

# fnitoworld

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FROM EDUCATION TO EMPLOYMENT, AND BEYOND

**Sir Richard Branson**  
**PUSH THE BOUNDARIES**

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# I Can See Clearly Now...

I had always looked after my business. However, I had stopped taking care of myself a long time ago. Tearing through life at full tilt for as long as I can remember, it took sheer exhaustion and a moment of utter clarity to recognise that I was heading towards becoming one of the richest people – in the cemetery.

After a long hard look in the mirror I had to accept that the game was up. Something needed to change and that something was me.

I was successful, self-made and enjoying all the trappings of my achievements – to the outside world – yet an absolute wreck, on the inside. Unhealthy and burnt out, not only in spirit and mind, but also in body. It was time. I had to put myself first before it was too late and my life had spun totally out of control causing permanent, perhaps fatal, damage.

My journey of self-discovery has led me to a destination that has enriched my life in so many previously unimaginable ways. Now emotionally and physically rebalanced and rejuvenated I realise that this investment in myself has given me an entirely new-found love of life, that's full of deep happiness and health. I now know how to properly reap the rewards of my hard-earned success and have been granted extended longevity along with many more years to savour with my precious family and friends.

I needed to be taught how to focus on myself and my wellbeing, and learn to have greater empathy for myself, and others around me. My body and mind have been realigned and I am reaping the benefits, and so is my business.

Sometimes it's as if we don't have time to think about ourselves – our minds, our bodies, our souls. How senseless is that?

I have discovered that you cannot compartmentalise your problems. It's essential to look at your life holistically to truly understand what's at play and reveal the full picture.

With professional support, this is what I have managed to do. I feel like a new person living a completely enriched, vibrant new chapter of my life. It's as if my body and mind have been expertly and gently dismantled, cleansed, fine-tuned, then polished and re-assembled, liberating my soul. I now know that anything is possible – and I don't have to desert myself in the process. This life-changing journey has left me feeling stronger, more youthful, focused and content. I am the souped-up version of myself, and feel extraordinarily grateful. My only regret is that I didn't do this years ago...



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## Founder's Letter



As I contemplate this latest issue, I admit to finding trilogies somewhat appealing. We always aim to give our students a beginning, middle and successful end to their search for a meaningful career. So often by the time a candidate reaches us, they have endured the ancient Greek equivalent version of a series of three tragedies, finding rejections, one after the other. The launch of the Employability News Channel [www.finitoworld.com](http://www.finitoworld.com) might represent our tetralogy or quartet. We don't intend stopping there.

My first meeting with Sir Richard Branson involved him greeting me at his Holland Park front door without shoes. This was in contrast to Fred Finn – the Guinness Book of Records' most travelled man, who had flown on Concorde 718 times when we were introduced – and who wore shiny leather brogues.

Sir Richard had generously agreed to host a reception and unveil a £1 million cheque in aid of the Malcolm Sargent Cancer Fund for Children, raised through a Readathon sponsored competition to promote literacy amongst pupils.

It was agreed at the meeting that the event should be Black Tie and a gold embossed thick invitation card was prepared. There was a bit of an aghast moment when I ventured to tell Sir Richard that if his guests were attired in Black Tie, there would be a certain expectation that he should be too. I felt the wrath of his public relations advisers at telling a great man how to dress in his own venue.

Fast forward to the event and I duly received a message that Sir Richard was arriving. I took the lift downstairs to the lobby and Sir Richard walked briskly inside. It was just him and me going up. He smiled and quietly asked; "Will I do Sir?" It was the very first time he had been photographed so dapperly and the paparazzi had a field day.

It was a lesson that great leaders listen and act, he is a class act to which all of us aspire but if that occasion was nerve wracking for a young man in a hurry to get on in his career, nothing quite prepared me for his 360 degrees acrobatic feat, which followed. I accompanied Sir Richard to RAF Scampton to fly with the Red Arrows. It is a great honour to be invited to fly and he relished the occasion, although seeing him exit the Hawk cockpit after 30 minutes of extraordinary twists and turns in a full training sortie was nothing short of extraordinary. I was so full of admiration for the man who has inspired a generation, future generations and leaders and pleased to have kept my own feet firmly grounded, on the tarmac.

In this issue, we pay fulsome tribute to Jeff Katz, a former client, loyal friend and generous bursary supporter to students. He was a regular contributor to everything that we did and filed his last editorial submission a few days before his death. He worried about his pieces being edited. We reproduce Letter from an American without amendment and invite his many colleagues, business associates and friends to join in "never can say goodbye."

I am grateful to Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP, Chair of the Education Select Committee, for supporting my idea for Leg Up. Like the NHS volunteer scheme, we ask everyone who is employed to reach out and help one unemployed person back into work. As the extended furlough scheme draws to a close, we all have a responsibility to do our duty.

I hope that all our readers emerge from lockdown having had the vaccine and ready to grab the opportunities which await us. f

Ronel Lehmann



# Has the Chancellor got it wrong on self-employment?

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**As we emerge from this period of crisis, the nature of the political debate has subtly shifted. We're no longer thinking about how to get through the next days and weeks, but about what we've learned during this time of trial.**

The Covid-19 pandemic has yielded a thousand stories - from the heart-breaking tales of businesses gone to the wall, to the extraordinary heroism of Captain Sir Tom Moore, all the way to the resilience of the tech sector that has shown us glimpses of an accelerating future.

But as a vast and imaginative furlough scheme was unfolded - at a pace and with an efficiency which *Finito World* applauds - there have been those who have fallen through the cracks. That this was inevitable during a time of such upheaval doesn't make the matter any less something from which we should learn.

One of these was the self-employed, who have been the sacrificial lambs of Covid-19. Consider, for instance, that you had taken the entrepreneurial step of moving to sole trader status during the tax year 2018-2019. You'd have qualified for no government support, but by a quirk of HMRC's rules, found yourself liable to pay 150 per cent of tax for the next two years. All that would have been payable by 31st January.

Now imagine that you've made that move, but you're also a parent. The services which you're paying for - chief among them, education - would have been closed for the majority of the year.

With kids out of school, the self-employed, lacking the structure of

an employment relationship, found themselves especially vulnerable to productivity issues. The income of the self-employed rises and falls according to daily output in a way which isn't true for people in regular jobs.

The government has made some of the right noises. In early February, Boris Johnson sent a well-meaning letter to all parents, praising their work in picking up the slack. In a time of unparalleled - and justified - government largesse, it was not uncommon in the first part of 2021 to hear parents wonder, only half-jokingly, when their own tax rebate was coming.

Noting the anomaly, the Chancellor Rishi Sunak moved to take into account the tax return filings made in 2019-2020 to expand the help offered to the self-employed. This was admirable, but it was accompanied by noises that at some point the self-employed National Insurance contribution would rise from the current 9 per cent to 12 per cent in line with those in employment.

This is short-sighted. Without pension contributions, or reliable pay checks, the self-employed take on a greater degree of risk. They're by nature entrepreneurial - the sort of people the Conservatives are meant to admire. Self-employed parents are believers in the importance of the family unit - another important plank of Conservative thought.

This isn't just about self-employed fathers, but mothers too. The leading charity Pregnant Then Screwed was set up to fight against the discrimination women face during pregnancy and after having children. The organisation recently took the government to court,

to challenge the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme.

The basis of their argument is that the calculation of the grant does not exempt periods of maternity leave when calculating average earnings, leaving around 69,200 women affected. When questioned, the Chancellor compared taking maternity leave to taking a sabbatical or ill-health. The charity lost its challenge in February 2021 and is seeking grounds for appeal.

Rishi Sunak's style of delivery is always impressive. He is surely right to speak plainly to the electorate about the condition of the public finances. But when the government looks at how the cost of borrowing will be borne going forwards it will be important - both politically and morally - for recent history to be understood.

The truth is that the complex realities of family life are not sufficiently explored by the leading think tanks - a fact in itself symptomatic of an issue which has fallen through the cracks.

Mark Morrin, Principal Research Consultant at Respublica, says: "For years the self-employed have been encouraged to go that way, but when the crisis came they were ignored." He adds that this gap speaks to the fact that the Conservatives 'used to be entrepreneurial under Thatcher,' but that now "the Red Wall Tories don't look at the world that way. You might not admire Hungary and Poland for obvious reasons, but they have more sophisticated approaches to family policy."

Morrin's right - the Chancellor needs to look at the nuance of this before saddling the next generation of entrepreneurs with an impossible burden.

# Towards a new Special Relationship

Every time there's a US general election, we read a thousand election specials about what may happen, but in the lead-up to the result the commentary can be so much wasted paper.

In this edition *Finito World* has looked in depth at the Biden administration, its personalities, its underlying philosophy and early moves, in a special report that we hope will give students looking for placements with a US-UK nexus food for thought.

It's the right time to be thinking transatlantically. With Donald Trump having left the White House, it's worth reminding oneself that Democratic administrations tend to be good for the economy. The unemployment rate has historically fallen under the left, while tending to increase when the White House has been under Republican control. Under Barack Obama and Bill Clinton, unemployment fell by 3.1 per cent in each instance; under George W. Bush it rose, after the 2007-8 recession, by 3.6 per cent. Trump also presided over a 1.6 per cent increase in joblessness.

Of course there are anomalies. Ronald Reagan who held office from 1980 until 1988, did create jobs, although there are still some who would argue that, in being responsible for the deregulation on Wall Street which caused the recession under Bush, some portion of the job losses in the late 2000s need to be chalked up to his column.

Within those startling statistics, there are other stories - about youth unemployment, and especially youth unemployment among minorities. Zoltan Hajnal and Jeremy Horowitz in an important study found: "Across 35 years of Republican presidencies, black unemployment went up a net of 13.7 percentage points. Across 22 years with Democrats, the black unemployment rate fell 7.9 points."

With Kamala Harris in position, the stage is set both statistically, and in terms of the optics, for a more diverse workforce.

According to the US Bureau for Labor Statistics, there is currently an increase in demand for hires in computer and

peripheral equipment manufacturing, residential building construction, and pharmaceuticals. Biden's \$1.9 trillion Covid relief package will go some way towards supporting job opportunities for graduates in the hard-hit aviation and hospitality sectors.

These last years the language of the world has been protectionist - and that's something that's been to some extent caused by the current UK prime minister. But Boris Johnson is a chameleon, and as skilled a pivoter as they come. Born in America, and with an instinctive feel for Washington dating from his time as Mayor of London, we can feel sure that he will want to encourage ties between the two countries.

"Two nations divided by a common language," wrote Sir Winston Churchill in relation to the two countries. This last year we've been two nations divided by a common virus - but another thing the two nations have in common is the pace of our vaccination programmes. Dust off those CVs and send them across the Atlantic. The special relationship is about to be rebooted.

# Why so retiring?

The recent news that judges will now face mandatory retirement at 75 and not at 70 is welcome. Announcing the move, The Rt Hon Robert Buckland QC MP, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice said: "Our judges, magistrates and coroners are world-renowned for their excellence, expertise and independence. It is right we hold on to them and do not cut off careers unnecessarily."

For this issue, *Finito World* spoke to the former Court of Appeal judge Sir Rupert Jackson - an evergreen retiree as alert as a man half his age. Here was a lawyer who had accumulated enormous wisdom over a long career, who now

makes his living as an arbitrator and in writing volumes of history.

One can understand that the UK system has been designed to avoid the slightly morbid spectacle we've seen on a number of occasions with the Supreme Court in the US, whereby the world watches ghoulishly as Supreme Court justices, who really are at retirement age, cling to their seats, often until death deprives them of their position. But there have been mutterings for a long time that in this era of rising life expectancy, 70 is too young an age to leave the bench.

This middle ground is to be applauded - but with a President of the United States at the age of 78, it might be wondered

whether mandatory retirement itself is outmoded. And it's not just a problem in the judiciary. We have just been through a pandemic during which we rightly sought to preserve the lives of our elderly. In so doing, we implicitly declared their value to us.

But we don't take full advantage of their wisdom. Forced retirement remains a lively issue which has been litigated both at Oxbridge universities, and at the major accountancy firms. As we move forward into the next chapter -the pandemic mercifully in our rear-view mirror - let us not forget what the grey-haired have to teach and offer us. They deserve the dignity of work as much as anyone else. f



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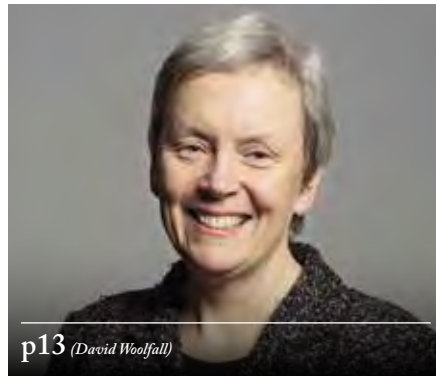
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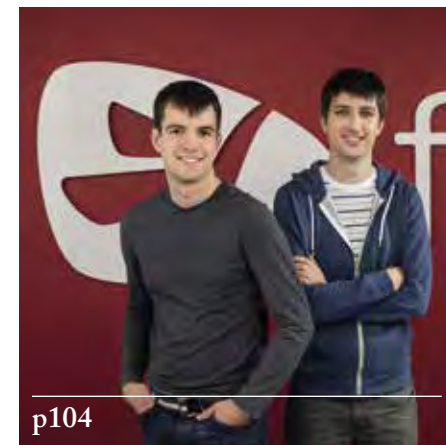
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## John Bercow

THE FORMER SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS  
ON JOE WICKS, BURMA AND DONALD TRUMP

Until the pandemic hit, I had never heard of Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Now they have become part of my life as most of my commercial and academic work has been done by that means. But the inability to play or watch outdoor sport for long periods I have found severely stultifying. Joe Wicks has been a lifeline. I have been doing his 20-minute workouts five times a week since 24 March 2020.

He is utterly motivational. If it had been 60 minutes or even 40, take-up would have been tiny. Twenty minutes' exercise, with our three children or sometimes alone, but always coaxed, encouraged, willed on by Joe, has made me a lot fitter. Thanks Joe. You have worked wonders for so many people who need no equipment to follow your lead and you have supported the NHS in the process.

Since coronavirus struck, precious little has been said about the 11-plus. Over 70 different 11-plus exams are taken by over 100,000 pupils every year and the results are not recorded or linked to pupil records. This extraordinary omission in an age of transparency means that we don't know how many pupils take the test every year and how many pass. Education researchers cannot evaluate 11-plus results against children's SATs and GCSE grades and young people's A levels without study of vital 11-plus data. Now, more than 20 distinguished academics specialising in education research, led by Dr Nuala Burgess, Chair of Comprehensive Future, have written to Gavin Williamson, urging him to publish the information without delay. Gavin, as your old boss David Cameron once said, sunshine is the best disinfectant!

If school pupils have suffered, so have university students. I wear two hats in the sector as Chancellor of my alma mater, Essex University, and as a part-time Professor of Politics at Royal Holloway College, London University. Both universities are doing all they can to adapt their teaching to mitigate the disruption. Yet the rupture is obvious and undeniable. I don't have a solution beyond superfast roll-out of the vaccine but my generation were lucky. I paid no fees, had a full maintenance grant, and benefited from outstanding teaching and the opportunities of a campus university. Today's students have a raw deal by comparison.

**“Joe Wicks has been a lifeline. I have been doing his 20-minute workouts five times a week”**

Netflix has over 200 million subscribers world-wide, our household included. In the last eleven months, I have cherished *The Stranger*, *The Queen's Gambit* and, above all, *The Crown*. Critics have carped about the latter for historical inaccuracy but it's brilliantly acted and a thought-provoking introduction to post-war British history. I've also read more books than I did as Speaker. Nothing has surpassed my favourite political

biography, Robert Caro's four-volume biography of Lyndon Johnson, a masterpiece truly jaw-dropping in scope.

It was a triumph of American democracy to evict the most rancid, racist and repellent occupant of the White House in my lifetime. In 2017, as Speaker, believing that he exhibited fascist tendencies, I signalled opposition to him addressing our Parliament and was condemned by reactionaries and stuffed shirts. Nothing has happened in the last four years to change my mind on the subject but much has happened to reinforce my conviction that he should not be invited. Joe Biden and Kamala Harris face huge challenges but they are motivated by the spirit of public service, not the service of themselves, and will enjoy global goodwill.

Misery and privation is faced again by the people of Burma.

After more than half a century of brutal military dictatorship, Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won a landslide election victory in 2015. Daw Suu made big mistakes, suffering major damage to her reputation. She should learn from the experience. That said, she won overwhelmingly again in the November 2020 election. Her detention, and the theft of the election by the military from the people, is a scandal. It is time for the Biden Administration, eloquently backed by the UK, the European Union and freedom-lovers everywhere, to isolate the Burmese generals until they face trial. Let them do so, answering for their thuggery to the International Criminal Court. [f](#)



# Reader Enquiries

OUR ROUNDTABLE WITH READERS STRUGGLING  
IN THE PANDEMIC EMPLOYMENT MARKET. WITH FINITO MENTORS  
SOPHIA PETRIDES, ROBIN ROSE AND ANDY INMAN



SOPHIA PETRIDES



ROBIN ROSE



ANDY INMAN

**I** work in radiography recruitment. During the pandemic, the firm which I've worked at for ten years - and to whom I've been very loyal - has taken Covid-19 as a chance to renegotiate my package, cutting my commission from 20 per cent to 15 per cent. I like the company and want to stay there but feel they've taken advantage of me. It's also a niche area. I'm unsure what to do.

**Kieran, 36** Fulham

**Sophia** Kieran, as you know, Covid-19 has created a ripple effect in the economy. Both private healthcare and NHS are prioritising urgent cases due to the restrictions and this is having an unexpected knock-on effect for some specialist recruitment services. I suggest you have a very open discussion with your firm to get the full picture of the direction of their business. I would suggest a compromise where you ask them to review your package again with a view to restoring your original rate.

