

Redesigning Schooling

A vision for education – beyond five-year policy cycles

Vision 2040

April 2015

**REDESIGNING
SCHOOLING**
THE CAMPAIGN FOR A SCHOOLS-LED
VISION FOR EDUCATION



About the Vision 2040 group

The Vision 2040 group was formed in 2013 at the start of SSAT's Redesigning Schooling campaign. The volunteers, a group of school teachers and leaders, came from a broad range of schools nationally. What united them was their desire to work together to promote an evidence-based, innovative and reforming approach to education. The initial remit defined by the group was to inform the Redesigning Schooling agenda through school-based action research projects within and across their schools. It was quickly realised, however, that a bigger issue was at stake – the system-wide barriers to a profession-led vision needed tackling head on. And so, in the summer of 2014, the group redefined their remit and the idea for this pamphlet was born. Read about the authors overleaf.

About the pamphlet

This ambitious pamphlet envisages the fulfilment of a new paradigm for education: a system based on high equity, high quality, and the concept of agency, by which learners, teachers and leaders are empowered to act to achieve their aims. The Vision 2040 group set about the task of envisaging what they hoped education would look like in 2040, and worked back from that point.

The story follows 25 years in the professional life of a newly qualified teacher in 2015, tracking the key events and milestones that, by 2040, have revolutionised the education system as we know it now. This creative venture enabled the authors to rise above the inherent short-termism of the policy cycle that so often stifles long-term strategic thinking and the profession's ability to agree on a shared purpose for education.

The pamphlet's mission is to invite you to do the same. It is being made freely available to all in the profession or with an interest in education. The Vision 2040 group and SSAT implore you to read it, talk about it, challenge it, or write your own vision for 2040. But most importantly, we ask that you share it, with your colleagues, your students' parents, your governors, and the employers and other stakeholders you work with.

Please share the pamphlet and your thoughts using **#Vis2040**.

If you'd prefer to share your thoughts by email, you can do so at redesigningschooling@ssatuk.co.uk. SSAT will collate and share the discussions generated.

Editors

Peter Chambers and Jane Birbeck

SSAT's purpose

SSAT believes that teachers make students' lives. As the world gets more complex, that vital role becomes ever more demanding. As the hub of the largest, longest-standing network of education professionals in England, SSAT exists to help teachers perform their job even better, more confidently and more professionally than before.

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Contents



Preface 1

Foreword 4

Introduction 6

The metanarrative of educational change (2010-2040):

- Characteristics of the vision: equity, quality and agency** 9
- Professionalism and professional cultures** 18
- Learning: pedagogy, curriculum and assessment** 32
- Governance, systems and structures** 47

Conclusion 56

References 59

Preface



Members of the Vision 2040 group determined to co-author a pamphlet for release just before the 2015 general election. Our intention was to send a clear message that, regardless of the outcomes of the election, providing a world-class education for all our children requires a long-term consistent vision and sense of purpose. This is not simply a laudable aim. Given the timescale chosen and the willingness of many people to work together, it is an achievable goal. Education is an issue that must transcend the whims of political parties and the narrow parameters of five-year election cycles.

The pamphlet has been written as a historical narrative looking back from 2040 at the changing decades of educational reform between 2010 and 2040. Our storyteller, who was a newly qualified teacher in 2015, looks back at this changing landscape as s/he has experienced it as classroom teacher, subject leader, school leader and eventually system leader, leading across a family of schools. Our narrator has an interesting and rich story to tell, with many implications for those of us still stuck in 2015.

Predicting the future of education over the next 25 years is a daunting task. Probably the only thing we can be confident about is many of the specifics of what we write may not happen. Our purpose, in writing, is not to predict the future but to engage readers in: thinking about the journey ahead, taking the best of what we do forward, while abandoning those things which hold us back; discussing and debating key ideas; and influencing the next generation of education policies. In time, we believe these policies can be generated by a self-improving school led system, rather than being done to us by politicians.

There are concrete steps that need to be taken to ensure congruence between the culture that we believe should exist within the education system, and the construct of the system itself.

Below is our starter for 10:

1. Develop a national conversation to determine the core principles that a future education system should be built on and that would govern future policy development and implementation.
2. Agree the outcomes expected of the education system, with associated valid and reliable metrics which all schools aspire to and can attain. Do not limit or recognise success artificially.
3. Reconsider all current curriculum, assessment and wider policy changes to determine which should be abandoned, which could be delayed and which should continue to be addressed. Reduce unnecessary teacher workload.
4. Over the next decade, move with strategic intent towards a system of geographical families of schools. Have one simple governance structure across the newly established middle tier and the same 'freedoms' for all schools.

5. Establish a Royal College of Teaching with a timeline and the resource to establish regional Royal College of Teaching research universities by 2020.
6. By 2020, these regional universities should offer Research and Leadership Masters' degrees to teachers, and by 2025 they should take responsibility for the Masters'-level training of all new entrants to the profession. Phase out other national qualifications and routes into teaching.
7. Move the design of curriculum, assessment and pedagogy to professional teachers, working together within and across their geographical families of schools. Support the work being undertaken by the Headteachers' Roundtable National Baccalaureate Trust.
8. Use the 2015/16 academic year to trial and finalise the new short inspection process. From September 2016, all schools to receive a narrative report, without grades, to assist school improvement and increase overall effectiveness.
9. Sponsor pilot programmes of externally validated peer-to-peer quality assurance with the resultant high-quality programmes made available, free of charge, to all schools for amendment and adoption within their current contexts.
10. Rationalise the current governance, accountability and commissioning middle tier system and roles, removing unnecessary overlap and bureaucracy.

These steps will require wholehearted commitment and collaborative action involving teachers, school and system leaders, and all elements of the administrative and political structures in this country. Whether you agree or disagree with all or aspects of our narrative, we hope you will engage with it.

Foreword



How does that old joke go?

‘Sir, can you tell me the way to the city centre?’

‘Well, if I was you, I wouldn’t start from here!’

Obviously, we are where we are. We have an educational system that has many strengths with scattered pockets of excellence, driven by a workforce rich with talented, committed individuals. And yet, we’re frustrated. There’s a strong sense that our education system could be so much better than it is. Too many young people are short-changed; the inequity in the system is vast and, given the resources at our disposal, most people would recognise that where we are is not where we should be. But we are where we are. The first question is – where do we want to get to?

The Vision 2040 concept was dreamt up by the inspirational SSAT CEO Sue Williamson as part of the Redesigning Schooling initiative. She argued that we spend too long thinking about the next few years, trapped in the political cycle, weighed down by the inertia of system change fuelled by the inhibiting force of accountability

pressure. Our short-termism prevents us from conceiving of a system that might represent genuine transformation and, therefore, from thinking of mechanisms that might lead to turning the vision into a reality.

This pamphlet expresses a bold, innovative attempt to reimagine our system and to tell the story of how that transformation could be achieved – through the voice of an imagined teacher who had entered the profession in 2015, but is looking back on their time in education from the not-so-distant future of 2040. Yet the narrative is deliberately not ‘pie in the sky’, even though it is from a viewpoint 25 years in the future. We’re not talking about ripping schools down in some futuristic landscape where teachers are replaced by machines and we’re all communicating via chip implants. It’s a vision rooted in the reality of where we are and what we know now. It is pragmatic, grounded, philosophically sound and, crucially, it is absolutely achievable.

I commend Stephen Tierney and the Vision 2040 team for their work on this publication. The vision is exciting – a system based on high equity, high quality and the concept of agency: learners, teachers and leaders empowered to act to achieve their aims. The power in the document is that it shows how the system could change over time to lead us to the vision. This is a call to arms! I hope that everyone who reads it will see it as such and act accordingly.

Tom Sherrington
Headteacher, Highbury Grove School
& first Chair of the Vision 2040 Group

Introduction



'My hands were clammy. My heart was threatening to burst from my chest with excitement mingled with no little terror. It was my first lesson. If I could unstick my dry mouth, I might be able to start. The first words come out of my mouth. It's the first of September 2015 and my teaching journey has begun.'

For most teachers it is the first of thousands of such lessons, but none will feel quite like this first one. Capture that excitement and the sense of infinite possibility; the hope for success, alongside your initial fears. The best teachers never lose it and they never lose the passion and urge for changing something for better in the world: one class at a time, one lesson at a time.

If your first lesson is fresh in the memory you have some time to go. We all have 25 years until (hopefully) we reach 2040. Nearly three decades feels like an educational eternity; however, consider that a teacher starting now, aged a fresh and green-gilled 22, will teach for a full 40 years if they are to reach the full length of their working lives (in current terms).

It is the newly minted teachers beginning today that will ultimately make any vision for 2040 a reality. This pamphlet is very much for experienced teachers and leaders of today, but, crucially, it is for the teachers and school leaders of tomorrow, who will live and teach through the distant-seeming future of 2040.

Here we speak to those new teachers.

