. After being Minister of State for School Standards she had been promoted to Secretary of State for Education and Skills, succeeding David Blunkett.

I chatted to her on the night and it was the obvious thing to invite her to Beauchamp to open our new admin block, which is when the picture was taken.

Her stint as Secretary of State was short-lived. She resigned suddenly in October 2002, though she did return to government the following year as Minister for the Arts. She stepped down as an MP at the 2005 election and she joined the House of Lords as Baroness Morris of Yardley the same year. She retains an involvement in education through university and charity posts.

As a colleague Estelle was dedicated and delightful, qualities which, as well as her teaching experience, made her a popular minister with teachers. It was a sad day for education when she resigned.





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