**Robin** Cutting your commission at a time like this, at first glance, looks somewhat unfair. As commission is related to additional business, it appears strange that they should wish to reduce this element of your remuneration. Perhaps they feel you are earning too much related to others in the firm? I can appreciate that you feel your sector experience is niche, but your skills are more easily transferable than you think. You may or may not have exclusion clauses in your contract that limit your approaching rivals. However, your recruitment skills would be of value in any medical sector recruitment area and there's no shortage of jobs in this sector now. After ten years it may be time to start looking anyway.

**Andy** I agree with Sophia and Robin. If you decide to stay, make sure that you're happy with the reasons for your decision and not just taking the easy option. Being a disgruntled and unhappy employee is not a good option for either side.

**I** was made redundant at the age of 40 during the first pandemic. Eventually I landed a job for a start-up tech company. It's for less money than I'm used to earning, but the company is noble and looking to tackle climate change. However, I've now got through to the final round of a job for a bigger institution which will pay double. I feel it might be unfair on the first company to leave, but the money from the second company would be good, as I have a daughter. What would you advise?

**Sally, 40** Manchester

**Andy** Sally, the reward we get from employment is not just the figure that we are paid at the end of each month: being fortunate enough to work in a role and company that resonates with your inner self is rare. That said, you have responsibilities to your family and it's important that you're able to fulfil their needs.

If the extra remuneration is what drives you then see the selection process out to the end. If you're offered the job think carefully where your priorities lie. Don't worry about the start-up; I'm sure if you move on, they will employ someone else. If you decide that there is more to work than the pay, then you may already be in the right place.

**Sophia** You mentioned your current employer wants to tackle climate change. If this is very important for you, then perhaps consider staying in your new role and have an honest talk with your employer regarding your remuneration and your current earning trajectory with them. Working for start-ups can be a gamble but on the other hand, if they offer performance related bonuses or share options, success can mean great financial rewards for employees.

**Robin** Sally, if you're working for less than you are able to earn, you are in effect, making a charitable donation to a start-up. Maybe there is a better way you could support them while still maximising your earning potential. You may also have to negotiate a staggered start time with your new employers.

**I** t used to be that I did well in interviews - me and my partner used to joke that interviews were my superpower. My first few interviews I got the job. But in 2020, that skill seems to have deserted me. I am told from feedback after interviews that I am too assertive and ambitious. I am new to rejection and finding it difficult. Do you have any advice?

**Dominic, 34** Leeds

**Robin** Dominic, your experience is not unusual. Assertiveness and ambition is valued in times of growth but seen as a threat in times of austerity. Companies prefer certainty in these uncertain times. If you give a potential employer the impression that you're likely to move on if they can't promote you quickly enough, they're unlikely to invest in your learning curve.

Think about how you might respond to questions like, "Where do you see yourself in three years' time?" or, "Why do you feel this role is right for you?" The fact that you are sufficiently self-aware to identify the problem suggests that it will not be too long before you remedy the situation and regain your superpower in interviews.

**Sophia** I'd only add that prior to your next interview, I suggest you roleplay with a trusted friend or find a professional to work with you, like a career coach. We are not always aware how we are perceived by others, in particular during challenging times, where we have a need to survive!

**2020 has been hard for me. I know every time I apply for a job that there are thousands of other applicants. But now I see that there is a set of effective vaccines, and I wonder whether I should just wait it out and hope the economy improves. My parents say this is a lazy approach, but my heart sinks every time I apply for a job, I know deep down I'm not going to get. Do you have any advice?**

**Greta, 22** Guildford

**Andy** Greta, this year has been a shocker for many, the news of a vaccine is a rare and very welcome glimmer of light on the distant horizon! During difficult times some will thrive and others will fall by the wayside. To be amongst the winners we need to put ourselves out there, take the rejections, learn, adapt and keep moving forward. Don't take a job rejection personally: use it as an opportunity to learn, The Roman philosopher Seneca said "Luck is when opportunity meets preparation".

**Sophia** Greta, you are not alone! Even though the future is uncertain, you cannot give up. Keep persevering. It's easy to lose hope after rejections, but the truth is there are always more

jobs and there is no good reason why you shouldn't get one of them eventually - unless you stop applying. Perhaps seek guidance from a professional CV advisor to support you.

**Robin** Greta, you're quite correct that sending off hundreds of applications is depressing - and for the most part a waste of time in the current situation. Your parents are also correct, it could well be a couple of years before the economy recovers sufficiently to alter the job/candidate ratio even with a proven successful vaccine.

There are jobs out there that need to be filled, however. They get filled by candidates who genuinely understand their skills and experience, know who would value them and know how to market themselves. Jobs get filled by people who know how to get in front of the right people and how to handle themselves in social and interview situations. Possibly you need to identify a mentor who can help you in these difficult times. Look for someone who knows the sector you are targeting and can possibly help you with your self-development and targeted job-hunting activity. f





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## The Economist

# Jim O'Neill

THE FORMER COMMERCIAL SECRETARY TO THE TREASURY  
AND GOLDMAN SACHS CHIEF ECONOMIST ON THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY  
OF COINING THE INFLUENTIAL TERM THE BRICS

**In late summer 2001, when I was co-head of economic research at Goldman Sachs with Gavin Davies, it became clear there was a strong probability Gavin would be leaving to become Chairman of the BBC. In Goldman's inimitable style, their immediate thought was to find another co-head for me.**

And so I became involved in interviewing all sorts of incredibly illustrious economists from around the world - spectacularly well-known names. I had to explore the idea that I would have some credibility as their equal.

Then, crucially, September 11th happened. I'd been at the annual Economics Association Conference in the Twin Towers. On the Tuesday, Gavin and I were hosting our monthly video conference with all our MDs around the world. Halfway through, the guys in New York left. We were wrapped up in our little world - we just carried on. Then, around 15 minutes later Gavin left for his final interview for the BBC. He popped back into the room and said: "I think you probably want to be aware that apparently some plane has hit one of the Twin Towers." My first instinct was to say: "Okay, thanks Gavin. Now, you guys in Asia..."

But within two days of it happening, I came to the strange conclusion that the underlying message to take away from this tragedy - rightly or wrongly - is that this was the end of American-led globalisation. It was the terrorists lashing out and saying: "We've had enough of Americanization."

Within six weeks, I published my first piece: "The world needs better economic BRICs". Three things were at the core of it. Firstly, I'd already been mesmerised by China's role in helping solve the

Asian crisis in the late 90s so I was already aware of the relevance of China for the world. Then, of course, we were coming to the end of the first decade of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the supposed emergence of Russia as some kind of democratic state. The G7 would soon expand to the G8 to accommodate Russia.

Thirdly, we'd also seen the launch of the Euro as a single currency. So France, Germany and Italy now shared a single monetary policy, currency and the common framework for fiscal policy, which would still have the same equal representation as all these seeds of global economic governance.

It was only in 2003 that the acronym became well-known in business, when we published our outline as to what the world could look like by 2050. We deliberately called that "Dreaming with BRICs". People forget that we wrote about what could happen if every country fulfilled its potential. Of course, in reality the idea that every country in the world would reach its productivity potential is crazy. The idea that they'd all do it at the same time is completely absurd.

In reality, what has happened is that China has become so big that it's twice the size of the other three put together. So when it comes to discussing the BRICs as an economic or political group, China completely dominates. Because of that, it still means that the various assumptions we made about the BRICS becoming bigger than the G6 in the future, actually could still happen - despite what has been a very disappointing decade for Brazil and Russia.

Overall, China and India look as though they're going along the central path that we assumed. Meanwhile, Brazil and Russia have proved that they

suffer from the so-called commodities curse. They can't seemingly adjust their economies from being excessively dependent on commodity price swings. They keep having these violent economic cycles. In both countries, there's also significant evidence of misallocation of resources and a lot of blatant corrupt practices that go with these dominant industries. Both countries need to reform and stimulate their private sectors.

Interestingly, the legal people at Goldman spent a brief amount of time exploring the case for acquiring the rights to the acronym. Whenever anyone mentioned the phrase BRICs, they wanted it to be Goldman Sachs BRICs. I argued against that because then other places wouldn't have used it.

Today I worry that the American democratic system is struggling. The country is having to adjust to the fact that for the past 20 years, US economic growth has been so unequal. There's been no rise in real wages during that time, which has caused this remarkable split politically. If we don't see renewed economic growth post-COVID - and alongside it, shared economic growth - then the fragility will only grow more. <sup>f</sup>



Lord O'Neill of Gatley

(Roger Harris)

## Front Bencher

# Margaret Greenwood

THE FORMER SHADOW SCHOOLS MINISTER RECALLS LIFE AS A TEACHER  
AND THINKS THERE MIGHT BE ANSWERS FOR THE PRESENT IN THE PAST

**Whenever you ask the government about exams they say it's the best form of assessment, but that's a meaningless comment which stands up to no scrutiny.**

When I started teaching secondary school, GCSE was 100 per cent course work. The exam board would ask us to put forward ten pieces of work for each student; two of those pieces had to be done in controlled conditions, like an exam. Pupils knew that every piece of work at the start of the year mattered. It meant pupils took up-front responsibility for their own learning.

When they brought that arrangement to an end it was like attending a wake at my school: we were mourning the passing of this as we'd seen such an increase in quality. If you have an exam at the end of the year, you're talking about memorising things rather than developing skills. I found the old way very constructive and flexible. If you have a situation where a pupil has missed a month of school or been ill, or something terrible has happened in the family, you could say, "Let's get on with the next thing."

I'd like to move to a system where we have greater development of skills and research. In the age of the search engine, to have assessment processes in demonstrating memory seems flawed to me.

I once taught in an adult centre reading to adults who struggled with reading. That was quite a profound experience because you were in close contact with people who throughout life had experienced that profound deprivation of not having sufficient literacy skills to make their way in the world. Today we have around seven million adults with poor literacy skills: that's damning in a country like ours.

That's why in 2020, as shadow schools minister, I argued against the Reception Baseline Assessment. There was evidence it was causing children distress, and taking teachers away from settling children into school-based routines and developing relationships with pupils.

We've got a similar issue with SATs. I spoke to a mother who told me when her daughter was in Year 6, she used to cry on her way into school as she wasn't very good at maths. That's why a broad-based curriculum is important. These decisions taken early in children's lives affect employment outcomes further down the line.

If you've ever been to adult education centres, you learn the hunger people have for learning when they've missed out on it. One class I once taught was called "Women Back to Work". These were women who wanted to get back into the workplace, and needed a GCSE in English to do that. One knock-on effect was the impact on their children: they would bring them into the classes with them, and proudly stand in front of the class and give a talk while their child was there, looking up so proudly at what their mum was doing.

When you think of women who have come out of work to look after children and then become carers, they can often lose their confidence. Adult learning is a fantastic way to open up ideas. I worry about the long-term economic impact of children who grow up in poverty. They don't earn much, not as many go to university and they're less likely to have good health later in life. This government has no appreciation of the scale of the problem. It was dragged kicking and screaming on school meals by Marcus Rashford, a fact which spoke volumes.

Part of the problem is that the status of teaching is still low in relation to what it should be. At a local level, people are still immensely grateful to their local teacher so the relation between pay and status has to come from government. When I look at what primary teachers do, their skill levels are absolutely phenomenal.

The Labour Party is in a process of development of policy, and we have to include our membership in that. Keir's been leader for a year or so, and because of Covid too there hasn't been the opportunity for meetings or conference. I think it's too early to say, but we need to look to the past for inspiration.

In the 1970s, we had a big pay rise and there was buoyancy because we as teachers felt valued. This was before the national curriculum and we'd teach as we saw fit, with no testing regime and more creative time. I remember we used to put on school plays and when they bought in the national curriculum it killed it dead. I think that's tragic. We need to look at that.

Exams are not the answer. <sup>f</sup>



Margaret Greenwood is the  
Member of Parliament for Wirral West

(David Woolfall)



## The Broadcaster Iain Dale

THE LBC PRESENTER AND FORMER CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE ON THE ART OF THE INTERVIEW AND HIS COMPLICATED RELATIONSHIP WITH DAVID CAMERON

**If you appear in the media, everyone imagines that you must be a complete extrovert.**

Of course, even in an interview there is a little bit of ham-acting involved, particularly if you're in television. But most radio and TV presenters have a shy side to them. Perhaps shy people tend to be a little bit more empathetic.

Shyness is more common than you might think. I knew somebody who was a conservative parliamentary candidate who would literally throw up before every speech. But I don't get nervous. Having said that, I recently interviewed former FBI director James Comey, and had little time to prepare. Thankfully, my approach to interviews is normally not to do a lot of preparation because I like to think of them as conversations - and the more preparation you do, the more stilted it is. I never have a list of questions, for example. I try to listen to what the answer is. If you have a list of questions, the temptation is just to go through them one by one and ask them. Well that's fine, but it's not very rewarding.

We are all human beings, and this is what sometimes people forget about people in the media - or more to the point, politicians. We all have the same human reactions as everybody else. If an interviewer starts asking really aggressive questions right from the start, it's no surprise that the politician puts the shutters up and thinks, "Well if you're going to be like that, then I'm not going to give you anything." There has to be a degree of mutual respect.

Interviewing prime ministers is interesting. In 2003, I was asked to write an article about who will be the 10 people at

the top of politics in 10 years' time. I remember writing in that article that David Cameron hadn't really made a mark on parliament.

The week after the article was published I sat next to him at a dinner. When I raised it, he said, "Yes, I did see it. I asked my staff to leave the room and I put my feet up on the table, and I just sat there for five minutes thinking: 'He's right. What have I achieved in two years in Parliament?'" That was a brilliant way of defusing a potentially awkward social situation.

**"I remember writing that David Cameron hadn't really made a mark"**

Later, when I was running for parliament he drove up in his Skoda to campaign with me and we had a brilliant day together. And when he was prime minister, I did three interviews with him. I was poacher turned gamekeeper, and understood where he was coming from. This is one of the advantages of having been involved in politics, and then moving into journalism and broadcasting. As an interviewer, I have an advantage over people who haven't been involved in politics: I know how they think, and what they don't want to be asked.

Boris Johnson wrote the foreword to my latest book. He said yes immediately and then of course COVID happened. I got in touch in July 2020, and told him I'd understand if he couldn't do it, and that there was no need to write 20 pages or

anything like that! And it came on time.

But it was interesting to see the reaction. Some people on social media said, "I wanted to buy this book but I'm not buying it because you've got Boris Johnson in it." I thought: "If Jeremy Corbyn had won the election I would have asked him!"

It's quite difficult to come to a judgement on a prime minister who's still in office. Boris' reputation in history will depend on how quickly the country gets back on its feet and how many people are actually out of a job. But most prime ministers are known for one thing in history. He wanted to be known as the Prime Minister who "got Brexit done". He has got it done. But I suspect he'll be known as the Covid Prime Minister.

I used to find it very difficult to interview people that I know well. Now I just go in for the kill. Brandon Lewis and David Davis, who are my two closest friends in Parliament, say that they find me the most difficult interviewer. They think it's because I'm overcompensating for the fact that everybody knows that. I don't think it is. I just get more out of people by having a conversation with them. **f**



Iain Dale's latest book is *The Prime Ministers*, from Hodder and Stoughton

## The High Mistress Sarah Fletcher

THE HIGH MISTRESS OF ST PAUL'S GIRLS' SCHOOL ARGUES AGAINST TODAY'S EXAMINATION-DRIVEN SYSTEM

**I would like to conjure two images for you. The first is of an imaginary workplace of the future: there is space for quiet working and areas for meetings and collaboration. Powerful computers drive new technologies and leverage augmented reality. Technology to break down geographical divisions is on display, with digital, connected whiteboards to share ideas simply and effectively.**

Teams of people, diverse in background and skills, are working together both in person and virtually. Refreshment is available to break up routines, inspire impromptu conversation, seed fresh thoughts, and allow tired brains a rest. There are deadlines to work to, but it is accepted that new ideas can be messy and that there will be risk. It is better to try something and fail early than not to try it at all, is the mantra.

There are other rooms too - places of equal importance. They are for those with the technical, computational, or practical expertise to translate ideas into practice - to prototype, and make, iterate and refine. Entrepreneurship is encouraged and valued. Respect is the overriding concern, respect for those you work with and for the wider audience you wish to reach: respect for the environment and for society too. These are the spaces in which problems will be dissected, analysed, and solved and in which the future will be created - where head, hand and heart meet.

Now we see an exam room: desks separated, rigidly aligned, front-facing. Collaboration is forbidden, breaks are supervised; notes and research are left at the door. Access to the outside world has been disabled with mobile devices confiscated and turned off; watches removed. Only pens, transparent pencil cases and paper can be seen. Those with dispensation to use computers are confined to another room. The task is

strictly timed to suit a fixed approach. An "off day" is not to be countenanced and there is only one chance to get it right.

The questions are the same for everyone and the answers are predetermined too, with the highest reward reserved for those who most nearly hit the mark.

The contrast is stark. There is, of course, a place for exams. The ability to work under pressure is important. They can act as a powerful motivator and memory is a muscle we need to learn how to flex. But over the past few years, and in the name of rigour, we have added and added again to the things we must learn and assess. Rote learning has taken root, and stress levels have risen inexorably. The need for mass-produced tests and the chimeric search for "reliable" grades has driven out the open-ended questions that might invite deep thinking, support a growth mindset, and encourage fresh ideas.

We now reward conformity and fixed thinking instead - and at a time when adaptability and initiative are so necessary in the workplace. An algorithm fixes the bell curve of achievement and condemns a third of all students to fail the most basic of requirements in English and maths, a failure that impacts significantly on their life chances. The favour given to academic subjects over technical, vocational, creative, and practical skills has disempowered segments of the community and diminished opportunity in precisely those occupations that are so badly needed. The EBacc is much at fault. Its myopic focus on English, maths, science, a language and a humanity has all-but driven out the creative and performing arts, and technology has been another casualty too.

It is time we looked again at those things we value most - the skills we wish to develop, and the knowledge we want to impart. A slimmer curriculum with more open-ended questions and

variety in assessed tasks would broaden opportunity for creative, collaborative enquiry, adventure, exploration, and experimentation, and would encourage students with different skillsets to shine. Technology needs harnessing to break down societal, economic and geographic divisions. Investment needs to prioritise those at risk of falling through the cracks. Partnerships between schools, both independent and maintained, with business and industry should be developed and supported.