It is hard to look beyond the first lesson, the first week, year and so on. Setting a vision for decades hence appears fanciful. It may appear something beyond your capacity to even imagine. School chains, technology, or students chained to technology... it can descend into visions of jetpacks and the Jetsons. Even the most experienced of teachers would understandably struggle with such a task of imagining.

If you are a newly qualified teacher, just embarking upon a career in the classroom, the purpose of education can be quickly subsumed by the difficulties of our daily practice. It is easy, indeed practical, to be mired in the problems and plans of today. Tomorrow is more important than 2040.

Our hopes and passions can be quickly squeezed by our workload pressures. Disappointment can attend even our best-laid plans. We can too easily lose our sense of power to change anything; we can quickly lose faith in our leaders and be spun to distraction by political strategies.

It is right to attend to the here and now, to be practical and manage the stresses, daily successes and inevitable failures. But it is also important to retain our initial urge, our passion and hopes so that they may sustain and guide us.

From your first lessons to 2040 you will no doubt gain much in experience and know-how. There will be thousands of lessons for you and your students. By 2040 you will in all likelihood be one of the leaders of a generation of schools, either by being a great teacher and leader in your classroom, or by becoming a school leader, helping steer the strategic direction of your school. We need therefore to imagine an education system in which we take a lead and become part of making that vision a reality in the years ahead.

Having a vision for education for 2040, the *raison d'être* of our group, is about making that urge and passion tangible and real. Though it is far away in time, setting a vision for a better education system, with attendant steps to get there, is important – now – for us all. The rest of this pamphlet will be told through the voice of one such teacher who had entered the profession in 2015, but who is looking back upon their time in education from the not-so-distant future of 2040. It is about attempting to make a vision tangible and a better path intelligible.

Creating a vision for a great education system for our future, toward 2040 – before and beyond – can give us a sticking point to hold our courage to. It can prove a valuable guide for the days and years ahead. By mapping out our imagined educational future, we hope that this pamphlet can prove such a guide.

The metanarrative of educational change (2010-2040)

Characteristics of the vision: equity, quality and agency



It is interesting to reflect on my 25 years spent in schools.

I joined the profession in the **Decade of Deregulation**, which culminated in the near meltdown of education as we approached the 2020 general election. Starting out in September 2015, being a rather excited and nervous newly qualified teacher in a challenging school, meant the days were hard and long. I never minded the hours worked, but with hindsight it would be easy to be angry at the blitz of cuts and the lack of coherence within the school system. This haphazard change was created by constant government interference, initiatives and diktats, allied with the punitive Ofsted inspection regime that created a culture of fear and mistrust.

While accountability was high, the lack of autonomy felt by many teachers and school leaders led to a lack of any sense of agency [action or intervention so as to produce a particular result – *Concise Oxford Dictionary*]. My headteacher felt powerless, despite cutting away at every corner of the school to survive the unending push for austerity. I tended to avoid the staffroom and its negativity in those early days.

I still remember the morning when the head called us in for staff briefing to explain that the recent inspection couldn't have gone worse: *'We are in special measures.'* He wished us well and thanked us for all our hard work and commitment. His desk was empty at the end of the day. The following few years of being sponsored were a blur: lots of 'improvement' activity but with limited impact on the children's outcomes.

In essence, we had two challenges: a norm-referenced examination system that actually maintained so-called *pass rates*, irrespective of whether the overall standards in schools were improving or in decline, alongside relative isolation when seeking to support some of the most disadvantaged children in our area. I committed my efforts to the classroom and the children, and did my best even when health, home or family problems contrived to undo much of my work.

Despite the coalition government's welcome commitment to pupil premium funding for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, the long tail of underachievement continued to blight the education system. The number of young people classified as not in education, employment or training (NEETs), and the underachievement of children entitled to pupil premium funding, created a low-equity system. One in which even the most committed teachers struggled.

At the start of the decade, the analysis by OECD's Andreas Schleicher of international data showed that what set apart the high-performing school systems internationally was *'their capacity to deploy resources where they can make a difference. Your effect as a teacher is a lot bigger for a student who doesn't have a privileged background than for a student who has lots of educational resource.'* High equity – equal access to great schooling and outcomes for all our young people, regardless of their

levels of disadvantage or other social factors – was a long, long way off.

There were other government interventions that, while admirable in principle, ended up creating more problems than they solved. Education, health & care plans were a great idea but the bureaucracy and funding in those austere times meant only the parents who could shout the loudest and understood how to work the system ever got anywhere. As ever, the poor lost out. This state of affairs whittled away at me and I can recall far too many of my colleagues leaving education feeling it was a lost cause.

Looking back, what is most surprising, even alarming, during this decade was the lack of an overarching and unifying vision, purpose or agreed outcome for education in England. We needed more than ever a compelling metanarrative that was rich with values; an engaging and ultimately aligning story, to unite and focus our work. The speedy demise of maintained schools, allied with the seemingly overnight formation of single academies, multi-academy trusts, federations, teaching school alliances and free schools, created a near chaotic structural situation. Schools and school leaders scrambled simply to survive the cuts and the swift changes.

The formation of some multi-academy trusts, which sponsored so-called failing schools, and the rise of ‘outstanding’ teaching schools following an Ofsted inspection (which we now know, as we did then, lacked validity or reliability) seems inconceivable to the many new teachers I have helped induct over the past decade. At that time trust within the profession and beyond it always seemed perilously low; and competition led to limited reciprocity between local schools. As ever there were bright lights among the schools, their leaders and teachers, but this happened in spite of the system – not because of it.

Sometimes I found it was easier to share ideas and resources with teachers in a different part of the country, or half way across the world, through social media, than the school down the road or the teacher across the corridor. We were in a right mess.

The failure of successive governments to plan enough primary school places during the first part of the decade was predictably followed by a lack of secondary school places being available 5-10 years later. The retirement of the baby boomer generation, partly due to demographics and shadowy amendments to teachers' pensions, was exacerbated by a pernicious accountability culture and excessive workload, from ill-thought-through changes to the examination system and the like. It created a recruitment and retention crisis. The 2020 election proved a watershed for the relationship between government and the profession, with irate parents demanding change. It was not an easy time for anyone.

Just before the 2020 general election we lost our sponsor. It was explained to me at the time that there was an issue with a 'connected party transaction'. I never did get to grips with the confusing jargon that masked outright financial mismanagement. It was one of many financial revelations to hit the news and the now infamous headline 'Schools & taxpayers robbed in broad daylight', with the then beleaguered education secretary shown in a Dick Turpin costume.

We had reached rock bottom. It's always darkest before the dawn.

The September after the 2020 general election saw me take up my new job as a subject leader. The Royal Commission on Education set a new tone and the **Decade of Reconstruction** (building social capital) had started. Much of the work of the commission passed me by, if I'm honest, but through my later Masters' degree I studied it in more detail.

The work of the Royal Commission started with a political decision to impose a moratorium on change and the suspension of all inspections. Her Majesty's Inspectors were assigned to the commission and led on a number of important work strands. The long, slow, almost painful work of the commission took nearly three years to come to a conclusion, with a further 12 months to write its report. The report was long and detailed, but some of the highlights are below. There was a bit of a shock in the early pages as the report stated: 'many of our recommendations are rooted in the reforms of the last decade.' On closer reading of the report, the best of the 2010s had been kept while the excesses, inefficiencies and idiosyncrasies so reminiscent of the truculent teenage years had been left behind.

The 2020 Royal Commission on Education

Core values for the education system of **equity, quality and agency** were established and a wide set of metrics covering the three strands of educational outcomes, personal outcomes and social outcomes for children were agreed to evaluate the effectiveness of schools. School judgements stepped back from the perils of cliff-face accountability.

This had an immediate impact on the curriculum offered by schools and what we considered success to be. It was a hugely liberating time for the profession as the three interconnected strands were developed with different assessment models – national and local as appropriate – developed to assess the three strands.

The recommendation to remove hundreds of powers from the secretary of state for education was fully implemented by the incoming government and a decentralised, regional model was built to coordinate and share best practice across the middle tier. Long-promised school freedoms at last looked more like, well, freedoms.

Ofsted was thanked for its work and quietly retired. HMI, released from their work on behalf of the Royal Commission, were now focused on working with the establishing middle tier to: embed the newly agreed educational outcomes in schools, advise on developing high-quality self and peer evaluation & review, and ensure quality at source. HMI, in a blast from the past, weren't slow at prompting families of schools into action if things needed improving. However, in the new relationship, HMI's authority came from their ability to influence not their power to make judgements. HMI carried wisdom not fear through the education system.

This wasn't the only change for HMI who, while retaining their rather antiquated and inappropriate title, were charged with re-energising the Royal College of Teaching and working out of it. In reality, they formed regional teams but were at the heart of co-ordinating national proposals, delivered locally, for one high-quality route into teaching and a professional development curriculum for teachers.