Meanwhile, teacher training should be advanced to meet the new demands and career development. Adaptive testing and AI could personalise learning to support and address classroom differentiation; digital resourcefulness needs embedding as the fourth "R" in the toolbox of essential skills. The classroom of the future could be an exciting place, rigorous and demanding, collaborative, creative, curious, and individually affirming and rewarding too. If employers increasingly disregard GCSEs and even A-levels as measures of future employability, and feel the need to train new employees in the basics of collaborative and complex problem-solving skills, it is in honest recognition that our current assessment is not fit for purpose in a new and changing world. **f**



The High Mistress Sarah Fletcher



# The Lib Dem Layla Moran

BY GEORGIA HENEAGE

**When Boris Johnson closed the Department for International Development in June 2020, his reasoning was based on safeguarding British needs over others. He said that UK overseas aid “has been treated like a giant cashpoint in the sky”. Meanwhile Rishi Sunak’s heavy cuts to Yemen aid announced in early March - a near 60 per cent slash - prompted heavy criticism from ex-PMs such as David Cameron.**

Layla Moran, the Lib Dem Spokesman for Foreign Affairs and International Development, is another critic. “Fundamental to Lib Dem values is that global problems need global solutions,” she says. “Just because someone is somewhere else in the world doesn’t mean we don’t have a duty of care to them, especially if they are at risk of starvation.”

Moran sees the cut to Yemen aid as “an embarrassment” and hopes that the “sharp contrast between what we are doing and what the Americans are doing will serve to remind people of what Boris Johnson’s agenda actually is about.” She recalls that during the Clegg-Cameron coalition “there was a real sense that all the parties were pulling together in the same direction.” In its place, says Moran, has arisen an “enlightened self-interest”, which stops the progression of economic migration and encourages others to bear the brunt of climate issues.

“The Tories have reneged on their manifesto pledge. More importantly they’ve reneged on their promise to the world’s poorest, and I’m deeply concerned about the consequences of this,” Moran adds.

These narrowing interests have had a huge effect on the charity sector: according to NCVO’s UK Civil Society Almanac report in 2020, the proportion of charity income that comes from government was at its lowest point in a decade ahead of the coronavirus pandemic.

“We rely on Save the Children and other smaller charities for a lot of the work that we do,” says Moran. “They are now in a moment of crisis: the proportion of charities potentially going under is enormously high. I’m seriously concerned about that: as soon as an organisation folds you lose that institutional knowledge. We really will struggle to get those links back up and reestablish the important role they play in both civil society in the UK and also abroad. If smaller charities start to go under, then I think we’re in real trouble”.

**“The Tories have reneged on their promise to the world’s poorest”**

One answer, says Moran, may be to alter the charity model post-Covid. “It’s now time for charities to join their voices together; I think we need a coordinated response to raise public awareness”.

As an MP of Palestinian descent - the very first, in fact - Moran says her background and life experiences have shaped her view of the part we must all play in helping those less lucky than us. It does make you appreciate the world in a different way, says Moran.

“We were taught to appreciate everything we had - as a refugee, my mother had almost nothing growing up and she had to develop enormous resilience.” Moran still has family in Palestine who are living in segregated circumstances, and says it’s “heartbreaking” to hear the stories from back home.

Her father’s job in the diplomatic service for the EU meant that Moran grew up living in war-torn countries like Ethiopia and Jordan. “Those very early memories were so important”, says Moran. “I remember when I was about

five we were living in Ethiopia in the midst of its war with Eritrea. I was exposed to huge levels of poverty - literally on my doorstep - and constant military parades outside our house for months.

“I remember asking my father why this was happening, and he explained to me that the dictator who ruled at the time wanted to exert his own power and chose to spend money on tanks over feeding starving people. It became a huge driving force on why I care so much about these issues.

You can talk about geopolitical shifts and you can speak philosophically and esoterically about world politics, but in the end it all comes down to real people. I keep those individuals in the front of my mind - that’s my motivation and everything else stems from there.”

Moran also argues that the way the UK government has approached the vaccine roll-out has only served to highlight our innately “insular” nature: “We haven’t appreciated that no one is safe until everyone is safe. There are parts of the UK where 50 per cent of people are vaccinated - which is an extraordinary achievement - but there are places in the world where not even a handful of health care workers have had the jab. It’s important that we help to tackle the world’s problems together. It beggars belief that the government isn’t listening.” <sup>f</sup>



Layla Moran

(David Woodfall)



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# A Question of Degree



With Sir Rupert Jackson

**I**t's fair to say I always found the classics more interesting than the law. I did classics for my first two years and then switched. I did have some regrets. I enjoy law as an academic subject much less, but I was set upon pursuing a career as a barrister; but it doesn't compare with the study of the classics. Even so, I thought that studying law might be a good idea under the circumstances.

But there are some aspects to a study of classics which can be of use in the law. An exposure to classical authors can be helpful, for example, when it comes to composing judgments. I structure all my judgments in the same way. I make them as clear as I possibly can, and in that I'm particularly influenced by Julius Caesar. Then, in terms of elegance of style, I am indebted to Tacitus. Greek literature is another pleasure: I have gained a lot from Thucydides, who is lucid like Tacitus, and from Herodotus when it comes to storytelling.

Traditionally, it's always said that classics is a very good grounding for a legal career. It promotes orderly thought, and gives you the necessary intellectual background and so on. That's all true. Classics is of great benefit for a legal career.

But I've now found that a legal career is a great aid to the study of classics. Having practised as a lawyer for 50 years, I am well accustomed to studying evidence, assessing it objectively, and reaching my own conclusions.

In my book, *The Roman Occupation of Britain and its Legacy*, I have tried to apply the disciplines which I have acquired in a legal career to analyse the evidence.

It seems to work like this. The study of classics reinforces your understanding and application of the law and practice as a lawyer reinforces your ability to analyse the archaeological and literary evidence in an ordered and structured way in order to reach logical conclusions. The two go together.

Since the time when I was an undergraduate studying classics, there has been a revolution in the study of Roman Britain. This is now driven by archaeological research - somewhat to the detriment of the literature. People pay a lot of attention to field studies, and much less attention to what the ancient authors have to say. In recent years, people have been so preoccupied with archaeology and field studies that they have downgraded the importance of the literature. I've tried to reintroduce the literature to a preeminent place in writing this book.

It took me eight years. I set about going through the literature first. I did that with the aid of translations where I was getting stuck with the original texts. In other words, I was operating in the traditional way - the way historians would have done it in the 1960s when I was studying classics of Cambridge. I then went through all the reports of field studies, together with the archaeological research reports and tried to combine that with the literary evidence.

That may sound like quite an arduous task for a mere amateur like myself. In fact, it's an impossible task for an amateur. But by great good fortune, I had the help of Martin Millett, who is the Professor of Classical Archaeology at Cambridge. I went to see him at the suggestion of a Fellow of Jesus college where I'm an Honorary Fellow. He had his doubts as to whether a mere lawyer could actually make anything of it.

But we developed an entirely informal system. I would read chunks of archaeological research and so forth.

I would draft my chapters and then go up to Cambridge. Martin and I would discuss them for an hour or two - then I would take him out for lunch. He was very happy with this arrangement.

I think he was quite interested to have a lawyer analysing the evidence and challenging what the academics had said. For me to have his input was essential: there was no way I would know which were the reputable articles and which weren't; nor would I have known the best sites to visit or what I should be looking at. So Martin guided my reading and research informally.

Some people have said my book is funny, but that might be an area of disparity between classics and the law. It can be disastrous to make jokes in court. But I do try and bring the knowledge of human nature I've acquired in the law to the period. Imagine Caesar's invasion of Britain today and you'd get a public enquiry immediately - or as in Iraq, three different public enquiries with three different terms of reference.

It's important to treat a classics degree as a springboard for your intellectual life, and to continue to pursue your reading and study of what you have been learning at university. The interesting thing is that human nature doesn't change very much: in the ancient texts we are observing how human nature, which is the same as now, operated in a very different historical and technological context. The human heart remains the same, but the mindset changes. [f](#)



(4 New Square)

Sir Rupert Jackson was a Lord Justice of Appeal until his retirement in 2018. His latest book is *The Roman Occupation of Britain and its Legacy* (Bloomsbury, £25)



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# Carter-Ruck



# Relatively Speaking



With Axel Scheffler by  
Christopher Jackson

**F**ame has its peculiar pockets. The man I'm talking to could walk down any street unmolested. And if you were sat next to him at a dinner party you might not know the identity of the man with the polite and surprisingly thick German accent. But his name is one of the most ubiquitous on the planet.

At 63, Axel Scheffler is best-known as the illustrator of *The Gruffalo* and its sequel *The Gruffalo's Child*. The first alone has sold 13 million copies in 59 editions worldwide, and has been made into a film. It's a favourite book of Michelle Obama - and just about every parent. Did his parents encourage him in his chosen career? At first, there was friction. "They weren't artistic," he explains. "My father was a businessman and my mother was a housewife. So yes, my father considered me a hopeless case when it came to anything to do with numbers and business. But they were fine in the end."

Did they know before they died how successful he'd been? "They saw the beginning of it, yes. *The Gruffalo* was beginning to be successful before they went."

Scheffler talks to me over Zoom from his studio in the house he shares with his wife and 13 year old daughter.

I can see books ranged beyond him, and everything is lit by an appealing skylight.

He looks the epitome of established success - and is. But Scheffler had to find his own way, independently from what his family expected of him. "I always liked drawing," he recalls. "I could see I had friends who liked my drawings which they made them smile - but it took me a while to see that this was my profession. At arts college I found that illustration was what I could do; I knew that by my late twenties."

What distinguishes Scheffler is the memorability of his illustrations. The illustration of the Gruffalo itself is a magnificently weird creation, full of an outlandish comedy which is only hinted at in Donaldson's poem. The books simply wouldn't exist as they are without Scheffler's ability to delineate absurdity.

And yet they're also essentially inclusive, creating the illusion that anyone might have a go. That makes him a wonderful person to come into schools and give talks ("If someone says to draw a cow or a dolphin or whatever, I can do that, I've been doing this a long time!") but there's a quiet professionalism beneath the humour.

How long does it take him to do a double-page spread? "If everything goes well, I will do it in a day and a half or two days but normally I'm not happy! It might depend how much detail I have to do. If there's a sky or not, or whether I'm using watercolours with colour pencils on top, but a double spread in two days is possible. I hope my publishers won't read this!"

For a moment, I'm in his world - briefly aware of the technical skill involved. Is he a great gallery-goer? "I'm sad that there were a few exhibitions I wanted to see when corona came. I wanted them extended but I don't think there's a direct link between classic art and my work."

I ask if he sees positives in the NHS art in the windows now. He is immediately enthusiastic: "I think it's lovely - especially the chalk drawings on the pavement round here in Richmond. It's very touching, something which has been around for so long - chalk on a pavement or a wall. It's very nice and retro."

There's a generosity about Scheffler - a love of children. He continues, almost wistfully. "I don't know whether there are numbers on whether Covid-19 has made children more creative but it would be a good thing if that was the case. Arts education in school isn't priority in this country anymore, and it's good if children can create."

Scheffler's appears such a one-off career that it feels hard to imagine how it could ever be repeated. But does he have any advice for the younger generation? "I would say it's not always the first choice you make which is the right thing for you. The situation has changed for young people compared to what people grew up with in the mid-80s. This concept of a job for life is under question, and in some ways it's harder now to do what I did. But hopefully there will still be authors and there will be illustrators. My advice is to be open and try." *f*



Axel Scheffler

(Martin Kraft)

# Ten Thousand Hours



With Talan Skeels-Piggins  
by Alice Wright

**I** was in the Navy for six years as a regular, as a fighter controller in the operations room. I then became a reservist. Shortly after I joined the reserves in November 2002, I was paralysed as a result of a motorcycle accident.

Initially the Navy dismissed me, but I argued my case to the medical board of survey and proved that I could carry out the same requirements as an able-bodied officer. I did the bleep test, the mile and a half run in a race chair, the weapons handling test, the gas mask handling test and I passed each one for my age group. But I knew I would not be going to sea again. I ended up working with NATO.

My case set an important precedent in allowing disabled people to remain in the armed forces. Back in 2003, I wasn't allowed to tell anybody the outcome as the Navy were concerned that the floodgates would open and all those that had been previously dismissed would want to return. But after the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, applicants were able to use my ruling as a precedent to continue serving in whatever shape they could. It's great to see that the military

no longer gives up on the knowledge these people have.

After the paralysis, I was in a pretty dark place. This massive change had happened to me and all I could see was that change. Luckily for me, I had a chat with a guy who had also become disabled, who came in for a regular check-up while I was laid up in hospital. He told me he had been skiing. That became my goal: to get out of hospital and to learn to ski. I didn't know at the time that I would become a gold medallist in the European championships.

In order to do that, I had to accept what had happened to me. The more I looked internally, the more I realised that we have this untapped power, resilience and energy inside of us. I call it the little person inside. I believe we all have it. I don't have any magical ingredient. I'm not superhuman. I'm not special. We should use ourselves as our greatest source of inspiration. You don't need to look externally for inspiration.

Motorcycling would become another passion. As with the Navy, I went about getting permission to race motorbikes by looking at the arguments as to why I couldn't do it: then I'd overcome whatever obstacle was placed before me. Gradually I jumped through all the hoops.

In Great Britain, you're either a motorcycle racer or you're not, and that was what I was fighting for. It's a really fabulous thing for me as a paraplegic to go and compete with able-bodied cyclists. It's a little bit of escapism - because for that moment in time I'm simply a racer and I'm not being treated any differently from someone able-bodied. I feel free from my

wheelchair, my disability and the restrictions that have been placed on me due to an accident.

I set up a charity called The Bike Experience. I take disabled people and help them to learn to ride motorbikes. We've taught over 400 people so far. Some people come once and it's the catalyst for them to go off and do other things - whether that be triathlons or fly planes. Some people come back and they're able to ride on the road again. You see someone arrive nervous, but when they leave, they look like they can take on the world.

After 13 years of being paralysed, I had a conversation with myself about what it means to be a human being. I asked myself: "How do I validate my existence?". The answer I came up with was: "How many people have you helped?" and I realised that since I've been paralysed I've helped more people than I would have done if I had been able-bodied.

It's a very difficult time right now, and everyone is experiencing change: they're allowed to be upset. Sometimes when you have things that affect your life it sets off these waves or these ripples in your timeline, but it's realising that it is only temporary and the next good time is coming. *f*



Talan Skeels-Piggins



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## Tomorrow's Leaders are Busy Tonight



With Meggie Foster  
by Emily Prescott

**You may not recognise the name but if you have ever ventured onto Twitter or TikTok, you will know the face.**

When the virus hit, Meggie Foster was a 27-year-old trained actor working in an office. She dreamed of performing but because London is so "blimming' expensive" and the industry is "crammed full" of talent she was working a 9-5 job hoping a door into the creative industry would somehow open for her.

Finally, furlough gave her the time to focus on her creative career and she started posting videos online featuring lip-syncs of politicians and celebrities, much to the delight of millions of people in desperate need of some whimsy.

One video, which has been viewed more than 1.5 million times, uses the audio clip of the home secretary's April press briefing announcement, that there had been "300,034,974,000" coronavirus tests on one day. Foster lip-synced Priti Patel's announcement while swigging from bottles of spirits and smoking throughout, before getting out a roll of clingfilm and attempting to use it as a facemask.

In another, which has received nearly 20,000 likes, Meggie lip-syns an interview between ITV news presenter Tom Bradby and Meghan Markle in which Markle admits she struggles with life as a royal. Meggie's Bradby plays the violin and Meghan wipes her tears with a £50 note.

She is in demand. Foster took a call from Robert Peston's production company asking

if she could come up with a video mocking his biggest blooper. She reenacted the awkward moment Peston appeared to say an expletive when the chancellor asked for his question during a press briefing.

Foster playfully presents the ridiculousness of people's own words with her perfectly timed synchs, exaggerated facial expressions and costumes (which are often borrowed from her Dad's wardrobe).

"I think it's sort of an eye-opener that you can actually do it yourself and not wait for the phone to ring. I was definitely that person to wait and see if anything would happen. I'd never sort of gone out there and done it myself and maybe that was because I was scared," Foster tells me.

Her apprehension about putting herself online is understandable, but thankfully, she has not encountered too much meanness. "I haven't really got too much negativity. With acting I knew people could be quite vicious about it. Even on your looks and stuff like that, especially for a girl you've got a load of pressures on you. I'm actually really surprised how I haven't got comments about how I look. I am really shocked about that actually."

She speaks with such buoyancy and enthusiasm, it is easy to believe that she would not be too disheartened by a few nasty comments.

"I have got quite a thick skin, I'm quite a tough cookie when it comes to stuff like trolls. I think if you don't want to watch me, if you don't find me funny then just don't watch them or don't follow me, it's as simple as that. I am not really bothered what people like that think. Obviously if the majority of people were saying that but they're not. The majority of people have been overwhelmingly positive."

Despite her new-found online stardom, Foster is yet to feel the full force of her fame, she tells us from her family home in Oxfordshire.

"A few people sort of recognised me and things like that, but because we have been in lockdown I haven't been out too much

and wearing a mask around, no one can see my face anyway.

"I feel like I am not famous because I have been stuck in my childhood bedroom, with my mum and dad sort of nagging me to pick up my clothes from the floor. So I feel like I'm back at school if anything but we will see. We will see what happens."

When I first reached out to Meggie with an interview request in April, she politely declined. She later said she had taken the advice of her journalist brother and was composing herself before speaking to the media. Since then, the savvy comedian has featured in *The Times* and on *Lorraine*. Now she has an agent and is thinking about next steps.

"I do worry that it is getting boring. I know lip-synching is funny but I don't want to sort of bore people now so I'm trying to spread my wings a bit and see whether there is any more life in other directions. Dreaming big I would love to have The Meggie Show."