The system of teacher training quickly began to cohere and the prestige of the profession was transformed with a speed that I hardly anticipated. The early years of the teacher's curriculum was focused on subject expertise and pedagogy, leading to a Masters' qualification. I missed out on this but instead embarked on one of the second Masters available to teachers, after five years in the profession, which focused on becoming a researcher in the classroom. Teaching went from being a no Masters to a two Masters profession overnight. With teacher effectiveness increasingly assured through selection, initial education and effective ongoing professional development, the focus now shifted to school effectiveness.

Teaching was becoming a job that you would even recommend to your own children.

The decade was one of massive change at a personal and professional level. I now had a family which I could give time to while still working hard and effectively. The workload issues started to ease, as changes were only implemented if they would:

- have a real and telling impact and
- replace something else or start only once previous initiatives were embedded.

Bad ideas still snaked through into schools, but now we voiced our displeasure with a collective sureness.

My accelerated promotion, through to being a senior leader and then headteacher, was partly due to the opportunities created by the retiring baby boomers, but I hope I also had some aptitude for my new roles. As a school leader, I work in the cluster's leadership team with the other headteachers and the system leader. Work previously undertaken by the hundreds of designated teaching schools in terms of school-to-school support, provision of professional development, initial teacher education and succession planning is now undertaken by each family of schools. This work is no longer by designation but is distributed across all clusters and is in part responsible for increasing the overall quality of the education system.

My focus was fully on the people in the school, children and adults. Business functions – finance, premises, health & safety – are shared, led across our cluster by professionals in these key areas. As a strong and effective family of schools, we are also connected in a series of more transitory alliances and relationships that add to our work and that of our partners, but do give value. There is greater reciprocity than ever before as the new assessment systems challenge us to help all children achieve the expectations, standards

and benchmarks set. Success is no longer rationed, but is instead available to all who can attain it.

The thirties have been the **Decade of System Maturity**. Collective moral purpose, high professional capital and self and peer evaluation and challenge have begun to take root across the education system.

After five years of school leadership, I was promoted to system leader of the family of schools that included the school I had started my career in almost 20 years before. What struck me was the sheer professionalism and quality of the people working in these schools. The new role was very different and I connected much more with the local health and social services. The education, health & care plans that got off to such an indifferent start are now beginning to have a real impact.

The fundamental change in thinking following the 2020 Royal Commission had seen a move from providing support to children designated as having special needs to providing support at the point of need for all children who were not making progress in school. The support was partly enabled by more generous funding of public services following nearly two decades of austerity and restraint. This ensured that children from disadvantaged backgrounds were afforded the same life chances as their more affluent peers and were no longer the sole responsibility of schools. It had become a shared responsibility for a number of important agencies which affected a child's life. We were becoming a more equitable society as well as a more equitable school system.

Schools were now afforded the freedom to be great. I never forgot these words from our outgoing system leader: 'Trust is difficult to gain and can be lost in a moment. It requires integrity – I back up

what I say through my actions – and reciprocity – the give and take that occurs in all long-term enriching relationships.’ These words were not grand-standing, they were rooted in honest action.

I came to understand that high trust is an integral part of a network of relationships within the education system: students, teachers, other staff working in schools, colleges and universities, parents, unions and through local and national government, indeed, the whole of society.

Equity, quality and agency are interdependent, mutually supportive values which produced a positive spiral of improvement. They form the key values on which our education system has been built and they permeate the life of our schools. These values guided our direction of travel towards 2040. They are the touchstones of policymaking at a system and school level.

The journey required some abandonment as well as discernment. The latter allowed us to separate the wheat from the chaff of education ideas, the non-negotiable from personal choice, the profound from the irrelevant. Teachers these days wouldn’t know a silver bullet if it was given to them nor thank you for it, they are far too research-savvy and knowledgeable. There were and are no quick fixes.

Professionalism and professional cultures



The Decade of Deregulation (2010 – 2020) was a fraught one and it would be easy to imagine that teachers, support staff and governors were anything but professional, if you paid too much attention to some politicians or elements of the media. Accusations of being the ‘enemies of promise’ or part of the ‘blob’ did little to help the prevailing relationships between teachers, schools and politicians.

The unequal freedoms available to different types of schools; the use of unqualified teachers; and the lauding by politicians of certain schools or their leaders, who later became embroiled in various scandals, did little to speak to children, parents or the wider society of our great professionalism.

Schools and teachers were told that they had autonomy, but I’m not sure that the government’s definition and mine were quite the same. The increased freedoms supposedly granted to schools seemed to be stifled by increasingly rigid surveillance and the use of performance measures to control behaviours. The retrospective introduction of the EBacc, performance-related pay being forced on

teachers and schools, and the pervasive inspection process left too many teachers, leaders and schools looking over their shoulders rather than at the children in front of them.

These changes, under the guise of 'freedom', only allowed school leaders the freedom to cut away at budgets and whittle their teaching staff down to the lowest cost possible. Even where a school did exploit its freedoms, these freedoms weren't passed on to teachers in the classroom. Each policy, audit, and new 'corrective practice', wore many colleagues down. Accountability trumped autonomy and there was no real sense of agency.

Despite all, and still enjoying the relief of getting on and simply teaching, I plodded ever onwards. Too many teachers simply got out.

A seed sown by the Cameron administration, although it is now seen as the legacy of Sir Michael Wilshaw, was the contraction of Ofsted, at least in terms of size if not jurisdiction. In many ways this can be seen as an accidental by-product of austerity, with happier unintended consequences than other cuts at that time.

Whether unintended, accidental or otherwise, though, it is now clear that the decision to end contracts with Serco and others for the external training and designation of registered inspectors in 2015 was vital in the move to more authentic, and useful, accountability of Ofsted and consequent reliance on school leaders to shoulder the accountability burden can be seen as the moment when the profession took control of its own regulation. Accountability ceased to be a dirty word. The old certainties about top-down accountability went out of the window.

The new short Ofsted inspection was introduced and school leaders were increasingly involved in inspections. With the benefit of hindsight, this was quite a momentous change, though as with many things in this decade potentially powerful insights into how it could have changed the system for the better were often missed. As early as 2012, Christine Gilbert had proposed that ‘in a self-improving system, schools themselves become accountable for challenging each other and ensuring that all schools have the school-to-school support that they need to improve.’ It would be more than a decade before these prophetic words were realised in a systemic manner across all schools.

Incidentally, my headteacher had met with Ofsted’s head of reform and talked about the benefits of validated peer review. The idea was that one school scrutinised another’s self-review and evaluation processes to offer additional insights, challenge and support. The process would be overseen and validated by a third party to ensure there was sufficient rigour and the relationship was not too cosy. Ofsted’s view had become, ‘you can do that yourselves, you don’t need us, get on with it’. There was an element of truth in what was said but it was an opportunity missed to produce a system-wide change in the intelligence of the accountability system. Yet, a first step had been taken with the short inspections, and it is ironic what evolved in the years ahead.

Changes in qualifications, their assessment, accountability measures, and the disastrous Ofqual interventions with grade boundaries at the beginning of the decade rendered league tables nonsensical and shattered any sense of validity or reliability. In the later part of the decade, education was damaged by the ill-thought-through curriculum changes. These changes came quick and fast, and though they had laudable elements, they proved incoherent.

Children were examined on new curriculum or examination content without having fully experienced or been taught the prerequisite knowledge. The accusations flew about whose fault it was and the political recriminations were at times bitter. I retreated to my classroom and continued to do the best I could for my children. Some of the changes helped me improve my teaching, but too little was transformed for the better. Opportunities were lost as politicians ceaselessly sought their name on the trophy of each new curriculum and qualification shift.

Royal Commission

The Royal Commission of 2020 saw the most radical changes in teachers' professionalism. Their already high standing among parents moved to a new level, in the various polls reported by the media. For the first time in my career I didn't tell a little white lie about what I did when out socialising. I was happy to publicly declare I was a teacher and proud of it.

At the core of the commission's work was the development of a greater sense of agency within the profession. The arguments at the time seemed largely academic, but were in fact fundamental to the establishment of what it meant to be a teacher. The debate started the process of defining our professionalism.

The term agency, and its constituent parts of autonomy and responsibility, proved rather slippery to define. While the debate started with the Royal Commission, their acceptance that the terms were in fact dynamic and would evolve over time led to the Royal College of Teaching continually refining and redefining what it means to be professional. The resulting journey towards authentic professionalism is what has kept me in the profession; as a leader I continued to evolve.

The commission fundamentally changed the landscape by:

- determining that there would be only one high-quality route into teaching in schools
- making the secretary of state accountable for the supply of teachers across England
- commissioning HMI to develop a mandatory Masters' level curriculum for teachers in their first five years of teaching
- working in partnership with the Royal College of Teaching to develop a regional structure through which the mandatory Masters' level curriculum and two optional Masters, one focused on the teacher as a researcher and the other on teacher leaders, would be delivered.

It's difficult for us to imagine, these days, the risk the Royal Commission took in insisting on its one high-quality route. The economy was on the up, and some powerful teacher recruitment charities and teaching school alliances presented forceful arguments as to why the status quo was preferable. While there was obviously a level of self-interest in such pleading, there had also been a lot of good work done and able people brought into the profession.

The commission calmly held its ground, commending both the charities and teaching schools for the work done, but insisting that, while this was good, we needed better. The commission was really serious about abandonment before adding anything new and bringing greater coherence to the whole system. Quality and equity weren't just buzzwords – they had become the route for the way forward.

The commission was gaining support in staffrooms and its decision to put a moratorium on change and stop inspections helped to stabilise the profession and to staunch the haemorrhaging numbers leaving the profession in their first few years. The change in demographic, with the bulge of students having now worked their way through the secondary system, alleviated the need for an ever increasing number of teachers. The College of Teaching had been given valuable breathing space. It used it well.

The mandatory Masters for new entrants to the profession was part of the five-year initial teacher education programme that combined enhanced subject knowledge, including mathematics, reading and writing for all primary school teachers, alongside their own specialist subject, with theory and considerable practice on behaviour management, pedagogy and meeting additional needs. The latter element could be taken as an extra module for those who wanted to work with children with long-term complex needs. The core element to meeting additional needs for all teachers focused on differentiation in the classroom – ensuring all children who were falling behind in their studies, or in danger of it, were supported and put back on track as soon as possible.

The ‘closing the gap’ mantra of 2010 became ‘don’t allow the gap to appear’ in the 2020s.

Initially, the academic qualification required to enter the profession was set at a first or second class honours degree. Just prior to the end of the decade, the Royal College of Teaching gave three years’ notice that from 2030 only graduates with a first or upper second degree would be admitted onto teaching courses. The recruitment process was extended to include a number of assessment days where candidates’ reasons for wanting to enter the profession,

their personal and social skills and sense of moral purpose were scrutinised and judgements made about suitability. Invariably candidates needed at least voluntary experience of working in school to be accepted on the course.

Greater prestige attended the teaching profession and the regional Royal College of Teaching research universities found it much easier to recruit candidates with great potential. With fewer people leaving the profession, the competition to get into it increased. We started entering a period of stability in the classroom for children as the churn of teachers experienced in the previous decade disappeared. The new secretary of state was able, for the first time, to express her satisfaction at replacing every teacher retiring or leaving the profession with a high-quality entrant, including in subjects in which previously there had been a shortage.

Politicians realised the profound truth on which the quality of an education system was founded: the quality of its teachers; the system's ability to connect them together; and the effectiveness of its leaders.

A positive spiral ensued, whereby teacher agency, set as a core value by the commission, was central to the professionalism of teachers, who were now in control of the core business of learning in schools. Teachers were given the freedom to create a world-class provision in their own setting and support other teachers to do the same.

Subtle changes also started to appear across families of schools, with school-to-school support and professional development opportunities increasing, and augmented by wider regional alliances.

Professional learning cultures were created and enhanced by school leadership, linked to the ethos of a school community and the core values of those at the heart of the school improvement process; schools embraced learning in all its forms and created opportunities for staff to collaborate and learn. Professional learning became integral to the work of many more schools.

As the profession became increasingly more competent and capable, so the level of autonomy expected by schools and teachers increased. Accountability (now termed professional responsibility) became a self and peer endeavour, with teacher effectiveness seen as the responsibility of all teachers and all schools within the system. This started to redefine our relationship with parents. They no longer saw or positioned themselves as consumers within a system in which schools were expected to compete to attract the most or the best or the brightest. The increasing high quality and equity across the system helped reduce the need for high stakes external accountability processes.

My early years in the profession had been plagued by ‘Ofsted want it or say we have to’ discussions, though they weren’t really discussions – more directives. It was a moot point whether Ofsted did or didn’t want these things, whether school leaders had lost their way, or why the inevitable variability in the quality of inspections had seen teachers everywhere lose faith in the whole system. The discussion changed to ‘our children need this’, and it was a welcome change.

In light of the new metrics and the relative absence of Ofsted, school leaders needed support in developing their self-evaluation systems. Through collaborative working, the expertise and support of governors, school-to-school improvement partners and HMI, rigour and challenge was brought to the work of quality assuring

what happened in every school, in every classroom and for every child. The focus was on the agreed outcomes of an effective school.

This was an accountability system led by the profession, supportive of the profession, and focused on the outcomes of a child's education – academic, personal and social. Did we ever really name, shame and grade schools?

It was during the Decade of System Maturity, in the 2030s, that much of the Royal Commission's earlier work came to fruition. It was embedded across the profession, in all schools and deepened in nature. The culture of professional learning linked directly to the consideration of goals and values. What students needed to learn, experiences relevant to learning, and how we could respond to the changing needs and demands of the workforce regularly featured in discussions.

The accountability system now allowed teachers the freedom to innovate intelligently in order to respond to the context of their particular schools. Aspects of learning valued by children, their parents and the local community were recognised and added to a common core. The local family of schools and regional alliances created fertile conditions for effective dialogue and collaboration. Networks of teachers within schools extended beyond regions, to nationally and globally sponsored opportunities for staff, in order to enable the conditions needed for a rich, deep and profound professional culture. At the heart of this new symbiotic relationship between freedom and accountability was, once more, trust.

My new Research Masters gave me access to an opportunity to take part in an international visit. My focus was differentiation – not in an old fashioned sense which actually limited some children's

opportunities (though this was never the intention), but on how to develop pedagogy to bring all children to the expected level of curriculum mastery and personal or social development. My Masters was enabled by the increase in time afforded to me, partially to complete my studies but also as a senior teacher at the school. I was responsible, with the other senior teachers, for the induction, education and mentoring of the teachers during their first five years in the profession.

Part of my work involved collaborative research in the classroom, supported by our local university, to help discern the most effective pedagogies for our children – the ones with the biggest impact on their outcomes – before then sharing the findings with colleagues. My practice was informed and augmented by research, but it wasn't in awe of it, nor did it follow it blindly. The days when teachers argued, in a largely ill-informed manner, backwards and forwards about who had said or written what, quoting names or sometimes just 'the research says...' had disappeared.

The limits and possibilities offered by the research community were now increasingly understood and exploited for the benefit of our children. I witnessed my colleagues no longer bristling at what the 'research says' because they were qualified to critically evaluate the 'who, what, how and the why' of the research evidence. I can recall working with local schools to rid ourselves of a particular edu-company that had long feasted on the ignorance of our school leaders. It was the value of agency made real and it made a tangible difference to our students.

An important cog in the wheel to support schools in this realm was the establishment of the regional Royal College of Teaching research universities, whose remit was to advance the professionalism of teachers and the learning communities to which

they belonged. The universities were responsible for the delivery of higher education across the profession, from the early years initial teacher education Masters, to the Research and Leadership Masters people engaged with during their career.

The Leadership Masters was an umbrella for a set of qualifications, with the obvious school and system leader modules being widened to include modules for other key professionals working in schools on human resources, finance or premises. One module of the Leadership Masters was co-delivered, including health care and social services professionals. I was happy with my Research Masters, but given the change to my role at the end of this decade, this would have been a useful module to study.

Another function of the Royal College was to provide a route to greater agency in the profession for groups that had continued to be under-represented in school leadership throughout my career. When I started teaching, the number of female leaders had continued to remain low, so while strong role models were there for them, they were still too scarce to make an impact. Those with families or intending to have children were faced with a perception of poor work/life balance and a reluctance by government to address the issues of childcare costs, support for flexible working, maternity pay and pensions.

The Royal College encouraged increasing numbers of female leaders through their Leadership Masters, enabling them to work with local mentors and network with others nationally. This approach was mirrored in encouraging more school leaders and teachers from diverse ethnic groups, using Royal College research universities' courses and links with families of schools to have their communities far more widely represented professionally. These initiatives have been vital, not only culturally, but in order to provide more role models for the next wave of the profession.

The college was instrumental in bringing about a change in the perception of how senior leaders carried out their roles day-to-day. With schools working increasingly in partnership and the changing face of the school day for students, leadership roles meant being spread across a number of settings. We needed to move away from always being based 'on-site' and working regular hours: this model was becoming outdated and unfit for purpose. A campaign for more flexible working was successful not only in retaining more teachers but in encouraging those with families, particularly women or those with young families, to embrace their careers without the guilt of poor work/life balance.

The Royal College also provided a depoliticised voice for the teaching profession to campaign alongside other public services to address the financial implications of pay and pension decisions, finding a place around the table that would lead to far greater transparency and mutual understanding.

The higher education status of the regional Royal College of Teaching research universities was a deliberate decision, but these were not ivory towers. The professional learning expected was rooted in academia, but assessments were rooted in practice in schools. It wasn't enough to write about behaviour management or assessment or differentiation, you were required to deliver well-constructed research and improvement projects in and across your family of schools. The focus on improving equitable outcomes for all children was never lost. Impact – not activity – was always the key determinant of success.