Foster, who is continuing on her upward trajectory, has some advice for budding actors and comedians.

"I think my main piece of advice would be: do it yourself. Don't wait for that phone to ring you know, you can create stuff yourself if the work is not coming to you, especially now when theatres are closed.

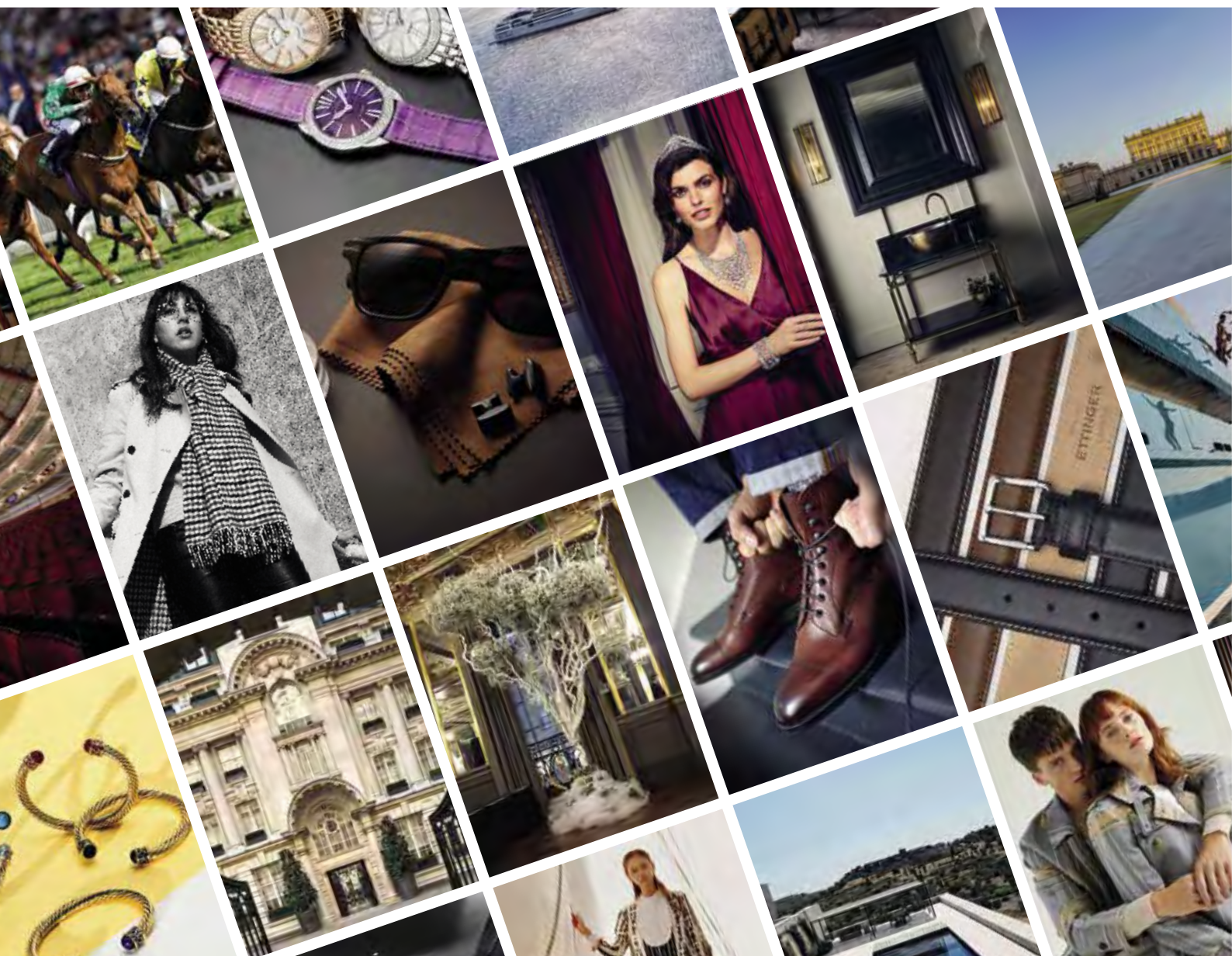
"If you have got sort of, I don't want to be cringe, but a dream or a passion or something you want to get to: you can do it. You can create your own luck." f



Meggie Foster



# THE GAME-CHANGING APP



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# Those are My Principles



With Rosalie Nelson by  
Georgia Heneage

**I**n Australia they have a healthier outlook on how models should look, so I was pretty shocked when I came to the UK, aged 22, and was confronted with an industry which wants their models to appear emaciated and gaunt.

One agency in the UK said they'd take me on, but that I had to lose weight. I was already a size eight - the standard in the industry was to be around a size 6 - but I decided to give it a go. They didn't give me any nutritional diet plan, advice or support, but I went off and completely altered my diet on my own: for four months, I was pretty much just eating fish and veg everyday.

I lost a huge amount of weight and got really close to the measurements they wanted; when I returned they said I was doing really well, but that they wanted me "down to the bone". The woman even pressed on her hips to suggest she wanted mine to stick out more.

I decided to take a break from it all, but started to really miss it: I'd made so many good friends modelling and I hadn't really trained for anything else. So I applied to some more commercial agencies, who encouraged me to be more healthy. The transition made me realise that the fashion industry is uniquely toxic: designers dictate what

size they make the catwalk samples - usually a six - and, since Fashion Week is the pinnacle of the industry, this puts huge pressure on models to be thinner in order to get work.

By chance, my agent called me up and asked whether I'd be interviewed for a Channel 4 news piece ahead of Fashion Week. The news team asked me if I was looking forward to the week ahead, and I explained that I was 'too fat' to appear on the catwalk. The reporter's face was completely shocked: he couldn't believe that I thought I wasn't thin enough.

After the news piece, things started happening quite quickly. In August of 2015 I got in contact with Change.org and started a petition to raise awareness around the issues in the industry. I was so excited when we reached 40,000 signatures: people from all over were sending such powerful stories about themselves or family members who suffered from eating disorders or body dysmorphia because of the way fashion projects an image of beauty and being thin. The more I dug, the more I realised my experience was really common.

Once I reached 100,000 signatures, I went to Downing Street to chat to David Cameron. I presented my petition and we discussed how there were no safeguards for models, no HR and no support for mental health or physical issues. Unfortunately Brexit was announced five days later, so suddenly everyone I'd been speaking to in the politics world just couldn't work on it anymore.

But we've recently picked discussions back up in Westminster. There are so many issues in fashion it's been hard knowing where to start, but one thing I've really been campaigning for is bringing into the school system some kind of awareness around body image and how social media has a dangerous impact on this.

I think part of the reason why there are absolutely no safeguards in the modelling industry is that models are viewed in such a particular light. People think we have it easy; that we get flown around the world, get to wear nice clothes and have our makeup done; that we are so lavishly dipped in money and gold that we don't need help. There hasn't needed to be any reason to help models because people think we have everything in the world. We don't: we are told daily not to smile, not to talk, not to have an opinion on pretty much anything. We are forced to starve ourselves to satisfy the whims of how society views beauty.

Thankfully, the need for models to look bone-thin has slowly begun to change, and the industry is encouraging more normal sizes to enter the fashion mainstream. But even diversity campaigns can be problematic; when designers demonstrate a shift towards a diversity of skin colours, ages and shapes, they brand it as somehow "different" from the norm, as if being anything other than a white skinny girl is not normal, when in reality that's what the average girl looks like.

We need to change our perspective on what "beauty" really means, and we need to encourage people to be comfortable in their skin - whatever colour, shape or size that is. [f](#)

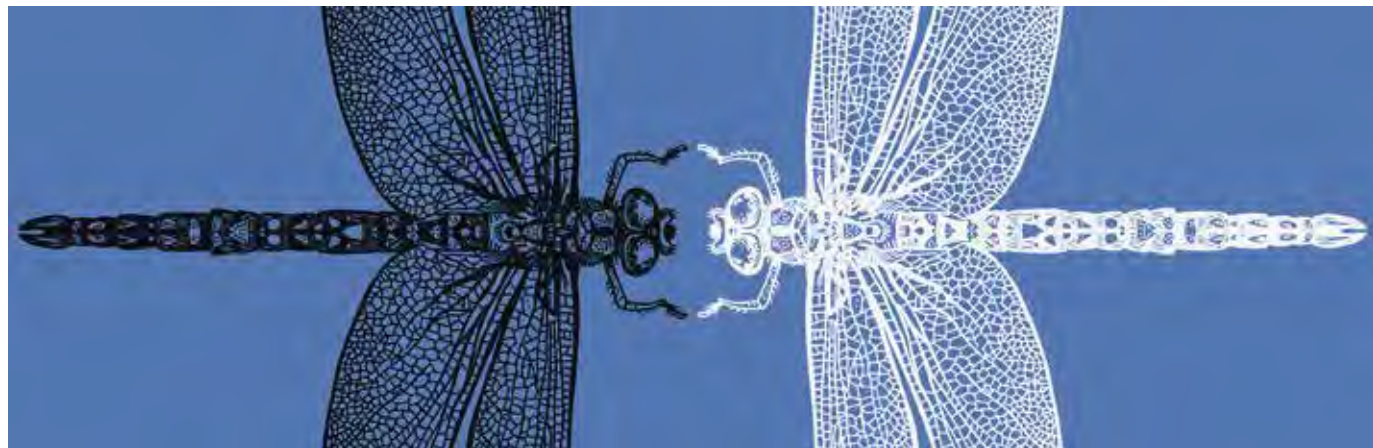


Rosalie Nelson



# Waterfly

THE WATERFLY SEES THE REFLECTION IN THE WATER. IT TAKES NOTE AS THE WATER SHIFTS. HERE'S THE LATEST GOSSIP FROM THE EDUCATION AND EMPLOYABILITY SECTORS



Hamish Jenkinson



## Uneventful times

Spare a thought for the live events industry. *Waterfly* spoke to its leading light Hamish Jenkinson, the brilliantly imaginative founder of The Department. His last job before the pandemic struck was to plan a party for Facebook for 5,000 people in a circus big top tent in Dublin.

That seems a long time ago. Jenkinson tells *Waterfly* that “Rishi Sunak’s announcement in March 2020 – that £12 billion would be made available to help the arts – was the point I realised that it wouldn’t help an agency like ours.” That night, Jenkinson went home and watched *Contagion*: “It gave me an indication of the situation we

were facing.” Things began spiralling downwards from there. “I went into the office to let half of the team know they would be made redundant,” he says. “That took its toll personally.”

But were there positives? The pandemic also afforded Jenkinson the time to “raise investment for, and start planning, a new immersive experience”.

Immersive theatre, according to Jenkinson, was already becoming “the dominant entertainment experience, outside of the superstar touring experiences”.

“I firmly believe that we will experience our own Roaring Twenties after the pandemic is over, much like the world did after the last great pandemic, which saw an explosion of culture and creativity.” May that be so.

## Google it

Gaps in access to education continue to worry Chair of the Education Select Committee Robert Halfon MP, especially when it comes to the availability of crucial technology. “The government has supplied around 600-700,000 computers already, but it’s taken a very long time,” he tells *Waterfly*.

Part of the reason for this has been that

they’ve had to buy thousands of laptops and get them made from scratch, which they say is a “really difficult thing to do”. So what would Halfon recommend? “Personally I would have just given teachers vouchers, or picked Google Chrome books instead of Microsoft computers, which cost less and don’t need special software.” Page 1-Gates 0.

## In sickness and in health

Jeremy Hunt has not only watched as the health secretary Matt Hancock has conducted his old job, as Chair of the Health Select Committee, he’s also scrutinising his performance of it. “I certainly don’t envy him,” Hunt tells *Waterfly*, adding that he gets job satisfaction from the new role. “I can hopefully make a difference to the way the government handles the coronavirus pandemic and I can continue to work on areas I’m passionate about like patient safety and mental health. So I wouldn’t swap positions with him no!”

And what role should business leaders play? “Those who have found innovative ways to keep going during the crisis not only served their customers and staff well but the country as a whole, whether that was through supplying critical

PPE or simply continuing to generate tax revenues. They demonstrated the entrepreneurial spirit we will need to get through these tough times and they deserve our support and praise.’ But in channelling the entrepreneurial spirit of his next-door neighbour, has Hancock gone a step too far? Hunt didn’t say.



## Collectively Concerned

Tough times for the gym business. But Core Collective Gyms CEO Jason de Savary, a company which has sites in Kensington, Knightsbridge and St John’s Wood, explains why online provision is attractive to customers: “People like to feel that someone is watching them or that they’re there with other people, it keeps them a bit more accountable.”

But the future, he says, is still in the gym. “Just being in one place can feel imprisoning, you eat at home, work at home and exercise at home. It can be very depressing.”

And it’s hard for de Savary to stay connected to the workforce. Core Collective works with freelance trainers, and many freelancers have found it difficult to access government support. “It’s tricky,” de Savary admits. “The reason they’re freelance is because they have their own personal training businesses and other incomes so we can’t do anything for them, but they do seem to be coping well. We do weekly check-in’s and group workouts together.” Dust off that gym bag then.

## A major comparison

Professor Lee Elliot Major, the UK’s only social mobility professor, makes the point to *Waterfly* that it’s not about the

Bay Burdett



apprenticeships you can create but how you react to them: “In terms of the links between education and the workplace, we pale in comparison to most other education systems: Australia has, for instance, developed much stronger vocational options and headteachers celebrate the students who get really good apprenticeships as much as those who go to top universities.” Major adds: “We still suffer from a cultural assumption that academic success is somehow the be-all and end-all.” Touché.

## Kickstarting Kickstart

*Waterfly* has discovered that since Kickstart began, many potential placements have been jammed in a slow process which stopped small businesses from applying directly for funding; instead, they’ve had to bunch together and apply via a mediator.

Ben Taylor, founder of a home working portal called HomeWorking Club, was keen to give young people a chance to learn the ropes of internet marketing

when he heard about Kickstart, but was put off from applying altogether. “When I actually started to look into it, I saw that you needed 30 people, had to go via Job Centre Plus, and didn’t know who you were going to get. Businesses way bigger than mine have been put off by it,” he said.

Those who did proceed experienced difficulties. Bay Burdett, founder and CEO of food provider Bay’s Kitchen, experienced a “huge delay” in the process. “We sent our application in October and were told we should hear back in four weeks,” says Burdett. “We heard nothing, and then in December we got a generic email from Adecco, our chosen gateway provider. We’re only just managing to get the ad live this week.” Something for Rishi Sunak to mull over during the summer.

## The art of nursing

In an original response to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, founded in 1932 by Lady Barber, is set to become the first ever museum with its own “Nurse in Residence”. In a creative twist on the familiar concept of the artist-in-residence the organisation will welcome Jane Nicol, Senior Lecturer at the University of Birmingham’s School of Nursing and a registered nurse who has specialised in palliative and end of life care. Art is sometimes described as a healer, but during a pandemic it makes sense to plump for the real thing. [f](#)





ABOUT E2E

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AI POWERED  
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# PUSH THE BOUNDARIES: SIR RICHARD BRANSON

CHRISTOPHER JACKSON INTERVIEWS THE LEGENDARY VIRGIN  
FOUNDER AS HE NAVIGATES THE CHOPPY WATERS OF THE PANDEMIC

**F**ame will sometimes have a blurring effect. Public presence sustained over a long period of time can create a confusing image. During a long and varied career, so much is attempted and commented on, it is as if longstanding celebrity contains geological layers. To get to the truth of what made someone famous in the first place is a form of excavation.

At 70, Sir Richard Branson has reached this level of fame. We think we know him, but he has come to mean different things to different people. The range of his businesses interests makes his precise contribution to the world difficult to pin down: from trains, music, journalism, space travel, healthcare and - what has given him many headaches during the pandemic - aviation, there is little he hasn't attempted.

Indeed the three words 'Sir Richard Branson' are themselves a sort of paradox, the first word suggestive of establishment accommodation, and the latter two synonymous with daredevilry, rebellion and harmless fun.

Branson was born in Blackheath, London to soldier and barrister James Branson, and Eve, an entrepreneur. Eve sadly died of Covid-19 in January 2021, aged 96. When we caught up with Branson shortly afterwards, he was happy to engage extensively, and submitted to our questions always in good humour, making sure we had what we wanted.

## Virgin Mother

When I offer my condolences, he replies that it's his mother's spirit he prefers to recall: "I don't believe in mourning, I believe in celebrating incredible lives - and my mum really did lead quite a remarkable life," he explains. "She had such a zest for life - and even at 96 years old she had the same energy and wit she had when I was a boy. When I was growing up she was always working on a project; she was inventive, fearless, relentless - an entrepreneur before the word existed."

Eve's example gave the young Branson an ingredient the entrepreneur cannot

do without: gumption. Educated at Scaitcliffe School in Egham, and then at Stowe in Buckinghamshire, Branson would give the UK educational system short shrift, famously leaving school at 16. Partly due to his dyslexia, and partly because of inherent restlessness, one gets the sense that he never felt comfortable in educational institutions. With a can-do spirit the world would later come to associate with his companies, he simply set about creating structures better suited to his gifts.