Beyond the school I was one of the team of senior teachers who delivered on the initial teacher education programmes, sharing knowledge and expertise of subject matter, key concepts and how children develop. A focus on subject knowledge and effective

pedagogy always included formative and forensic assessment of children's work and behaviour management. It was a joy to work with these new professionals and see them grow.

In 2014, Peter Matthews had stated in an SSAT pamphlet, 'In the best schools, the teachers' moral and professional accountabilities extend to all the children in the school and the other schools they work with.' This was now evident both within families of schools and beyond, as teachers saw learning from each other as a routine part of their practice. Engagement with peers became a key way of enabling innovative practice and professional accountability to improve quality of practice.

As the focus shifted in this decade away from teacher effectiveness (no longer an issue) to school effectiveness, relationships with the health and social services sectors took on a different perspective.

The shocking scale of child and adolescent mental health problems, limited access to the professional services required, and growing exposition of child sexual abuse (the scale exposed was almost beyond belief) in the 2010s had led to an increasingly diverse set of professionals working in and out of schools. It has been an incremental but relentless change. I now have routine access to trained mental health professionals, on-site, who work with the children, but also outreach to the families, where the need is often similar, supported by the social work team. When everyone realised that if children do not attend school it is noticed and action is taken, it was a relatively simple step to see the need for a more coherent strategy, particularly for areas where the disadvantage is the greatest.

The health and social care professionals have routes and networks into the wider health and social care systems. If the child is in school we can meet their needs most effectively at that point. We needed some more office space and rooms for the teams to operate from and another table to fit the extended leadership team around. If a child or her/his family is having a problem we have a professional solution on-site.

I find it difficult to imagine how my predecessor must have felt or coped when everyone was in their own silo. Working with a range of professionals, from both universities and social services, became the professional norm. I look back on the days of 'austerity Britain' aghast at the seeming inability to properly join up professionals to support our children. Thank goodness that we connected the pieces of the jigsaw.

Learning: pedagogy, curriculum and assessment



I was in nursery when the 1988 national curriculum was introduced. I was one of the ‘guinea pig years’ children’ who had to learn my level by rote, to tell the headteacher, lesson observer or inspector, and then complete standardised tests.

Notwithstanding its name, the national curriculum did not apply to independent schools, which set their own curricula, and academies, which while publicly funded also had a significant degree of autonomy in deviating from the curriculum. I’m not sure how much they were actually using this freedom by the time I entered the profession.

My school life had been shaped by the national curriculum as it grew to fill the entire teaching time of my school’s curriculum. The ubiquitous three-part lesson, five times a day, five days a week, for five long years became my staple diet. There were exceptions: from the disastrous ‘no structure, no learning’ hopeless attempt of one of my teachers, to the beautifully crafted and differently structured lessons of Mrs Jarvis. It was her passion, enthusiasm, care and unbending expectation that we would succeed that inspired me to teach.

Just before I entered teaching, the national curriculum was revised, in 2014, to contain less prescriptive but much more challenging programmes of study, with irredeemably corrupted national curriculum levels being removed.

Its imposition drew ire from the profession who didn't feel engaged in its creation. The potential of this curriculum to make a positive change was always limited by the fact that politicians simply hadn't convinced the teachers who would enact it that it was the right thing to do. There was too little trust between schools and politicians.

The whole implementation happened in a period of a few years, so children were coming into my classes who had not covered enough of the revised national curriculum for me to start teaching the age-related content. I renamed it the sieve curriculum, as children had so many gaps in their knowledge.

For the first three years of my career I continually rewrote schemes of learning and lesson plans, in an attempt to cover each successive cohort of children's gaps in knowledge. It became a near impossible task. Teaching in a school that had become a sponsored academy after going into special measures, I had to produce half-termly, weekly and individual lesson plans. I was diligent in preparing them but had so little time left that my own professional development suffered. Our department team was scattered and the opportunity to build a great curriculum was too quickly lost.

In lessons, I fired magazines full of silver bullets, dispensed and consumed litres of snake oil, tried brain gym and looked at learning styles. All to little effect. My pedagogy was haphazard and continually changing as the next consultant's idea, or 'best practice', was wheeled in and tried with little forethought or steadfast evaluation.

One of the first organic seeds of school- and teacher-led change was the formation of the National Baccalaureate Trust in June 2015. I wasn't involved, nor was the school I worked in, but I followed the changes with a slight sense of envy via the Headteachers' Roundtable website. If I understood it correctly, the trust established an overarching framework that required core learning, A-levels, GCSEs and vocational qualifications to be successfully completed alongside an individual project and programmes of personal development.

It had a more holistic and broader feel than the 'special measures' curriculum we ended up offering to our children, as we desperately tried to push the middle through 5+A*-C EM only to have to change tack when Progress 8 hit. The inclusion of additional achievement and qualifications spoke of a richness of experience in these pioneer schools that our children could only dream of possessing.

The end of the decade saw numerous examination changes at both GCSE and A-level. I sometimes felt that the hamster wheel I found myself on just kept spinning faster. In my more angry moments I would tell anyone who was listening that all the children learnt in school was how to sit an examination.

Many important elements of my subject had been lost in a limited and narrow assessment system. The introduction of Progress 8, which had been well received when originally announced, was met with a more mixed reception when implemented. My rather cynical view was that a school's opinion of the measure was largely affected by its new position in the league table. While for some schools it was a topsy-turvy world compared to what they had been used to, disadvantaged children still performed significantly less well than their more affluent peers. Progress 8 had become all-

powerful (the EBacc measure had been abolished) as this was far more difficult for schools to manipulate.

In time, schools just focused on teaching children as well as they could, so maybe not such a bad outcome after all. The Arts made an expected resurgence in schools, but vocational education was still perceived as a second-class educational route. This wheel of fortune and favour would continuously turn.

As I look back, I realise that some of the changes had made the assessment system more manageable. The synoptic assessment of whole courses was easier, compared to the previous splintered modular system. However, I still regret the one-shot, high-stakes nature of the terminal examination and the lack of recognition of important procedural skills, which could have been included if a more extensive view of assessment had been taken.

The system's revenge came just before the 2020 election. Teachers working in schools unwilling or too exhausted to also examine, and those recently retired on final salary pensions and not in need of extra money, were no longer prepared to prop up the examination system they didn't ask for or agree with. The examination system imploded and the results never materialised until weeks after the usual publication date. Children and parents were furious and the anxiety felt by sixth formers wanting to know whether they would be attending university was heart-rending to watch.

In contrast, the removal of levels led to some interesting thinking and working, but more than a few false starts. Rethinking assessment led to schools and teachers focusing on the curriculum in terms of the big ideas and concepts within each subject, and where children were on the journey towards them. I still churned

out whatever data was required by the senior leadership team, often thinking our system was more about assessment for leaders than assessment for learners. Like many, we just continued to give work levels and grades – enabling the myth of ceaseless progression to be maintained in our linear progression bubble.

Alongside this I diagnosed summative assessments to determine what children did and didn't know, then taught to the gaps. Sometimes this would involve reteaching a particular aspect of the scheme that the class hadn't understood. I took responsibility for this and thought about different ways to teach it until I hit upon a methodology that seemed effective.

My attempts to reorganise my classroom so that children who had different gaps in their knowledge did different work was not so successful, but with perseverance and good will from the classes we got there. Sometimes through talking with my students, at other times through written comments, I gave them feedback on what to focus on next and engaged in learning conversations. I worked to develop them academically but also as learners. It was about developing them as people, people in a community where their social skills would be fit for purpose. Relationships matter: children know when you are busting a gut for them and will repay you in kind.

It was a lonely time professionally and I was glad to be in touch with the school's old headteacher. He was part of the reason I joined the school, and not having had chance to say goodbye to him after the Ofsted inspection report came out always saddened me. In a series of email exchanges he shared the wisdom of years and his deep sense of joy at being a teacher. I've collated my favourite parts below:

‘One of the golden nuggets of advice to impart to you is to make some promises to your future self; to decide on your motivation for teaching and stick to it. Whether your key driver is “to make a difference”, “to inspire young minds”, or “to enthuse learners about your subject”, never forget the reason why you started in this profession in the first place. Promise yourself that you will hold true to this.’

‘To be successful and to survive in our profession, we must keep our purpose in mind and maintain this throughout, regardless of the most recent political and policy change and in spite of the educational context we may find ourselves in. I promised a futuristic version of me that I would always continue to learn, that I would never think I had all the answers and that I would constantly seek to pursue my purpose of making a difference. This has become part of my deep-seated belief system and as a result, although retirement is now knocking at my door, I am still inspired.’

‘Teaching is all about relationships. Without a deep understanding of the students in your care, you can neither understand their motivations nor meet their needs. So take time to really understand pupils. Show them you care. Understand their dreams, their hobbies, what makes them laugh. Learn what they think and how they feel. When students realise that they are cared for and valued, your classroom climate falls into place as they give this respect and value back in volumes.’

‘You are what they’ll remember.’

‘Above all else, I would recommend that you think differently. Break free from the parameters of thinking that have been created by the way in which you were schooled all those years before and challenge yourself to go even further than the expectations and mindset of the school in which you currently work. Pedagogy is a world of infinite possibilities and this adds such richness to our working lives, as it allows us to be ceaseless in our experimentation and our consequent improvements.’

‘My parting thoughts of you are, in some ways, clouded by a touch of envy. You are at the start of what will be a prolific career. You have yet to influence thousands of students for the better. So go forth and hold true to the fact that the sanctuary that is your classroom can be developed in such a way as to create dreams, inspire minds, enhance inquisitiveness and engender a lifelong passion for learning.’

‘We touch the future and must never forget this. Choosing to be part of this profession is undoubtedly one of the best, most rewarding life options that exist.’

The emails inspired me to apply successfully for a subject leader position. This was during the Decade of Reconstruction, 2020-2030, with its major impacts on learning, pedagogy and assessment, and I committed myself to leading my team in a different way to that which I had experienced. A team has a collective knowledge, expertise, perspective and skill set that is greater than any one individual could hope to possess. My challenge was to connect this human capital. The building of social capital was a key part of this decade.

If I'm honest it was a bit of a slow start. The Royal Commission on Education had put a moratorium on change nationally (not that it would stop me and the team from changing and improving), and it wasn't until the middle of the decade that they reported.

These five years were a period of intensive consultation about the curriculum and pedagogy. The decisions on pedagogy are pretty simple to explain: they were the preserve of the profession, with classroom experience 'informed and augmented by research'.

The professional culture of schools changed and we worked collaboratively, as a team. We planned the learning; identified key concepts and misconceptions; worked out how best to teach difficult factual, conceptual, procedural or metacognitive knowledge; and pre-planned assessments to exemplify the standards we expected children to attain. We looked at the end point of a particular unit of learning and then identified milestones along the journey and built in assessment checks to make sure everybody was on course.

Assessment at the end of key stages 2, 4 and 5 remained pretty much unchanged, but much more of our summative assessments between these points was focused on the learner, identifying and then addressing gaps in knowledge. There was far less reporting to leaders.

The concept of the national baccalaureate became increasingly attractive to schools. What had started as a modest number of schools involved with the National Baccalaureate Trust grew exponentially. A curriculum which celebrated core learning alongside the personal and social development of a child took root. The direction of travel was clear and what had started as a

group of school leaders trying to bring together a curriculum vision, a decade earlier, was now a nationally recognised overarching framework. By 2025, the examination boards and the Royal College recognised the power of the baccalaureate as being of greater value than the sum of its parts: qualifications were revised with the national baccalaureate in mind; strands of global citizenship, theory of knowledge, use of technology and philosophy and ethics were woven into the structure built around knowledge-rich specifications.

The curriculum was much more complex. In identifying the cultural capital to be shared with the next generation, care was taken to consult widely, with parents, teachers, further and higher education, royal societies and politicians of all persuasions, as to what was most appropriate. The biggest change actually occurred in the overarching vision: education was about the academic, this was important; but greater recognition was now given to children's personal and social development. The metrics used to assess a school's effectiveness were now much wider and met the needs of a more fractured society, after years of austerity. HMI did sterling work in leading the consultation and pulling the various strands together.

The national curriculum was eventually just that. It was agreed and a fifteen-year implementation plan was set out, starting with the early years and foundation stage in 2025 and finishing with the school leavers' examinations & certificate, born out of the Headteachers' Roundtable national baccalaureate, being implemented in 2040. The generations of children going through our schools benefited from the coherent, staged and manageable process of curriculum change. This wasn't the usually expedient pace of change determined by politicians in the past, but it received their full support.

As with all these things there was a certain irony, as many families of schools accelerated a number of curriculum changes, not because they had to but because they wanted to.

Just as the report from the Royal Commission came out I entered the school's senior leadership team and started my new Research Masters. I focused on pedagogy: the first year was a house of horrors ride through the research evidence of the last decade. While research can't ever tell me what will and won't work in my classroom, it can inform me what has and hasn't worked in other settings; it can give me 'best bets', or better bets than groping in the dark trying what I could. This seemed a more reasonable starting point than the firing of silver bullets or purchasing of snake oil.

I vowed that informed research would augment my own and colleagues' classroom experiences. I consciously developed what I came to call 'educated intuition'.

The team's focus on collaborative planning of learning intentions and success criteria, planning assessments to determine children's prior knowledge, and constructing the steps in the learning journey from this point, all proved highly effective in the classroom. I continued to research effective ways to differentiate within a class and measured the impact of different strategies with an understanding of research methods that made a laughing stock of some of the so-called evaluation processes when I began teaching.

The Research Masters now contained an allowance of one day per week release from the classroom. While the current school bore the cost of this I gave a contractual agreement to remain in employment at the school for the duration of my Masters plus one year. It seemed a reasonable payback and I was happy to sign on the dotted line. The time was invaluable.

The forum for discussion about pedagogy had undergone a transformation. When I entered the profession it seemed every man and his dog had a view on how I should teach – from inspectors, who seemed not to have read their own guidance, to the parents, media and politicians. The rationale seemed to be, ‘I went to school so I have a knowledge of what works in the classroom, which you must now use.’ This slowly but surely dissipated as effective pedagogy and decisions about how to teach became intrinsically linked, and inseparable from the professionalism of teachers.

In fact, part of teachers’ professionalism was defined by their conceptual knowledge and exploration of the most effective pedagogy. The establishment of the regional Royal College of Teaching helped cement a profound relationship between researchers, teachers and classroom practice.

An important aspect of this development was that schools engaged with large scale randomised control trials as part of the research community. Researchers shared their findings widely, generously and enthusiastically, while being very clear about the limits of what their evaluations did or didn’t ‘prove’. The Masters’ programmes, and the support of the research community, helped substantially upskill the profession as research findings were used and tested, by teachers, within their own contexts. Those practices that had greatest impact on students’ outcomes were refined in the classroom, as teachers sought to develop an increasing fluency in their use.

The narrative on pedagogy and who wrote it had been changed. Teachers were now the main storytellers. Another battle had been won without a single silver bullet being fired.

Working with new entrants to the profession on their five-year initial teacher education programme, I found them increasingly 'scripting' their input to classes and planning key questions to ask as the lesson progressed. These teachers were great to work with, and they soon realised that teacher talk was a powerful ally in the classroom, as long as they made sure they communicated the key knowledge concisely and sequentially. They came to appreciate that a funny story or an aside can help, but they shouldn't waffle or give too much information at once, as children then lose track of what is important. My knowledge, confidence and research skills greatly increased. I remained acutely aware that there was always more to discover, more practice to be done and more fluency to attain.

We were building a curriculum with quality at its core and equity as its desired outcome. We were slowly taking control of that which should have always been within our domain: teaching and learning.

The curriculum model of my Masters was interesting and proved great preparation for the next stage of my teaching career. Looking at the curriculum and seeking to devise one that was balanced, appropriate, relevant, rigorous, focused and coherent took hours of debate. To what extent was the curriculum about transmission of culture; or preparation for work, life or citizenship; or just part of being human? How should we redraft our curriculum models? These things now mattered more to me as I entered senior leadership in the Decade of System Maturity (2030 – 2040).

The curriculum was now being implemented in the later primary years and beginning to move towards secondary level, in the progressive way determined by the Royal Commission. While they had sorted many things and set in progress a clear timetable, other matters of detail needed to be determined. The thorny issue of

vocational education and its perceived status within the English education system had to be grasped. Various governments had talked it up in the period from 2000 to 2015 but then immediately undermined it by their actions.

Three different changes to the system during the 2030s brought about a fundamental change in the perception of vocational education.

The first was the implementation of the Royal Commission's decision that students would follow a common curriculum up to the age of 15. At this point they would make an informed choice about their preferred route through an academic or more vocational curriculum.

This led to the second significant change being introduced: a substantially enhanced careers education, information, advice and guidance service for the students and their parents. The significant involvement of parents in the process was crucial. Word of mouth spread very quickly about the two options, which offered equal levels of challenge and equal access to higher education establishments and career opportunities.

The third change was the removal of the GCSE in 2038. We had known about its impending removal for over a decade, and getting the last few cohorts of students through it was like pulling teeth. They couldn't understand why, if they had to stay in education or vocational (apprenticeship) training until they were 18, anyone would think it sensible to sit examinations at 16. I gave various reasons to them in attempts to soothe their rebellious tendencies. In the end I gave up, as I had always thought it pretty incomprehensible myself.