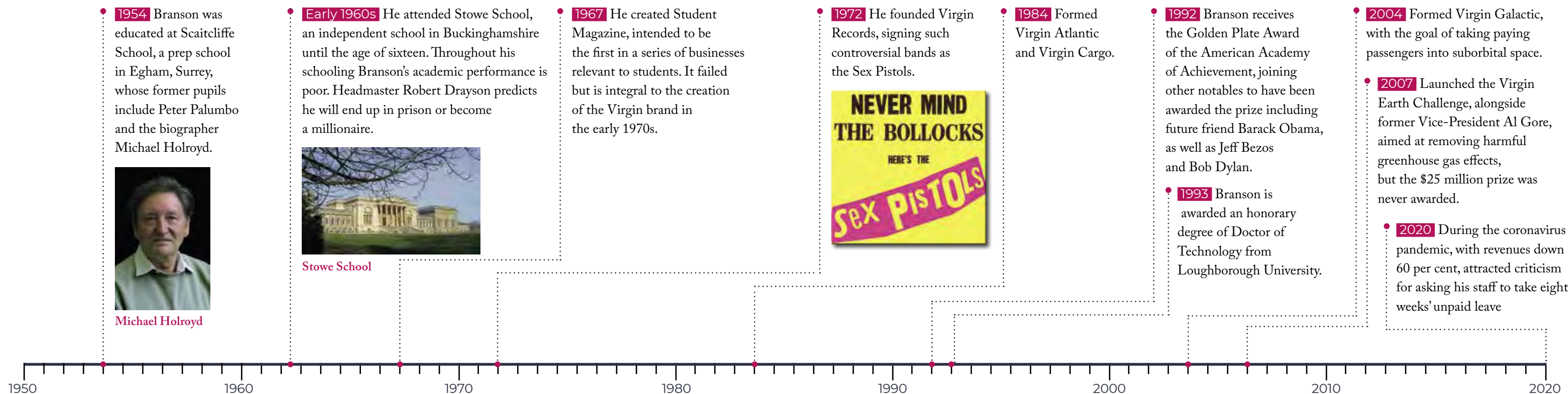
Parental support empowered him in that decision: "The values that my mum ►



Eve and Richard Branson (Virgin.com)



# BRANSON'S EDUCATION TIMELINE:



► and dad instilled in my siblings and I are lessons that have lasted a lifetime," he recalls. "They taught us the importance of hard work, of not taking yourself too seriously, of treating people how you wish to be treated, of entrepreneurship, and so much more. They showed us how family is the most important thing in the world and surrounded us with love and encouragement."

Of course, it was never plain-sailing. Not long before James's death, Branson *mère* and *père* gave an interesting interview to the *Wall Street Journal* where Eve in particular eschews diplomatic language: "Let's say he [Richard] was unusual at school. We didn't know whether he was 99 per cent stupid and one per cent rather exceptional. We hung onto that one per cent."

This is the sort of joke only an affectionate mother would make and

there's no doubting Branson as he recalls: "I was inspired by how my mum used her entrepreneurial energy to help others. I spend a lot of time now working with the Virgin Group's foundation, Virgin Unite, to challenge the unacceptable and to try and find entrepreneurial solutions to some of the world's biggest problems. My mum is always an inspiration, spurring me on and encouraging me to think bigger."

## School's Out

At first, thinking big meant leaving school. Many who have been to Stowe school, with its spreading Capability Brown gardens, will feel they could happily walk there forever. It is telling that Branson was immediately restless: even at this distance, knowing what he went on to achieve, you can sense his itchiness to get on.

In 1967, Branson founded *Student* magazine - a magazine not dissimilar in intention and readership to the one

you are reading. It still seems an odd choice of first venture for someone with professed dyslexia. At the time, he thought it would be the making of him. In reality, it turned out to be something as important: his first mistake. "I'm only where I am today because I've failed along the way," he tells me. "That's a failure which always stands out to me, failing to convince a major publishing house to invest in *Student* magazine. Even as a teenager, I had a huge vision for a whole host of new *Student* enterprises, from magazines to travel companies to banks. Unsurprisingly, they ran a mile."

Was that beneficial to him in the long run? "I didn't know it back then, but this was the seed of an idea that grew into becoming the Virgin brand. I carried on building businesses I loved and believed in. Fast-forward half a century and Virgin spans even more sectors than I dreamed of as a teenager."

You get the sense that these failures

give him perspective now during the difficulties of the pandemic. When Branson founded the Virgin record store in Oxford Street in the early 1970s, there was a dicey episode when Branson's parents had to re-mortgage the family home after Branson ran into difficulty with the tax authorities, having been caught selling discount records for export only. Eve would later tell the *Wall Street Journal* in her brisk way: "That was pretty horrifying."

Over time Virgin Records - whose value had been increased by the signing of numerous artists, including Mike Oldfield and his *Tubular Bells* album - would go global and eventually sell for around £560 million. Even then, Branson wasn't completely out of the woods. Libel litigation lay ahead between the newly founded Virgin Atlantic and British Airways. Branson won a record payment of \$945,000 in damages, famously sharing the award with the employees.

## Good Company

As significant as his financial success, Branson had created a style of doing business which caught the public imagination. In time, column inches accrued in a way not wholly dissimilar from the way in which on the other side of the Atlantic they accrued for Donald

Trump. Different in numerous other respects, both were perfect magazine fodder for the excesses of the 1980s.

However allegedly shy, Branson was a natural front man for his businesses. Keen to find out more about his business ethos, I ask him how he keeps his staff happy and motivated. ►



Healing the rift with Ivana Trump (Liz Brewer)





Barack Obama kitesurfing at Necker Island, just after leaving office in 2016 (Press Association)

► “I’ve always said, take care of your employees and they’ll take care of your business,” Branson replies.

And that’s a principle still true in the age of Covid-19? “While it’s been the most challenging year for all businesses, what has kept me going is the spirit and resilience from our people across the Virgin Group. Our people really are the thing that makes our brand different and special, we are lucky to have a brilliant group of people who believe in what they’re trying to do, which is to change business for good.”

Of course, most businesses will parrot that line. With Branson you sense his sincerity – partly because he was among the first to talk like this. “Over the years we have always tried to give our people the freedom to be themselves and to treat them like adults,” Branson elaborates. What does this mean day-to-day? “One example is our unlimited holiday policy at Virgin Management. We introduced this a few years ago and the response has been very positive. The assumption behind it is that people will only take leave when they feel comfortable that they and their team are up to date on every project and

that their absence won’t damage the business.”

What does he think of keeping regular office hours? “We should focus on what people get done, not on how many hours or days they work. We don’t need a vacation policy,” he says.

I’m keen to find out if this is corroborated by people who have worked for Branson. Oliver Osgood, formerly CEO of Virgin Pure, and now the CEO of Masterplant, a fast-growing portfolio of cannabis brands and assets, tells me: “The reality of Virgin is pretty close to what you’re seeing or reading. It’s a progressive company that is looking to change the way people work so it becomes more human and less corporate – and at the same time trying to do corporate things. There are companies where the outside is a reflection of the inside and I’d say that’s a fair comment here.”

Osgood is one of many who feel a loyalty towards Branson, having seen his operation from the inside.

With that in mind, I ask Branson about the new trend for flexible working. In fact, Branson was running Virgin

like a pandemic-conscious company before anyone had heard of Wuhan or the South African variant: “We’ve offered flexible working at Virgin Management for many years, long before the pandemic,” he explains. “I’ve never worked in an office, or ‘nine to five’ for that matter. Obviously, this doesn’t work for every single role across our businesses, for example a pilot, but we try and encourage it where it’s possible.”

### Poolside Tales

With Branson, I keep finding myself reminded of the Noel Coward dictum: “The thing about work is, it’s so much more fun than fun.” Branson is sufficiently retiring not to be too garrulous about his lifestyle; on the other hand he’s gregarious enough to own a private island and invite celebrities to it.

If you want to know the real stories about Necker, the private island he has owned since 1978, you have to talk to those around him.

In person, Branson is light-hearted, even goofy. Fred Finn, travel consultant and old friend of Branson, warns me: “Never go round a swimming pool when Richard’s there, you’ll end up in the pool whether you’ve got your clothes on or not.”

If you were imagining there’s a hierarchy as to who ends up in the pool and who doesn’t, you’d be mistaken. Liz Brewer, the noted impresario, recalls: “I had to heal a rift between Ivana Trump and Richard after he cheekily performed his ‘party trick’ at the Business Traveller of the Year Awards at the Hilton Park Lane, turning her upside-down.” This appears not to have gone down well with Trump wife no.1. To fix the matter, Brewer resorted to shuttle diplomacy conducted through cunning table placement: “I placed him at Ivana’s end of the 120-guest table at the engagement party I arranged at Syon Park before her marriage to her then future husband Riccardo Mazzuchelli. ►

## A Personal Tribute

I first met Sir Richard Branson at the Indian High Commission in London many years ago. During that meeting Richard asked me what I did for a living. I told him I was a businessman and ran my own charity as well.

Richard never asked me what’s my business but enquired about the charity. I told him that my wife and I had set up the Loomba Foundation in memory of my late mother, to support and educate the children of poor widows in India. To my surprise and delight, Richard, told me that he would like to help the charity and I asked him if that was a promise. He said, “Yes”, and we shook hands on it.

True to his promise, I received a letter from Richard almost a year later telling me that Virgin Atlantic were starting to fly to India soon. He would like to invite me as his guest on their inaugural flight and promote the Loomba Foundation on the flight. A Loomba Foundation brochure was put on every seat and, in addition, a video was played before landing in Delhi in which Richard, himself, made an appeal to support our charity. Both, the brochure and video were produced by Virgin Atlantic with no cost to the Loomba Foundation.

In 2004, Richard agreed to attend and support our charity event in Delhi. The event was also attended by our President, Mrs. Cherie Blair, wife of the British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and a delegation of 40 supporters of the Loomba Foundation from the UK. They all travelled to India on Virgin Atlantic with the generosity of Richard.

At the event, which was also attended by some of India’s most senior politicians and business leaders, Richard conducted our auction to raise money for the education of the children of poor widows. In addition, he pledged to educate 500 students in five Indian states for a period of five years. It was a huge support amounting to about £500,000 and I was truly touched by his generous contribution.

It was at this moment that I requested Richard to accept my invitation to become the “Patron-in-Chief” of the Loomba Foundation, which he very kindly accepted.

Over the years, Richard has made an appeal on BBC Radio 4, giving much needed exposure and awareness about the charity. He has always supported our fundraising events by giving items for auction. Virgin Atlantic has raised thousands of pounds through the “Change for Children” appeals on its flights worldwide. We are the only charity to have such three appeals.

In 2006, the Loomba Foundation in partnership with Sir Richard Branson’s charity Unite launched a project to support 1500 HIV orphans in five Townships surrounding Johannesburg, which was managed by a local charity called Great Hearts. It was a super event where my wife and I met Richard’s wife and his lovely parents. An unforgettable encounter.

Richard is a man with vision, an entrepreneur, a successful businessman and a big-hearted philanthropist. I am hugely grateful for all his efforts, participation and contributions to help and support the work of the Loomba Foundation since 2004. We couldn’t have done it without him.

As patron-in-chief he is a great ambassador for the Loomba Foundation.



Lord Loomba

(Roger Harris)



► All was healed from then on and Ivana returned to flying Upper Class Virgin.”

I cannot help asking whether the 45th President of the United States was there at any of those occasions? “I seem to recollect that Richard had lunch with the Donald once, having been invited by him to his home, when one of Trump’s ventures had gone under,” Brewer replies, adding: “These two in personality were poles apart, both in motive and manner.”

It is difficult, even so, not to conjure an image of Trump rotating through the air, an orange whirl of confusion turning into resentment, as a sniggering Branson scuttles away. More seriously, it is worth noting that while Trump has his name on many things – sometimes, it seems, on *everything* – Branson’s publicity is undertaken for Virgin as a brand.

#### Presidents and Lions

Presidential friendships turn out to be a leitmotif of Branson’s life. In particular, he became friends with former South African President Nelson Mandela.

Branson tells me: “Nelson Mandela remains one of my biggest heroes and a global symbol of liberation, hope and equality.” What memories does he have of the great statesman? “I have many lovely memories of spending time together. From working on human rights issues together to forming The Elders [a group of global leaders working independently for peace], his humour and humility always stood out to me. He redefined what it means to be a great leader and taught us all how powerful forgiveness can be.”

Another figure he got to know well is the 44th President of the United States Barack Obama: “I have had the privilege of spending some time with Barack, too,” Branson tells me. “It was a huge honour to be able to invite him and Michelle down to the British Virgin Islands for a break after Barack finished his second term as President and the

family left the White House.” So what’s he like? “Barack has an insatiable curiosity for information and is always keen to learn. He also approaches every situation with a natural optimism, humour and warmth. All of these things makes him a great listener and a great leader.”

In addition to this sociable side, there is also Branson’s much chronicled fearless streak. Fred Finn recalls: “I took him on safari with his kids for two weeks at Ol Pejeta ranch, then owned by Tiny Rowland. There were 18 lions in a three-acre chicken-wire cage. We turned up just as they were about to throw meat towards this rugby lineout of lions. Richard crouched near the fence and took a photograph of one lion. Then another jumped at Richard through the fence, and Richard reeled back, ending on top of the Land Rover. Instead of being frightened, he said, “Put my son on my shoulders, let’s do that again.”

## “If you get knocked down, get back up. Over and over again”

So fearless then? Finn replies: “Either that or publicity! After that he asked Tiny Rowland to buy the place and Tiny said: “When you’re good enough in business you can talk to me.”



With his friend Nelson Mandela (Virgin.com)

Rowland died in 1998, but if he were alive today would he think Branson ‘good enough in business’? The figures don’t look too bad. Branson’s net worth is estimated by Forbes at \$6.5 billion. Inevitably for someone of his stature he has had his detractors. In 2019, he attracted criticism for suing the government over Chris Grayling’s decision to disqualify Virgin Trains from tendering for the West Coast route. At issue was the question of whether Branson would take on a significant share of liability for paying out pensions to some 346,000 staff while running the services. The High Court took the government’s side.

#### Turbulent Skies

When I approached Grayling for a comment, he kindly declined, but added that he is spending his time on the back benches working with the aviation sector to keep it alive during the tribulations of the pandemic. One would assume that Grayling backs the £1.2 billion rescue deal Branson secured on behalf of Virgin Atlantic with the government in June 2020.

That, too, was a difficult time PR-wise. As part of the negotiations, Branson offered to put Necker Island forward as security. At a time when many were struggling with lockdown in small flats, it was irritating for some to be reminded that he had a private island at all. ►

► The resulting deal is a reminder too that the Virgin empire is by no means owned entirely by Branson. In fact, 49 per cent of Virgin Atlantic is owed by Delta; Forbes recently reported that Virgin owes the minority shareholder £200 million. But the fact remains that Branson has done what entrepreneurs do: survived. How has he managed during such a difficult time? “Resilience is a lesson we can all learn every day,” Branson tells me. “Resilience comes from failing and learning from those failures – and learning to still move forward. We all fail. Making mistakes is part of being human. If you can pair your failures with an openness to learn, curiosity and a sense of humour, you’re on your way to discovering resilience.”

## “Resilience is a lesson we can all learn every day”

This feels like earned wisdom and it’s something he’s keen to pass on. What would he say to the younger generation of entrepreneurs? “I always encourage them to try and find opportunities in challenges and if you get knocked down, to get back up. Over and over again.” There is quite a lot packed into that “over and over again”. Branson, I’m reminded, is very seasoned now; his youthful approach almost makes you forget that he has reached his three score and ten.

He continues: “It’s also important to learn to rest when you need to, rather than quit. In the face of great challenges, sometimes you just need some downtime to reassess and look at the problem from a different angle. I often have my best thinking time when I’m doing some exercise that I enjoy, like kitesurfing or cycling. Resilience isn’t a constant show of strength, it’s lots of little steps in the right direction that all eventually add up.”

#### Social Network

Branson is also enlightening on the question of social media. “It’s changed everything,” he says. “When I first started out in business, things were a lot different – I used to reply to letters and if it was urgent, I’d be on the phone. I enjoy checking on my social media feeds and find it really interesting to see everyone’s views on what’s going on in the world. I often blog and post about the issues I care about, from celebrating achievements in the Virgin family to trying to end the death penalty or working to encourage drug policy reform.”

Is there anyone whose social media use he particularly admires? “One of the biggest benefits of social media is brands now have a direct link to their customers and communities. Look at brands like Gymshark; the founder, Ben Francis, has used social media to build the brand from the very beginning. They have a truly digital-first approach, and were ahead of the curve.” Does he feel kinship with Francis? “Ben started the business in 2012, and thanks in part to its rapid growth on social media, it’s recently been valued at £1 billion. Ben started the business when he was 19 from his parents’ garage in Birmingham, while juggling studying at university in Birmingham, and evening shifts delivering pizzas.” That certainly reminds me of a young Branson.

Branson gives no signs of slowing down. How does he see technology fitting into Virgin’s path forward? “We’ve always used technology to elevate the experience for our customers wherever we can. From Virgin Atlantic being the first to offer seatback entertainment in all classes back in the early 90s, to Virgin Money recently launching a digital bank in Australia, or personalising your stay at a Virgin Hotel through its Lucy app, to earning and spending rewards across the Virgin Group with our loyalty programme Virgin Red. The opportunities are endless.”

#### In the Penalty Box

Of late Branson has become particularly interested in the death penalty. “It’s inhumane and barbaric, fails to deter or reduce crime and is disproportionately used against minorities and other vulnerable and marginalised groups,” he explains. When did he become interested in the issue? “It was after hearing powerful personal stories of miscarriage of justice, such as Anthony Ray Hinton, who spent 28 years on Alabama’s death row for crimes he couldn’t have committed. Unfortunately, there are many harrowing stories similar to his.”

Branson believes that business doesn’t do enough to rally round on these key issues. What sets his latest endeavour apart is precisely this sense of the powerful joining forces on behalf of the public good. “I’m proud to have joined a global group of executives, supported by the Responsible Business Initiative for Justice, in launching the Business Leaders’ Declaration Against the Death Penalty. Together, we are highlighting the case for abolition and calling on governments to end the practice. If you are a business leader reading this – I would urge you to join our movement.”

#### Branson’s Legacy

So what is Branson’s legacy likely to be? Osgood is particularly insightful on what the group has achieved: “Virgin Galactic is the first time he’s tried to start a new industry. Usually the group targets overweight, inefficient industries.” Osgood starts to list them: “Doing trains better, doing phones better, doing broadband better, doing flights, doing banking better, creating Virgin Money lounges, rather than those horrible branches with people behind glass.” Then he hits on it: “Creating an environment where the customer feels happy. It’s the stewardess who makes you sure you have a comfortable flight and doesn’t bug you about your baggage allowance.” ►



► That seems an impressive contribution in its own right, and you can feel Osgood's enthusiasm - one of many aspiring CEOs who has learned much from Branson's approach.