The 15-18 curriculum, implemented at the end of the decade, built on what had gone before. The expectation that students had secure factual knowledge and could use this to develop a conceptual understanding of subject areas was familiar since the implementation of the 2014 national curriculum. Importantly, while the factual knowledge expected, for example in mathematics, was similar in the academic and vocational pathway, its application was differentiated to suit the two programmes. The mantra 'learning begets learning' meant teachers were expected to give appropriate time and instruction in the development of procedural knowledge, within their subject, and metacognitive knowledge in the development of the learner.

In the classroom, knowledge was built across the four dimensions: factual, conceptual, procedural and metacognitive. Coverage of this in the Masters studied by teachers in their first five years proved invaluable. These teachers were now increasingly influential senior leaders in schools, and supported both new and more experienced colleagues through the significant changes.

The decade saw the steady but unstoppable synthesis of the taught and hidden curriculum. These had been seen as two separate elements. In some schools the pernicious accountability culture of 2010 to 2020 had led to exam factories, where opportunities beyond the classroom were too limited for too many children. The curriculum, the summation of a child's experiences at school or brokered by school, was now seen within the context of developing the whole child in their local world and beyond. The geographical model of a family of schools led to schools being far more open to, and focused on, their local communities.

The third sector, consisting of many voluntary organisations, had expanded following the dramatic reduction in public services during the years of austerity. These organisations, supported by some public funding, charitable donations and local businesses, found routes in schools to offer an extended school day for children and families. Older students became willing leaders and workers in these extended curriculum opportunities, as they had in previous years been willing recipients of the services. The recording of these contributions in the personal development section of their baccalaureate was a welcome recognition of the learning and commitment these student leaders made, and seen as significant by HEI and employment recruiters.

Governance, systems and structures



It's fair to say that when I started my career in the white heat of the Decade of Deregulation in the 2010s I probably didn't fully understand the significance of the structural reforms made by successive governments and notably accelerated under the 'Gove doctrine'. Even if I had, I'm not sure they really would have interested me that much. I was more concerned about the management of behaviour, the planning of lessons and the stack of marking that greeted me most evenings and each weekend.

By 2015, when I first entered the profession, the academisation project was well on its way to completion. From the handful of schools that became city technology colleges in the Thatcher era, to the scores that had the academy mantle foisted upon them under the Blairite agenda, to the thousands of 'convertors' during the Cameron administration, academy status was seen as the panacea for system improvement. After the 2015 general election, the forced academisation of the thousands of remaining schools (mainly primary) under local authority control proved that it was, at best, a placebo. At a stroke, in those heady days of the late 2010s,

hundreds of new multi-academy trusts (MATs) were created and led by schools with vastly differing experience of federated governance and mutual accountability. Hundreds more existing MATs were expanded, some beyond capacity, swelled by legions of new partners.

Perhaps, if the process had been slower, or actually organised – or had been done in a time of increased investment, both directly to schools and to local authorities, or at a time of stability for schools in terms of curriculum, assessment and accountability – things might have been very different.

The multiple pressures of structural reforms carried out at breakneck speed, dwindling budgets and fevered educational policy provided the ingredients for a perfect storm that threatened the very fabric of our education system. School after school fell into special measures as the new floor targets were missed on a massive scale. At the same time, the staffing crisis from the hastily implemented School Direct project adversely affected the quality of teaching, and for the first time ever thousands of schools hit the buffers of financial ruin hard and fast.

Academy status became King Canute on the beach, and even the potential advantages of MATs, academy chains and school independence couldn't hold back the waves that crashed onto our shores.

Direct contracts, held by every school in England with the secretary of state for education, piled the pressure on ministers. The number of sponsors willing to take on 'failing' schools dried up as the acquisitive overstretched themselves and the cautious withdrew into the sanctuary of their 'good' Ofsted status. It was a striking feature of this era that 'outstanding' was seen as unwelcome because of the expectation to help others it increasingly demanded.

By 2015 there were almost 500 teaching schools established across all education phases and in almost all parts of the country, although the secondary sector and London schools were over-represented. For a decade these schools were supposed to be heading a self-improving school system. It was clear something had gone wrong. Whether they were hampered in their efforts by government-imposed factors or the variability of purpose, from helpful to ego-driven, we'll never know.

The model strived for coherence and clarity it would never achieve: agency, quality and equity slid backwards.

My first experience of the changing system came following our negative Ofsted judgement. We were forced to become a sponsored academy and there wasn't exactly a long line of potential sponsors queuing up to take us over. The local authority tried to be helpful and support the inevitable process, but years of budget reductions had left the school improvement service pretty emaciated. This wasn't true of all local authorities, but what had been the middle tier for over 50 years was now a patchwork quilt of varying provision and quality.

Like all teachers, towards the end of the Decade of Deregulation I received a letter inviting me to join the Royal College of Teaching. Unlike many at that early stage, I actually joined. The creation of the Royal College of Teaching divided opinion starkly, not least due to the suspicions surrounding government seed-funding and the then-recent memories of the General Teaching Council (GTC) and its perceived role as little more than another accountability arm of government. The college also suffered a little because people rightly had high hopes for it and, when designated, it became apparent that the hopes were perhaps a little too high. At first, the expectations weighed heavily rather than lifting those who were charged with getting it off the ground.

In the late teens, the college struggled to recruit the members it needed to break even. The ambitious plans for professional recognition for main-scale teachers were, to an extent, thwarted by this and by the dominance of school leaders and former school leaders (as consultants) still hooked on the catnip of NPQH and other National College programmes. It needed a period of retrenchment for those who still clung fondly to the potential that got so many excited about a Royal College of Teaching in the first place.

By 2020, it was clear that something needed to change. Fortunately for all concerned, the genetically modified seeds of change that were bringing in a bitter harvest for the 2015-2020 administration were sown alongside some more organic seeds. With a little nurturing, these were ready to grow. Time moved on and we entered the Decade of Reconstruction, which brought greater coherence to the system.

The Royal Commission, established in 2020, showed a capacity for fashioning a silk purse of professional integrity out of a sow's ear of ill-thought through government policy. The commission believed that local families of schools, whether they were in multi-academy trusts, federations or coordinated by successful local authorities, were able to work powerfully together.

They committed their combined resources and collective moral purpose to a coherently defined group of children. Some of the most successful had also created wider alliances to increase their capacity for improvement. These alliances were educational, almost exclusively teaching schools, but some had developed links with health and social services. Put simply, if the family of schools had a problem they couldn't solve, they seemed to know someone in the wider alliance who could, and together they would act quickly to resolve issues.

The Royal Commission determined that there would be one standard governance model for all, based on a small number of schools (no number was ever given, but the most common groupings had 7-12 schools) working in deep partnership. The schools were always geographically close to each other and, as a family of schools, we could always identify who 'our children' were. The freedoms available to some schools in the previous decade had been revisited and a common core of freedoms was agreed to benefit all schools.

The idea of centrally designated anything was shelved once and for all. We were building a high-quality, equitable system for all, by all. Anything less was not considered acceptable.

While each family of schools had one 'single source employer' or central board, the formation of individual school boards and their delegated powers was determined by each family. Some determined their needs were best served by a single overarching board, while others established school boards with a variety of powers. There wasn't a single model, nor was the situation static. Central boards delegated and de-delegated powers as they thought best suited their context at each point in time.

Given the near implosion of some parts of the education system, the commission's report into teaching schools inevitably concluded that the model needed to be rethought. This process, coupled with extensive research into the work of the most ethical and effective alliances, led to a set of fundamental principles and expectations that would govern the work of alliances.

Rather than individual lead schools, it was for the maturing system to determine its own leadership structures. This rendered the term 'teaching school' obsolete. The belief that no individual school

should dominate others, and that quality had to be a system wide reality, not the preserve of the few, was becoming a reality. The concern had been that some 'strong' teaching schools had exploited their status to shore up their own recruitment, achievement and finances at the expense of others. Rather than adopting a government-generated designation, alliances were formed across regions by families of schools adopting a model developed from the principle of reciprocity. These alliances knew that there was powerful work they could do together due to their enhanced professional capital.

Formation of these alliances was facilitated by the regional model established by the Royal College of Teaching, with devolved powers for initial teacher education and implementation of the continuing professional development of teachers through its new Masters provision. Each extended alliance determined the necessary level of bureaucracy for it to be efficient and effective. Regional commissioners, a decade-long experiment, had proved an unnecessary expense. The designations of national, local and specialist leaders of education (NLEs, LLEs and SLEs) were all removed. Teachers didn't need or crave titles; provision was created within the newly formed families of schools to ensure improvement, or was brokered between them. The profession was moving towards greater maturity: the collective moral purpose for all children's education was nurtured within the family of schools but also realised beyond it.

The jewels in the crown of the reform process, the regional Royal College of Teaching universities, were created in response to the profession's thirst for a more research-informed, school-led architecture for teaching and school leadership. The coming together of the school and university sectors through organisations

such as researchED, the Coalition for Evidence-Based Education (CEBE), the Institute of Effective Education and the Royal Society of Arts, sent shockwaves through Westminster and eventually led to the reintegration of higher education within the Department for Education.

The post-austerity twenties couldn't have come at a better time for the college, bringing with them a loosening of the public purse strings alongside the commitment to system leadership outlined earlier. The alignment of HMLs, at a regional level, was part of a clear determination by politicians to relinquish their 'command and control' mechanisms and entrust the profession to the profession.

The fact that the post-baby boomer generation of school leaders realised that the College of Teaching needed to be about teaching, not leadership, was crucial in paving the way for the college that we now know and love.

The creation of posts for teachers to work within and across families of schools and alliances provided opportunities for the many professionals who did not want to leave their classrooms to pursue leadership pathways. Such teachers gained a relatively modest, but massively welcome, supplement to their salary, along with the time to make their role work, giving fresh impetus to the Royal College's leadership.

Over the course of the third decade of the 21st century, college membership quadrupled and teachers began to dominate its working groups and, eventually, its governance structures. The result has been an odd combination of stability (of the profession's core values) and innovation (of how to best recognise, celebrate and deploy these values in action) on the part of the college.

Much of the respect it now commands is due to the fact that we, as a profession, grabbed the reins of the accountability mechanisms, blended them with school improvement processes and shaped the education system for the benefit of all.

Because of the changes to system leadership, agency, autonomy and accountability outlined above, you have been fortunate to be a part of the teaching profession in perhaps the most exciting decade of profession-led reforms ever.

Now, more than ever, those engaged in the day-to-day art, craft and science of teaching can lay claim to be part of a profession. We are as research-informed now as the medical profession has been for years and we shape policy and practice for the school system at a level previously left to politicians. In collaboration with the university sector, we are responsible for a national curriculum that ensures entitlement for all children and the assessment processes at 18 that mark their entry into adulthood, be it a vocational, academic or mixed pathway.

Of course, we can still look with envy at the pay of some other professions, but the fact that the gap has narrowed significantly in the past two decades gives us hope for the future.

Interestingly, my work as a system leader sees me regularly engaging with colleagues in health and social services. The governance changes to institute education, health & social services boards across the region had created a level of bureaucracy combined with a lack of impact on children's lives. They were thankfully short-lived, being abandoned in the last decade.

It didn't take a genius to realise that it was at the point of need that health and social service practitioners were required – in schools which children are required to attend every day – rather than as leaders in

meetings. The role of system leaders in these public services was really to align priorities, metrics and funding to ensure delivery of wrap-around care, support and education to any child or family needing it. This was set in a greater framework of nationally determined priorities for public services aimed at creating a compassionate, aspirational and equitable society.

Since 2030, this dynamically conservative (with a small 'c') Royal College has increasingly assumed the mantle of the expert for ministers, the media, universities and, most importantly, practitioners themselves. The strengthening of membership, alongside the heightened demands placed upon those seeking recognition for their teaching (up to and including fellowship), has allowed the college to influence policy, practice and the perception of the profession, without ever becoming embroiled in the management and administration of the school system. It has placed a huge premium on effective research into all aspects of teaching, allowing it to achieve the escape velocity to pull away from the reliance upon 'best practice', 'government-knows-best', consultant quackery and all manner of edu-fads that had littered the landscape of CPD in the previous decades.

As the Decade of System Maturity unfolds the Royal College is financially secure. The college itself is no longer the recipient of treasury funding because its membership and its enormous success in bidding for funds for practitioner-led enquiry mean it no longer requires subsidy. Instead it has championed the profession as being value for money and, through the media, has effectively promoted the successes of the English education system above and beyond the latest international comparisons (comparisons the college has never ceased to challenge, with increasing success as ministers have abandoned 'policy tourism'). 'Education, education, education' has never been so popular a mantra for the electorate than now, with the forthcoming 2040 election.

Conclusion



As I sit in my office with 2040 just around the corner, the English education system is considered world class on all the main international metrics. Strangely, while I am pleased, like many goals once achieved, it no longer seems that important. We all have a greater appreciation of the narrow metrics used in many international testing systems.

We set out to be ‘world class’, but thanks to the perseverance of the baby boomer generation, the 2020 Royal Commission and the tenacity of staff, governors and school and system leaders, we have become the high-equity, high-quality and high-agency system that was our true aspiration.

Our school system remains an archipelago of families of schools. The reforms of the early part of the century to introduce ‘market forces’ and a ‘mixed economy’ caused consternation for many, a lack of equity for children and an absence of agency for teachers, support staff and governors. I think the ‘middle tier’ is now strong enough to hold its own and, fundamentally, I don’t believe that the profession would welcome a return to the control of politicians at a local level any more than to those at a national level.

You may never become a millionaire working in teaching, but our autonomy and the respect in which we are held means that we continue to be grossly oversubscribed with top graduates entering the profession. Self-determination was too hard won to hand back.

The question that remains now is how to ensure no school is an island, battered by hurricane winds and submerged by floodwaters without the necessary protections in place. But this is a question that we have never been better placed to answer.

My children were some of the first to experience the new wider, deeper and richer curriculum brought in by the Royal Commission from 2025, one year at a time, and it contrasts so starkly with my own educational experiences. My eldest will sit the new school leavers' examination next year, her first since the end of the primary phase, and is determined to do well. The national baccalaureate is an established feature of every child's educational experience. She started school on a path to completing the primary baccalaureate in the first phase and then the national baccalaureate. Each baccalaureate has a personal development programme at its centre; children and young people's entitlement to engage in physical, creative and cultural activities and community service alongside their academic and technical learning is now assured.

Like many of her peers she is desperate to enter the teaching profession. It may be in the genes but is now more likely also to be in the culture and climate we have forged within schools and across the system.

Education is rather like the Forth Bridge, in that the job is never done and the battles never won. The thirties have been thrilling, largely because they have been a decade of relative stability in terms of government policy and, simultaneously, a high-water

mark of profession-led innovation through the strong networks we have fashioned for ourselves. The balance of accountability, almost exclusively self- and peer-led, with autonomy has produced our high-agency system.

The quality of teaching and learning has never been better due to the regional Royal College of Teaching universities whose Masters' programmes for initial and continuous teacher education have been replicated around the world. The outcome is universal high-equity outcomes and a society that is fairer and more at peace with itself than it has ever been.

The first 25 years of my career have been an exhilarating rollercoaster of a ride. I now work as a system leader of a family of schools locally, reaching out into wider educational, health and social care alliances. Unlike the baby boomers that often left in their late fifties, just before the Royal Commission was formed, I have potentially another 15 or so years of my working life left.

The journey continues...

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The Vision 2040 timeline

THE DECADE OF DEREGULATION

2010-2020

2015

Our narrator starts as a newly qualified teacher

THE DECADE OF RECONSTRUCTION

2020-2030

Each family of schools decides its own governance and leadership structures

Our narrator becomes a subject leader

Schools' mantra changes from 'closing the gap' to 'don't allow the gap to appear'

Royal Commission's decision for a common curriculum to age 15 implemented a year at a time starting with EYFS

Staff retention in schools rises significantly; admission onto initial teacher education becomes increasingly competitive

THE DECADE OF SYSTEM MATURITY

2030-2040

Schools routinely have access to trained mental health professionals on-site

Our narrator becomes a system leader in national education

Accountability and innovation become primarily the responsibility of local and regional networks of schools

Voluntary organisations supported by older students enhance personal development in the national baccalaureate

Increasingly chaotic system beset with teacher recruitment and retention issues

Royal College of Teaching established but makes a hesitant and uncertain start

2020

Royal Commission on Education (RCE) established

RCE establishes principle of standard governance model for local families of schools within looser wide-ranging alliances of schools, some with health and social services

Greater funding provided for public services following a decade of austerity

HMI commissioned to develop one high-quality route into teaching with Masters' level curriculum for first five years of teaching

Royal College of Teaching (with HMI) develops regional structure for further Masters' qualifications for teachers as researchers; and as leaders

2025

Overarching qualifications framework combines A-levels, GCSEs, vocational qualifications, individual projects and personal development

Regional Royal College of Teaching research universities responsible for higher education across the profession

Only graduates with 1st or 2:1 degrees admitted onto teaching courses

GCSEs abolished

2038

Royal College of Teaching becomes the major source of expertise for ministers, the media and universities, as well as practitioners

This pamphlet is a special edition in SSAT's Redesigning Schooling series to help identify the big questions, look at lessons from other systems, and shape the debate on how we take our education system to world class.

Redesigning Schooling - 1: Why change is needed
September 2013

Redesigning Schooling - 2: What kind of teaching for what kind of learning?
September 2013

Redesigning Schooling - 3: Principled curriculum design
October 2013

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Redesigning Schooling - 5: Student impact in the redesigned school
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July 2014

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October 2014

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October 2014

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