Meanwhile, Liz Brewer recalls a magnetic friend: "Richard is a truly refreshing 'ideas man', entrepreneur, humanitarian and someone who always impressed me with his positive attitude and the ability to stay firmly focused."

So having dug beneath the geological layers of his fame, what is Branson really like? Uniqueness is never far from a discussion of him.

To interview a billionaire can be a mixed experience. I recall the unhappy

obsequious acolytes around a certain aviation entrepreneur I once spent several days with, but all of Branson's people seem happy. I recall the shifty banality of a media mogul of my acquaintance, but the Virgin Group feels transparent, and fundamentally benevolent. Above all, there is sometimes the sense that wealthy individuals aren't enjoying life in some fundamental way; the opposite must be said about Branson. The only way for a rich man to be saved from the corruption of wealth is for money to be tethered to purpose. Branson's life isn't in the end primarily a story about the acquisition of money: it is about

doing good, attempting the difficult or even the impossible, and doing it in the sunshine. It is this which makes him a hero to many.

Osgood recalls: "When he's in the room, everyone's excited. He claims to be a shy guy but I don't believe that for a minute. He does get nervous. It's more the aura, and the way he conducts himself. Lots of people see him cynically. He takes risks, and his intentions are good. But the businesses have a purpose: they're good for people, and good for planet."

Good for people, good for planet. That's not a bad epitaph - and it's certainly one he's earned. **f**



Space Odyssey: with Virgin Galactic, Branson is looking to take paying customers into space (Virgin Galactic/Instagram)

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# Why poetry must not be demoted on the national curriculum

GEORGE ACHEBE ON A FINITO WORLD CAMPAIGN TO REINSTATE THE SUBJECT POST COVID-19

**When *Finito World* spoke to former shadow schools minister Margaret Greenwood recently, she recalled an episode during the 1970s, before the national curriculum even came in. Greenwood was teaching a particularly difficult class in secondary school. “It was a real challenge,” she recalls. “But then I hit on an idea. I was going to give them all poetry books to read to themselves, and I was going to say: ‘This is a quiet reading lesson.’”**

It was the sort of inspiration which could be permitted to strike in those comparatively targets-free days. What’s more, it worked – though some of her fellow teachers were sceptical. “I remember one teacher looked at me askance and said ‘You’ll never get them to sit still,’” Greenwood continues. “But I went to the library and got all the poetry books and dished them out and explained that this was what we were going to be doing every Tuesday.”

The strategy took time to yield results. “It was fascinating. At first, there was a struggle and a bit of resistance. Then they got into it. We need to let teachers be the professionals they are.”

It’s a story about teaching, yes, but it’s also a tale about poetry. It posits the idea that poetry is capable of crossing boundaries, of overcoming indifference. It suggests that a poem – even a line of poetry – can alter the course of a life.

Yet if you look at recent government policy, it seems to tend rather in the opposite direction. It began with a storm last year – in the world of poetry, a storm usually amounts to a single article in *The Guardian*. In this case – a measure of the seriousness of the issue – there were two articles in *The Guardian*.

The cause of the storm? This was to do with Ofqual’s decision to make poetry optional at the GCSE level. The ruling states that for this year students must compulsorily take a paper on Shakespeare, but that they can choose two out of three from the 19th-century novel, a modern drama or novel, and poetry. Poet and teacher Kate Clanchy summed it up: “For the first time, poetry is a choice.”

## Under Pressure

The indignation – in Clanchy’s article, and also evident in a similar piece by poet Kadish Morris – was open to some objections. In the first place, Shakespeare is nothing if not a poet – and has for five hundred years proven a pretty good ambassador for poetry. Meanwhile, much modern drama – especially TS Eliot – deals in verse, and its prose dramatists – one thinks of Pinter and Beckett – tend to be poets as well. So it wasn’t quite the dagger through the poetic heart which it was reported as.

Secondly, teachers are, of course, able to teach poetry anyhow regardless of what Ofqual says. When I spoke to a secondary teacher friend, who asked not to be named, she said, “It’s not like my pupils aren’t exposed to poetry; they are. All this sort of thing does is demoralise teachers.”

When *Finito World* approached Ofqual for an explanation, a spokesperson further explained that the changes are temporary and “designed to free up teaching time and reduce pressure on students”. In other words it’s a specifically pandemic-based change, which should be repealed once we return to normal. Even Clanchy seemed to admit this in her article: “Plenty of teachers will stick with the poems, especially if

they’ve already studied them” she wrote.

In addition, to this Ofqual pointed out to us in their statement that exam boards retain the freedom to add to the common core if they wish. The Department for Education didn’t reply to our request for comment.

## Not Rocket Science

So is the whole thing a storm in a teacup? Well, not quite. In the first place, Clanchy surely has a point when she draws attention to a double standard: “The content of double science – the popular three-in-one science GCSE – is presumably also, as Ofqual says of poetry, difficult to deliver online, but Ofqual isn’t telling teachers they can pick between chemistry and biology next year providing they stick with the physics.

“It’s a reminder that this decision feeds into poetry’s worst fears about itself – about its sliding into irrelevance. ▶

## WORK

**I**’ve made up mortar and laid bricks  
I wrote a poem in couplets  
I’ve torn down trees and planted seeds  
I plucked a metaphor from weeds  
I’ve tried journalism  
I used my imagination  
I’ve been a salesman of many things  
I know meaning  
I’ve taught class and been taught a lesson  
I continue my education  
I’ve worn uniforms and three-layer masks  
I stick to my task  
These are a few of my occupations  
They gave me this poem  
*Gareth Writer-Davies.*

## METAL FINISHING

**N**obody worked like the West Midlanders.  
I scrambled off my bike from one sharp frost  
to find a driver dozing in his van.  
God knows when he set off from Birmingham  
to have his tooling first in Monday’s queue,  
be “Just in Time”, words spat by me and you  
as by steamed vats of acid or oxide we plated, coated, fought off rust,  
then dried laser-cut tools in our Victorian mews.  
“Like Dickens!” grinned the driver while he chewed  
three o’clock lunch, then roared down our back lane.

We quit. Accounts and knees reported pain.  
Small margins were not hard to understand,  
for decades, we wired robot parts by hand.  
There was untarnished love in this, no doubt.  
Our buildings saved us, sold, walls razed, dug out.  
Milk bottles crash. I wake. It must be four.  
I listen while the van throbs from our door.

*Alison Brackenbury.*



Alison Brackenbury, poet

▶ This is probably misplaced: when we have a funeral or a wedding – that is, when we really want to say something important to one another – we tend to reach for the music and springiness of poetry ahead of prose. That will probably always be the case.

But there wasn’t a similar storm over the optional nature of drama or the Victorian novel to quite the same extent. In the first instance, in an age of theatres closing, drama writers are more concerned about their works being put on again than they are about their texts being studied. And the Victorian novel, regularly adapted for film, seems invulnerable.

Poetry is different; it still has a feeling of fragility. As Alison Brackenbury, one of our greatest living poets, told *Finito World*: “Many people only know – and value – those poems which they encountered at school, especially if they learned them by heart. If they don’t come across poetry which appeals to them in their curriculum, the one chance may be gone.”

The Chair of the Education Select Committee Robert Halfon MP also expressed his worries: “In some ways what the government has done is understandable because of Covid-19,” he tells *Finito World*. “There are worries that with the Fourth Industrial Revolution, 28 per cent of jobs might be lost to young people by 2030, and so the curriculum has to adapt and change.” But then Halfon pauses, thinks and delivers his verdict: “Having said all that, poetry and literature are one and the same. In my view, you can’t promote one over the other.”

He is also uncertain over whether it’s really such a temporary thing. “DfE is saying this is a temporary measure, and it’s designed to help take the strain off pupils because poetry is perceived as difficult. But temporary measures can become precedent and poetry trains your mind in a very different way.



Robert Halfon, MP

If this becomes permanent it would be very worrying.”

## A Grad to Grind

It can seem to some that since the hyperactive tenure of Michael Gove as Secretary of State for Education, aided and abetted by Dominic Cummings: “English has been shrunk, confined and battered into rote learning and stock responses,” to use Clanchy’s phrase.

Halfon agrees: “Culture has an absolutely important role, not just in the economy but in our society and shaping our lives. It’s not just good for our learning – it’s good for our mental health, and it’s good for expanding our horizons. We don’t want to be a society of Gradgrinds from the Charles Dickens novel where all we want is facts.”

Halfon is reminding us that just at the moment when we are all looking at our mental health, the government appears to be demoting the branch of human affairs most designed to improve it.

Christopher Hamilton-Emery, the poet and former director of the immensely successful Salt Publishing, adds that the question of poetry’s status on the curriculum is relevant also to the increasingly discussed area of social mobility: “There’s a wider context to this and that’s the way kids come into contact with poetry, or orchestral music, or ballet, or opera, or theatre. In this sense, education is the gateway, the space that gives permission to children, and in this context there’s ▶





Tishani Doshi

## POSTCARD FROM WORK

Forgive me, I have been busy with the yellow trumpet flowers. They dance uselessly, slivers of rapture. I know the dishes need washing but the sunbirds are diving in and out of this den of gold. Their dark purple wings are soft nets, intimate with the leaves. Beaks poised to receive nectar. There are days I neglect my beard. I grow tired of digging. I imagine someone else will tend the hem, the torn sleeve. Someone else will pry open the dog's jaw for his evening pill. Our throats are in constant need of shelter.

I've sublet a room to a poet who does not know the price of milk but is ready to lay down her spear and surgical instruments, to worship the roots of this labyrinth. If there is rain and soil, onions will grow. After a day in the field, the poet and I sit around a fire to sing. It is a way of letting death know we mean to hold on. The threshold stays warm. We flick at night with a fly-brush, cheat insects of their audience with a chorus resurrected from silence. Think of the performance of this lament as our hunger, of the armchair in the corner, our repose. Underneath, is a footstool that hides.

*Tishani Doshi.*

► a political and egalitarian component to this debate around poetry."

But Hamilton-Emery adds, only half-jokingly: "I also recognise that poetry is a pain in the arse. Yet it's meant to be awkward, tricky, resistant to authority, dissonant - things that are hard to teach and accommodate, things that can't easily be measured or controlled. Poetry provides a critical citizenship and, I think, helps form the unity of the person and offers a living communion today and indeed through history."

This goes to the heart of the matter - the sense that the Conservative party represents authority, and that poetry is somehow being punished for being anti-establishment. Of course, these sorts of generalisations can never be the whole truth - even if there is often some truth in them. You could probably make a case that from Philip Larkin and WB Yeats to TS Eliot and Ezra Pound, there were more "great" right-wing poets in the 20th century than among their left wing counterparts.

### The Dance of Life

And yet one wonders whether there is a sense in which in our technology-driven, factual lives we have ceased to credit marvels and insodoing come to see poetry as somehow wishy-washy, and even insufficiently grounded in the commercial. Tishani Doshi is a world famous writer and dancer who continues to make poetry the centre of her life. She speaks revealingly of the poetry and the administration sides of her being: "I studied business administration and communications before ditching it for poetry, so I can get around economics and accountancy alright, but that's not to say I thrill in it. I move in waves. Sometimes I'm terribly productive about everything - to-do lists and all. Other times I want to be left alone to watch the flowers."

It is this idea that the government no longer wants us to watch the flowers

which riles people so much when this kind of decision is made. But Doshi is adamant that we need a more nuanced conversation: "One of my first jobs was to teach an introduction to poetry and fiction class to students at Johns Hopkins University."

"It was a required class, most of my students were pre-med or engineering. I like to think as a result that in future dentist waiting rooms, there may be a volume of Elizabeth Bishop lying around, or that someone designing a bridge might dip into the poems of Imtiaz Dharker for inspiration."

Halfon agrees: "My reading goes into my subconscious. It helps me when I'm writing articles - I may think of things and quote things and use metaphors. It just infuses my thoughts and the way I think. Something permeates like a beautiful stew that's been cooking for a long time - and it always tastes much nicer on the second or third day of eating it."

Doshi adds: "I don't know what the UK government's motivations for demoting poetry are, but I hope usefulness was not a factor. Everything is connected. I can't imagine any kind of life that doesn't need the intuition and imagination of poetry."

WH Auden once wrote that "poetry makes nothing happen", adding that it "survives in the valley of its being said, where executives would never want to tamper." It seems that in being so lofty it has made itself vulnerable to demotion.

Yet the poets one meets tend to be tougher than you might think - they cannot afford to be Keatsian and head in the clouds. They have to work. To kickstart its campaign in this area then, *Finito World* has asked a select few poets to produce poems about their work, which have been distributed throughout this article. We'll update on progress in a subsequent issue. f

## FIRST JOB

When the Open University opened, people said it could never work, and was a mad idea; there were only two real universities anyhow. It was my first job and I was terrified.

I got there, knowing no one. A field of mud surrounded lovely Walton Hall, the ancient church and cedars; not far off emerged a new city, Milton Keynes.

There was much that I had to learn fast. Then there was summer school, teaching the great English and Russian novels to students all older than myself. I stayed awake and heard them celebrating through the small hours. I agonised at the thought of public speaking.

I didn't know how vast it would become, but am grateful for all the interesting people I met, the skills that I discovered; thankful, above all, that the Open University taught me to write so as to be understood.

*Merryn Williams.*



Merryn Williams



# How to be a spy



Along the river from Westminster, in Thames House, more than 4,000 people are working to protect the UK against threats to national security. Members of MI5 must be discreet about their work defending the country from espionage and terrorism but former intelligence officer Annie Machon has given FinitoWorld some insider information about MI5's recruitment process and what it is like to be a spy.

MI5 of course refuses to reveal exactly what goes on behind the austere stone-fronted building but they do tell people what the job does not involve. They warn spy-hopefuls to put down their martini glass and throw away the Aston Martin keys. In reality being a spy isn't glamorous and the work is often "routine and painstaking (though vitally important)," they say.

Intelligence officers will be highly trained in espionage techniques. Sometimes they operate openly, declaring themselves as representatives of foreign intelligence services to their host nation. Sometimes they will operate covertly under the cover of other official positions and occasionally they may operate in "deep cover" under false names and nationalities.

Machon, a classics graduate from Girton College, Cambridge, applied to the Foreign Office to become a diplomat in 1990 and then received a mysterious letter from the Ministry of Defence. It told her there may be other jobs she would find more interesting and it asked her to ring a number.

"My first instinctive response, excuse the language, was 'oh f\*\*\* it's MI5.' I don't know why but I was actually quite frightened and thought, why would they want me?" she says.

But when she received the letter, Machon's father, a spy geek and John LeCarré enthusiast was in the room and he encouraged her to call the number.

The recruitment process took 10 months and she was quizzed on various matters from her sexuality to her political views. Eventually Machon was given the job and she began working on countering Irish terrorist threats.

The way Machon was recruited seems far more professional than the way the former head of MI5 Eliza Manningham-Buller entered MI5 in 1974 after an encounter at a drinks party. Indeed, since Machon's job offer, MI5 have professionalised their recruitment process even further. It's far more transparent and people can apply to work for MI5 via its website. People who reach the interview stage will be assessed with competency-based interview questions in which they will be asked for specific examples of past behaviour.

If the interview goes well, there is a thorough vetting process and candidates have to complete detailed questionnaires and provide references. During Machon's final year at MI5 she was trained up as a recruiter. "It was the first year where they put open adverts into newspapers rather than the oblique ones. They had 20,000 applicants most of whom were James Bond wannabes and of course none of them got through. I think out of the 20,000 only five were recruited."

In summary she says, if you want to work for the organisation "you need good organisation, good judgement, good analysis and good team-building skills." While MI5 is responsible for protecting the UK from threats to national security, MI6, which is also known as the Secret Intelligence Service, is responsible for gathering intelligence outside the UK.

Unlike MI5 which is answerable to the Home Secretary, MI6 is answerable to the Foreign Secretary. Sir Richard Dearlove, former head of MI6, says it is a vitally important service even if terrorist threats are seemingly "in abeyance at the moment." When FinitoWorld attended a virtual event with Dearlove before Christmas he said: "The terrorist threat hasn't gone away. It's in abeyance at the moment and it seems that the pandemic has added to the restraints on terrorism but the problem of fundamentalist Islam is still there."

He warned: "It depends on effective cooperation across the international security community and very often these terrorist issues get worse as the groups divide and subdivide and become less cohesive in their attacks

on our interests." In particular he says, he still worries about terrorists getting into areas such as biotechnology. Cyber security is a massive issue for all of us," he adds. Clearly, expertise in these areas would come in useful if you desire a career working within intelligence agencies.



Ever increasingly, it seems MI5 is looking to diversify its workforce in order to respond to a diverse range of threats. "In my day it was very white, mostly male and almost certainly Oxbridge," says Machon. "They understood they had this groupthink problem and also Al Qaeda had appeared over the horizon as the new big terrorist threat so they did realise they need people from more ethnically diverse backgrounds as well."

At the moment 43 per cent of the workforce are women. Machon said: "In my day it was actually about 50:50 women working there but the bulk of the women who worked in the intelligence agencies at that time were working in the registry or working as secretaries."

"I know that over the past 15 years they've been targeting women, even using Mumsnet I think to try and recruit more women," she added. In December 2020 MI5 published a Gender Pay Gap report which shows the mean pay for men is 13 per cent higher than for women. Director Ken McCallum said: "MI5 is committed to accelerating pace to deliver a diverse and inclusive workplace, harnessing and growing the talents of all sorts of people from all sorts of backgrounds to keep the country safe."

Indeed, Machon praised MI5 for receiving awards from the likes of Stonewall for being one of the best LGBT employees. She said: "This is an amazingly fast advance from my time there because when I joined you were not allowed to be homosexual because it might have been used for blackmail. That only changed in 1994 so to go from that to where we are I think is all credit to them."

Although Stonewall had to remain discreet about their work with MI5, Kate Williams who is the Associate Director of Workplace said: "In 2019, MI5 came in fourth place in our Top 100 Employers list, which acknowledges and celebrates organisations who are championing lesbian, gay, bi and trans equality in their workplaces."

Indeed, Anne speaks of the culture positively. "It was a very friendly workplace and it became so very quickly because you can't talk about your life to anyone else so friendships and social groups and everything form very fast on the inside," she explains.

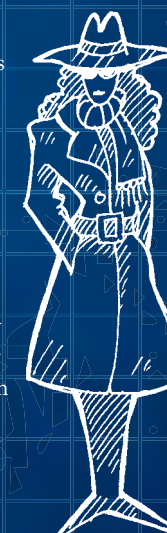
By  
Emily Prescott



But ultimately, Machon ended up on the run for a year after going to the press to expose alleged criminality within MI5. It was back in August, 1997 that Machon went rogue. She and her fellow whistleblower David Shayler were concerned about how various departments within the intelligence service were operating. The pair took a number of classified documents to *The Mail on Sunday*. The very first story to be published alleged that the phone of the then New Labour spin doctor Peter Mandelson had been bugged for three years during the early 1970s.

Of course Machon never returned to the organisation after that. But inspired by her time at MI5, she has been focussing her efforts on ethical data solutions and she urges people who are interested in protecting the country to do the same. She said: "I've been working with the World Ethical Data Forum. We are launching an initiative where we're asking students to submit an essay between 1,500 and 2,000 words either identifying an original problem or suggesting solutions related to the use and abuse of data." This could be a good place for students who are interested in a career with the intelligence services.

MI5 offers roles for school leavers as well as university graduates and they are interested in a diverse range of people. As Machon's story shows, joining MI5 is never going to be an easy career path but if you are genuinely interested in keeping the country safe it could be a route to seriously consider.



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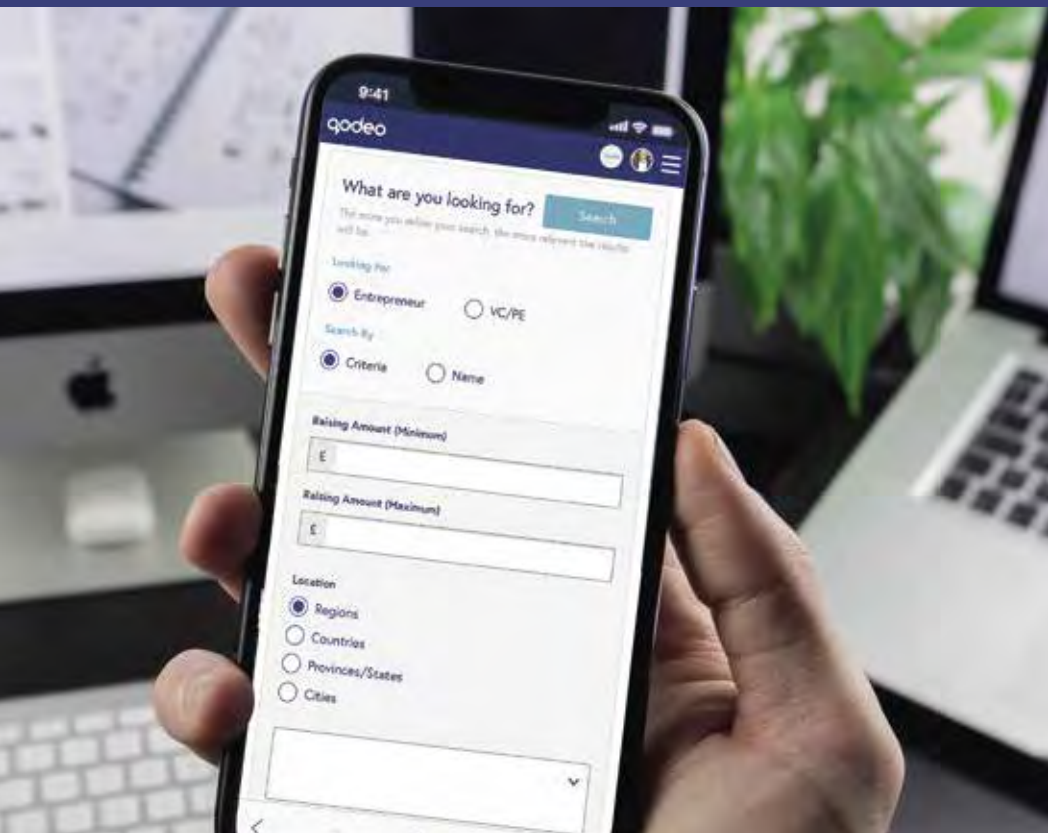
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# —Desperate measures: how do you— get noticed in a crowded job market?

BY GEORGIA HENEAGE

**I**f you scour the internet for ways to get yourself noticed, you'll likely land upon generic advice about pumping up your CV, calling recruiters or improving your skill sets.

But the fiercer the competition, the greater the need to stand out. And sometimes, these are just not enough.

It turns out that's especially so during global pandemics. The arrival of coronavirus has caused economic woe such as we've not seen since the Great Depression. Increasingly, employers are looking for that bit extra in their candidates. But what's heartening is that there is an increasing number of instances where employees are providing just that.

Trevor Walford, a 63 year-old former butler for the royal family, had been working on a cruise ship when he was let go of, following the first lockdown in March. In order to find a new job, he sent out over 700 applications. Having had no luck, he came up with the idea of standing outside the railway station in Leeds with a cardboard placard advertising that he was looking for a job. It worked. He was picked up by the executive of a restaurant group, and is now working as its training and development manager.

While the story of Walford is heartwarming, it's also a sad reminder of just how competitive the job market has become. The explosion of the internet and social media has made it especially hard to stand out, and competition for entry-level jobs in particular has swelled alarmingly.

Amber Shrimpton, an HR consultant at Centrica energy, sees the trend of job-seeking stunts as part of a wider socio-economic context. The current

economic situation, she explains, has engendered a 'loose labour market' where there are more people looking for jobs than employers offering them. She points out that there is a high number of applicants with university and other qualifications, meaning that jobseekers have more need to distinguish themselves.

"It's the jobseekers who needs to make themselves more attractive," Shrimpton tells *Finito World*.

"My work in talent resourcing has shown that when you have 500 applications which look the same, having something which stands out is probably going to work in your favour."

So is this trend born of desperation?

"More and more jobseekers feel they have to do that extra", continues Shrimpton. "It's not okay anymore to just have a good degree. There has to be something else, and that's the impetus behind it."

Like marriage proposals, many eager and frustrated job seekers have resorted to unusual means of public advertisements. Liz Hickok strung up fairy lights to spell out 'My wish-HR job' and her LinkedIn handle, which landed her four interviews; Pasha Stocking used a billboard plastered "Hire me!: Unemployed and Seeking Employment" which gained her the media coverage to start her own PR company (which ironically specialised in helping people rent billboards).

There was also high-school student Josh Butler who auctioned himself on eBay. His post went viral, landing him several interviews. He is now a successful city broker in London.

Even more creative examples might be cited. Lithuanian marketer Luka Yla found a job in his new home of San Francisco by dressing up as a courier to deliver a box of doughnuts to the companies he admired.

The boxes carried the following inscription on the inside: "Most resumes end up in the trash. Mine-in your belly." And, after writing a three-minute music video in place of a CV and cover letter, Alec Biedrzycki got his dream job at a marketing agency.

These success stories suggest that unusual methods of jobseeking may be the way forward for the millions currently facing unemployment. It might just be a question of changing one's attitude towards what has become, in most industries, a deeply standardised and homogeneous application process.

When Lucy Martin, a 23 year-old graphic designer from London, first started searching for a job, she fell victim to this relentless process.

"I was at a point last summer when I was applying to so many jobs that I was becoming a number in the application process," she said. "You just see thousands of people who are applying for the same job. I knew I just needed to get noticed in some way."

This desire to stand out led Martin to pull a stunt in her application to the highly competitive advertising firm Saatchi & Saatchi.

Having got through to the second round of the application process, Martin was given a brief to come up with a design solution to the slogan "nothing is impossible" and told that she'd be notified if she'd been "picked". Martin decided to take the second point quite literally. As well as fulfilling ▶







► the brief, she headed down to her local sweet shop, bought a bag of pick 'n mix, personalised some love hearts with her name on them, stuck a note inside saying "I hope you pick me", and sent it on to the CEO of Saatchi. "The concept was that he had no other option than to pick me—there was no one else in the bag apart from me," says Martin, who got through to the next round and then finally got the job. "They really liked it. They thought it was really awesome," she added.

Part of Martin's creative ingenuity came from her graphic design course at Edinburgh, where her tutors encouraged her to do "ridiculous things" to get noticed, and to "think outside the box".

"I did this art installation where I froze flowers in ice cubes, and my tutor said I should go and give them to every single person I wanted to work for. There's such a sense of urgency, because you've got a melting ice cube in front of you," says Martin. "With any job, sending something physical is really effective, even if it's not a creative job."

It might seem like creative industries are better equipped (or more likely to be

impressed by) such stunts. But across the job spectrum, people are finding they are having to think creatively when it comes to job applications.

Last year, Jack Nugee was working on an application – one of hundreds he'd produced that month – while listening to a cricket podcast. He decided to go off-piste and write his cover letter as a narration of an Ashes innings by Jack Leach, which had then acquired a kind of cult status, particularly in the cricketing world.

"I thought it would be interesting to try and relate my job experience to cricket, which I'm really interested in," says Nugee. In an 'Ode to Jack Leach' he wrote: "I ask you to please engage your imagination as I attempt to equate myself to the English spin bowler Jack Leach's innings in Headingly, highlighting, through his actions, the skillset at my disposal that align me perfectly for the account executive position."

In response to the letter, the employer said she wanted to speak to someone "weird enough to write a full page on a cricket innings, even though she'd never

watched cricket in her life," says Nugee. "She said it was the kind of thing they were looking for." Having had no advertising experience at all, Nugee got to the final two and says "they were going purely off character based on the application."

Though he didn't get the job, Nugee's current position was won through writing a similarly off-beat poem which begins. "I would like to apply for the role of Account Executive sat in the account management team / You will find this application has a rhyming theme."

Though the need to be outlandish is more apparent now than ever, standing out doesn't have to entail an eccentric application. It can come in the form of being proactive and presenting yourself to the bitter outside world.

Tibi Hodgson, a 23 year-old fashion stylist from London, never went to university and the sense that she lacked the right qualifications meant that she lacked confidence when first embarking on her job hunt.

Having had no experience in styling and facing rejection after rejection, Hodgson

decided to contact someone she admired in the industry directly. "I said I felt an innate connection to her work and I could work for her at the drop of a hat."

Hodgson says she didn't know any of the "lingo" around styling and was launched straight into the deep end. She learnt the process just through doing it, and was soon styling high-end models like Adowa Aboah and Suki Waterhouse.

After her employer left for the US and Hodgson began working in a gallery, she kept an eye on her old job.

"I was still being kept on the email loop and I noticed that some dresses and shoes hadn't been returned properly," says Hodgson. "So I volunteered to go pick them up myself. After that I just began going to different shops in Mayfair after work and seeing if there were items she needed to return, without her asking me to."

Hodgson says that through doing this she made her own contacts in the industry, and this has led to other jobs. Now a seasoned stylist, Hodgson is a case in point that experience,

qualifications and traditional means of job searching aren't necessarily the be-all and end-all. "I feel like with these unconventional ways it's all about luck and for luck to happen you need exposure. So the more ways you can expose yourself, the better," she says.

And, of course, the need to be outlandish applies not just to those seeking a job. The emergence of a gig economy and the sheer number of freelancers competing against each other is ensuring that freelance workers need to find alternate means to stand out from the crowd as well.

Rahoul Baruah, a freelance software developer from Leeds, was at a meet-up social with some fellow workers when he met a guy called Jamie who was "sort of famous in our world".

Chatting over some beers, Jamie seemed excited because he'd just set up this agency called "Made in London". The next day, "just for a laugh", Baruah decided to set up a spoof of his website called "Maid in London", featuring

a picture of a barmaid with Jamie's face and a link to the real company's website. The prank website ended up getting Jamie's original company loads of business, and three months later Baruah was offered a year-long contract from them.

"I basically got a year's work – which was really good pay – from just putting up a prank website," says Baruah. "Me and my group of friends have always said that to stand out you've got to do stupid stuff."

These stories all show that difficult economic circumstances can be traversed by imagination. You don't always need to get noticed via outlandish means: it's about putting yourself out there – whether that's via personalised love-letters, a cricket match for a cover letter or, like Baruah, just taking the time to show up. It's about being bold and fearless in the face of the unknown.

"If you want something so badly, you have to make sure you respect it more than the next person," says Hodgson. "You have to be that person who goes that extra mile." <sup>f</sup>



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## AN INDELIBLE MARK: JEFF KATZ: 1946 - 2020

FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES REMEMBER THE GREAT CORPORATE INVESTIGATOR JEFF KATZ, FAMOUS AS THE MAN WHO CRACKED THE GOD'S BANKER CASE



BY JODY FRESHWATER

**"Let's give 'em a call." A common refrain that would emanate from our office, overlooking Pall Mall, when a case had reached a dead end and we needed a new line of enquiry. Who we needed to speak to was dictated by the matter at hand, but for Jeff Katz, the late Chief Executive of the investigations firm Bishop International, the answer would always be found from a conversation, speaking to someone new and sharing ideas.**

Having worked in various investigative guises over the last 15 years, in the public and private sector, I have come across a number of different types of investigator. Jeff definitely fell into the category of an investigator who delivered results and broke cases open through sheer will and determination, coupled with a sharp intellect and his enduring interest in the human condition.

Born in the Bronx, New York in 1946, the son of first- and second-generation immigrants Max and Mollie Katz, and older brother to David, Jeff was fiercely proud of the city of his birth and the path he forged which led him to his adoptive home of London.



Jeff Katz

He spent his childhood and adolescence immersed in the written word, often retreating to his personal oasis of the Cloisters in the Upper West Side of Manhattan, where he found time and space to transport himself to the worlds of Twain, Steinbeck and Beckett.

That passion for reading and writing, along with an inherited strong work ethic, meant he was a high academic achiever and quickly found his first love, journalism, at school. As co-editors of the school magazine, he and his friend would catch the train at night and venture down to the paper's printers in Greenwich Village, a coming-of-age adventure that opened their eyes to a world that existed beyond the Bronx.

It would surely have been beyond Jeff's expectations at the time to realistically think that his own journey would involve the crossing of continents, meeting characters that could have

come out of one of his books and being involved in seminal cases that attracted worldwide attention, all during the emergence of a new industry: corporate investigations.

Jeff was drafted into the US Air Force in '66, moving into the world of intelligence when he was assigned to RAF Chicksands, near Bedford in England, in 1969. Enjoying how far his US dollars, and most likely his US accent, took him in the London of the 1970s, he decided to stay and pursued a career in journalism (interspersed with a first class degree in English Literature), working at the first incarnation of *Time Out*, followed by a punchy regional paper in Bedfordshire and finally freelancing for Fleet Street up to the mid-1980s. It was around then he met Frances, the love of his life and his partner of 40 years. Despite coming from very different backgrounds, they made a formidable



► team, with a shared love of literature and the theatre.

It was in 1987 that Jeff came across his true professional calling, the evolving sector of corporate investigations, and joined Jules Kroll's eponymous Kroll Associates. Key to the company's success in establishing the London office, Jeff was tasked with recruiting a network of investigators and sources across Europe, North Africa and the Middle East to facilitate complex cross border investigations. That legacy remains, with a number of colleagues that Jeff found and nurtured still

#### Vivien Leyland

**I first met Jeff in 1979 when we worked together on the provincial newspaper *Bedfordshire on Sunday*. The pressure at the paper was intense and it prided itself on old-fashioned scoops.**

We only published exclusives at that time, between 1979-85, no matter how small the piece. If another local paper ran a story that we'd been working on, we'd spike ours.

The paper built a reputation for fighting local government on behalf of individuals; highlighting official inconsistencies and exposing hypocrisy and corruption, an experience which took us all into bizarre and occasionally dangerous situations, rarely encountered in local journalism. We won national recognition for the strength of our reporting; we fed numerous stories to *Private Eye's* 'Rotten Boroughs' column and it was an unusual week when Fleet Street (as it still was) didn't run at least one of our pieces the following week.

Though we were a weekly Sunday paper, virtually all our news reporting took place on Fridays, when we'd start at 8am and work through till the paper was rolled off the presses at midnight. This last-minute pressure suited Jeff and also enabled him to concentrate on his own artistic pursuits.

There were just four journalists at the time and we all did everything - from

shaping the industry today in their respective parts of the globe.

In 1999, Jeff joined Bishop International as Chief Executive and set about reshaping the company, bringing in investigators from a diverse range of backgrounds including the Serious Fraud Office. From conducting due diligence for M&A, to obtaining evidence for litigation disputes; from forensic work on homicides, to tracing misappropriated assets, Jeff became known for an ethical approach and moral compass which are now impressed into the company's DNA. His legacy we will continue - as the following tributes will show.

proof-reading, headlines and coroners inquests to ad features, though Jeff held fierce control of the paper's photography and anything to do with the arts (so he got to review the plays, read the books, tour the exhibitions, and interview any visiting literary figures).

His sympathetic manner and kindness made him the natural and difficult choice for breaking intimate and personal bad news stories. He was the reporter used for the 'death knocks', and though I covered all the county inquests, he was the one sent out for photographs of survivors and victims.

Jeff and I lost touch briefly - around 1986 - when I went off to write novels and Jeff took on the editorship of a newspaper in Portsmouth. But he wasn't



Vivien Leyland, Author and Journalist



Bishop Group COO Jody Freshwater

an emerging, exciting new industry and found a calling that he followed for the rest of his life.

**“We have just bought this little IP investigations company on the south coast - would you be interested in working there?”**

#### Graham Robinson

**Jeff and my paths first crossed when I was a junior investigator at Kroll and he was their UK country head. Although we never met at that time my name must have stuck in his memory because, after I returned to practise as a solicitor, one day he rang me out of the blue and offered me a job.**

He said “We have just bought this little IP investigations company on the south coast - would you be interested in working there?” I started clearing my desk at the law firm before the call ended.

I then met Jeff in what were to become very familiar circumstances - over lunch. We ate with Paul Lever at Rules and Jeff's first love in life immediately became apparent to me - dessert. With the possible exception of Frances I am not sure Jeff ever looked upon anyone or anything with as much fondness as he did a well-made tarte tatin. I cannot recall ever attending a client meeting with Jeff before or after which he did not find a local restaurant or café to indulge his passion.

#### Paul Lever

**In 1997 I was appointed by the then Home Secretary, Jack Straw, to be his representative on the Boards of the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the National Crime Squad.**

With the approval of the Home Office, I subsequently became Chairman of Bishop Group, a business specialising in private investigations. My first task was to find a Chief Executive and I appointed Jeff Katz who had a wealth of experience in this field both in the UK and the US. Katz revived Bishop by recruiting from the Serious Fraud Office and the Serious Organised Crime Agency, as well as taking on intellectual property experts.

We worked together for 20 years in a partnership which became a close friendship. Jeff was a voracious reader, extremely knowledgeable about developments in the US as well as the UK and a talented journalist *manqué*. Two of his most remarkable characteristics were that he was both extremely tenacious and loyal.

When his friend Robert Levinson, a



Paul Lever, Chairman of Bishop Group



Nick Zarach, Jeff Katz and Roger Thornton (Sam Pearce)

former FBI agent and sometime CIA contractor, disappeared off the coast of Iran in 2007, Jeff made many attempts to elicit information from inside Iran on behalf of the family and lobbied at the highest levels in the US to find out what had happened. Despite these and official US efforts Levinson was never traced. He greeted the news that the US government stated that it believed Levinson was dead with great sadness.

#### Richard Alden

**In June 2016, on a date I will never forget, I travelled from Mexico City where I was working to Nairobi, Kenya, where I had previously been working for over three years.**

I was on a quick mission to move into a holiday home I had bought there to maintain a connection with a country that had become important to me and my family. I expected an uneventful visit but fate conspired cruelly to change that in a shocking manner. By midday on the day I arrived a friend of mine was tragically dead from a single gunshot wound in unexplained circumstances and I was quickly imprisoned and charged with her murder. Any tough business situation I had experienced until that time paled with the challenges I now faced.

My friend had died in my house and my gun was involved. There was no reason to believe she committed suicide so some logic dictated that another person in the house must have killed her despite the fact that there was no forensic evidence to suggest this or any motive. Apart from myself there were two domestic workers

in the house but they did not know my friend. I had taken her to hospital after finding her. So suspicion fell on me. And, despite my grief, I was also baffled as to what had happened. I had been in another room at the time I heard the gunshot and to complicate matters the gunshot entry point was at an angle that was neither consistent with suicide nor murder.

In the anguish and pain that followed I was introduced to Jeff by an old schoolfriend of mine who thought he might be able to help me piece together what had actually happened that fateful day. On bail for murder I wasn't permitted to travel so our meetings were telephonic. My lawyers were not particularly interested in theories as to what had caused the death of my friend, pointing out that it was the job of the state to prove that I had killed her rather than my job to prove what had actually happened. But the justice system in Kenya is slow and a legal process can be initiated on pure circumstantial evidence. Even if the accused is eventually found not guilty it can tie them up for years and I knew I was not guilty. I felt that I had to know what had actually happened that day and Jeff was convinced that he could help me unravel the facts using forensic science.

This is where the remarkable side of Jeff stepped in. Our conversations were taking place many months after the incident and almost all forensic evidence that could have existed had disappeared. I was actually sceptical as to what we might be able to achieve. But he was compassionate and unrelenting in his desire to help, probing the few facts ►





Jeff Katz hosting a function at The British Library (Sam Pearce)

► that we knew and pushing me when I had my frequent doubts. Through his wide-ranging contacts, he engaged one of the best ballistics' experts in the field and thereafter began a voyage of discovery, scientific simulation, measurement and theory testing that I never imagined would be possible. The result of many months of work led to one scientifically provable hypothesis - that my friend had fired the gun at the ground, probably accidentally, the bullet had ricocheted and entered her body at the strange angle that was noted, sadly killing her instantly. Jeff and his team had proven forensically that the death was a tragic accident and that no other person had been involved.

The meticulous quality of the report that Jeff commissioned persuaded the Kenyan Police to reopen their investigations and they were able to rapidly ascertain that I had not been in the same room (something that was overlooked in the initial haste to charge) and, as a result, the case was withdrawn. It's a powerful thing to know that Jeff's efforts directly resolved what was already a terrible situation for me and my family and

one that had every possibility of lasting for a very long time with an uncertain outcome.

At last at liberty I had the pleasure of a long lunch with Jeff in London. We spent hours swapping stories. I was particularly interested in his work around the death of Roberto Calvi, my first work experience having been working on the liquidation of Calvi's bank following his death. I was struck by how interesting a career he had but also by his human element. I wasn't a large corporate client; my fees weren't relevant for him but he had really gone out of his way to help me in my darkest hours and I think that speaks realms about the person that Jeff was and always will be for me.

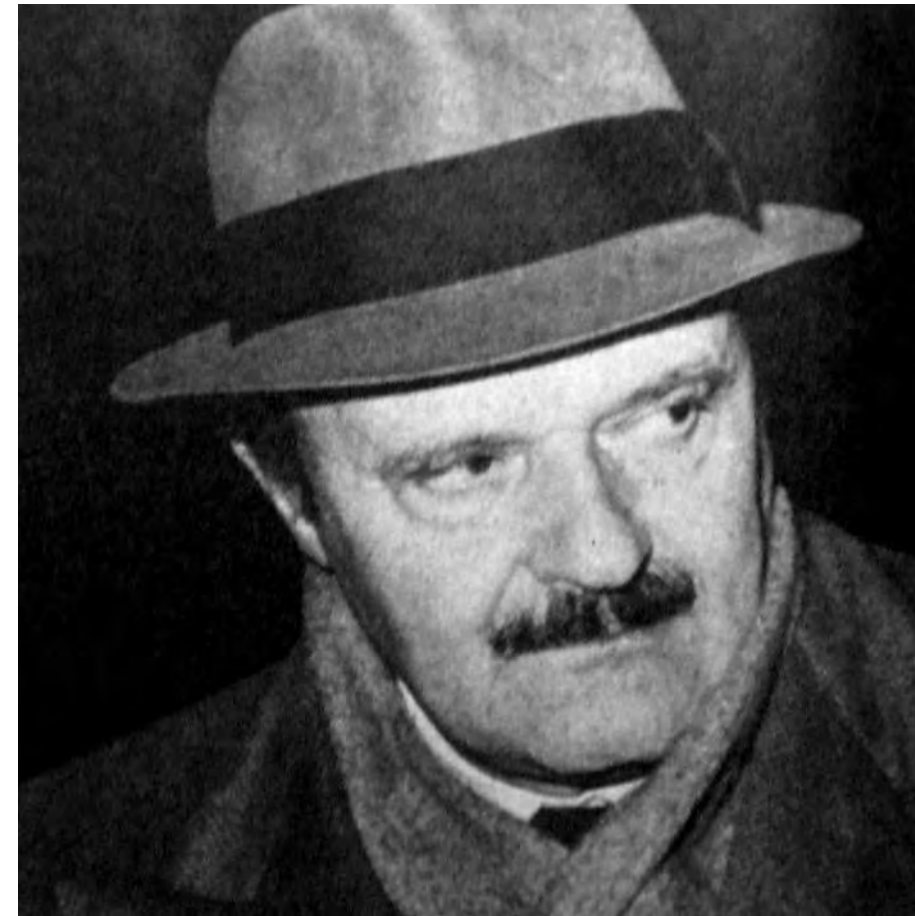
#### Dr Angela Gallop CBE

**In 1992, Jeff contacted me to ask if I would review the original forensic science investigation into the death of Roberto Calvi - the Italian banker who had been found hanging from scaffolding beneath Blackfriars Bridge in London ten years earlier, and conduct any further tests which might**

**help answer the central question of whether Calvi had committed suicide or been murdered.**

There had been two inquests - the first had recorded a verdict of suicide, and the second, an open verdict. But this was not good enough for Calvi's family who knew that, as a devout Catholic, the last thing he'd ever think of doing would be to commit suicide. Jeff had been hired by the family to re-investigate Calvi's death and, by the time I joined his team, he was already a mine of information about the case.

I accepted the job immediately as it seemed a very interesting project, but when I realised how little forensic work had been done at the time, and how few items were available for testing, I began to wonder if I'd bitten off more than I could chew. But right from the outset, Jeff was tremendously supportive. It wasn't long before I'd become thoroughly familiar with the foreshore underneath Blackfriars Bridge, the scaffolding from which Calvi had been suspended, and the rope and stones involved. ►



Roberto Calvi "God's Banker"

► And, with a forensic chemist colleague, I had established a testing strategy which would hopefully be able to gradually remove possible options, leaving us with an inescapable conclusion. And Jeff helped every step of the way - by arranging a boat trip down the river at night - from Greenwich to Blackfriars, so we could check timings and see what it would have been like under Blackfriars Bridge on the night in question, and what would, and would not have been possible with a boat. We went to Milan so I could inspect the rest of the clothing Calvi had been wearing at the time - it had been returned to Italy along with the other possessions he'd brought to London on the fateful trip. Jeff supplied me with other, similar items of Calvi's clothing and some gravel from Calvi's driveway at home, and he got hold of some of the original scaffolding so that I could use all this for my tests. He had me crawling all over a dilapidated boat looking for green paint that matched some on

Calvi's clothes, and all the time he kept updating me on his own researches.

Then came the day that I had to pull all my findings together in a report and, with Jeff, present it to Roberto Calvi's son, Carlo, on behalf of the rest of the family. By this time, there was, as I had hoped, one inescapable conclusion, and that was that Calvi had been murdered and had not committed suicide.

This was accepted by the Italian courts and some time afterwards I found myself giving evidence at the terrorist court in Rome about all the tests we had performed and why I was convinced that Calvi had been murdered. This was to help set the scene for the trial of several of the people who had featured in Jeff's work.

This case ensured that I used all of my scientific skills in erecting and testing hypotheses. I shall always be very grateful to Jeff for all of this.

#### Oliver Maude-Roxby

**Jeff's generosity of spirit was evident at every Bishop Group Christmas party. With 20 or more employees usually present, each year he would take the time to choose a book that he thought would be of particular interest to each individual.**

Jeff would arrive carrying a couple of carrier bags and, at the end of lunch, hand out each individually labelled present. I know that Jeff appreciated my love for his city of birth, New York, and I recall telling him that one day I would join him there to experience the city through his eyes. But it was never to be.

#### Jonathan Metliss

**I would always call Jeff for a second opinion to discuss an idea if I needed any guidance on an issue, or simply to have a chat. He was unfailingly helpful and reliable, and a truly genuine person. I see his mobile phone number in my address book, but sadly realise that if I rang I would now get no answer.**

#### David Glasser

**Jeff sometimes asked if I could advise or help on his assignments. On one occasion, he asked whether I would watch a person at a dinner reception to observe who he might converse with. I agreed without hesitation and spent the day in my guise as an interested party.**

There was panic at 10.15pm when I blinked and he was nowhere in sight. He was not in the toilets. When I asked the cloakroom attendant if 'my friend' had just left, he confirmed he had. Thankfully the doorman confirmed where the taxi hailed was directed to go and I went to a famous nightclub in pursuit. I followed and reported back. My reward lunch was almost as enjoyable as my day living my dream. ►



Elena Egawhary

**The first time I met Jeff Katz he was in a three-piece suit holding court in front of an audience of enraptured investigative journalists. His slick powerpoint on the corporate investigation industry was famous as one of the highlights of the Centre for Investigative Journalism (CIJ) summer school in London.**

Jeff was a regular presenter and every year his session on the corporate investigation industry was standing room only. He walked everyone through the origins of the modern corporate investigation business in the UK. Being a former journalist himself, Jeff understood how investigative journalists and corporate investigators operate in very similar worlds even if they have very different aims.

Five years ago I decided to embark on a PhD examining the role the corporate investigation industry plays within society by writing the history of Kroll Associates. Jeff immediately made time for me. He shared his contacts, and we would speak on an almost bi-weekly

basis over the course of the next five years. He was also an honest critic of the best kind: “this sounds like an advert” he once chastised me when I let him read the draft of a paper I was working on. “You can do better”. If he criticised it was because he believed you could do better, that you were better and he told you so. To know Jeff Katz was to be very lucky indeed.

Ronel Lehmann

**In August last year, I asked Jeff whether he could help find one of my oldest friends from City of London School. Oddly, our Alumni Development Office had no record of him either. I provided Jeff with some scant details and his last known address in Italy. Within 24 hours, he had tracked him down. I rang Davide Malliani to tell him that it had taken me appointing a Senior Corporate Investigator for us to be able to finally speak again.**

I had myself written some restaurant reviews which were published. Jeff wrote to me “I read your restaurant reviews over the weekend and, because I know

you and could hear your voice in the writing, I enjoyed reading them. Having said that, I don't think Jay Rayner has anything to fear.”

I proposed Jeff as a possible guest for Desert Island Discs. I received a reply from Cathy Drysdale, Series Producer, Radio Four: “We're always pleased to receive suggestions and thank you for the enclosed cuttings. However, as we're a very small team, you'll only hear back from us if we wish to issue an invitation - we hope you understand.”

Jeff supported many good notable causes. He wrote to me: “As someone who benefited from the days when higher education and career advice was free, I am pleased to donate a Finito bursary in the knowledge that it will give someone an advantage they might not otherwise have.”

Jeff was excited about writing for Finito World. When his Letter from an American made the grade in the October issue, he was so encouraged that he submitted a further piece for inclusion in this issue. We received his latest article penned a few days before his death, and include his piece as part of our tribute.

Jeff teased me endlessly by saying that he liked me in spite of me being a Tory and I larked about when he proffered alternative strategies in politics, none of which would actually work.

The last time we had lunch together was a little Italian restaurant tucked away in the middle of Theatre Land. It was exquisite, home cooked Italian cuisine at its best. Jeff was so at home with Pino Ragona who lavished service, lasagne, red wine and crème caramel all over me. Jeff salivated over their delicious selection of puddings. The history of the restaurant is mounted and sealed on the walls with an abundance of photographs. I will return to Giovanni's to ensure that he too is remembered as a loyal customer and for future generations.



Jeff Katz tightening Ronel Lehmann's tie before a presentation as Ty Goddard looks on

# Letter From An American

BY JEFF KATZ

**Truth, lies; facts, alternative facts; news, fake news; information, disinformation; reality, conspiracies - how and why did our views of the world get so divided?**

Joe Biden won the US election, but not without accusations of fraud from Trump and his supporters. It was mostly likely the coronavirus pandemic that gave the Democrats the edge, but not by as much as they expected. Trump's effort, in the words of *New York Times* journalist Will Wilkinson, to sweep “A medium-sized city's worth of dead Americans under the rug turned out to be too tall an order.”

When facts and truth become casualties of deliberately created social and political confusion, we all suffer. And that extends to our day-to-day dealings with each other. As someone once said, you start off by committing murder and end up being late for appointments.

One of my abiding lessons about facts occurred during my high school years in New York. In a school of 5,000 boys I found my niche in the English Department's journalism class, taught by one of my first mentors, a teacher named Louis Simon.

Lou was the advisor for the school newspaper, a broadsheet that came out four times a year. He also taught the journalism classes. By my second year I was in the advanced class and was a reporter for the paper.

One day Lou asked me to assist him with an experiment for the new intake of the journalism class. After the class settled, I came in and Lou told me to distribute textbooks. I dropped the

books noisily on the desks. He first admonished me and, when I ignored him, sharply reprimanded me.

I then muttered something that sounded like “\*uck you,” but wasn't. He ordered me out of the room. Then he told the class that he intended to report me for bad behaviour and wanted them to write an account of what happened to back him up.

**“When facts and truth become casualties of deliberately created social and political confusion, we all suffer”**

About half the class wrote that they didn't want to get involved. A quarter of the class quoted what they thought they heard - but hadn't. The final quarter wrote that they weren't sure what I had said, but that my behaviour had been disagreeable.

At that point in my life, the fact that half the students didn't want to get involved surprised me. But that the other half either reported the events incorrectly or couldn't decide what they heard taught me that at best many people will be unsure of the facts. More importantly, many people will simply be wrong because they hear what they are programmed to hear.

Forty years later I was invited to make a presentation to pupils at the City of London School. This time I was in the teaching role. I began by making an offer. Everyone who gave me a £1 coin would get two back at the end of the session.

There was a flurry of activity as pupils who didn't have a coin borrowed from their mates. As each person contributed a pound into a bag, they signed their name so there was a record of the transaction.

I put the bag of coins and the list of signatures into a briefcase and began explaining to the class how fraudsters work, how con men and women rely on the gullibility of people who want to believe in opportunities that promise rewards, regardless of how unlikely.

After half an hour or more of my explanations and examples of how such things happen, the teacher hosting the event thanked me and there was a nice round of applause. As I picked up my briefcase and prepared to leave the room there was a murmur among the pupils. I asked if there was something the matter. They asked about their investments that were supposed to double at the end of my talk.

“Oh that,” I said. “No,” I told them. “That was just speculation. If I manage to double your money, I'll let you know.” And I began to leave the room. Of course, I didn't. All the pound coins were returned to their rightful owners, but I suspect that those few minutes at the end taught them more than anything I said during the preceding half hour.

“Dishonesty, greed, double-dealing,” wrote Professor Churchwell in *The Guardian*, “are symptomatic of entrenched maladies.” The only remedy is education. And that will take time. f



# Broad Church

## HOW THE INTERNET REINVIGORATED THE RELIGION SECTOR

In the first of a series of articles on jobs within the religion sector, Robert Golding delves into how Anglicanism has coped during Covid-19

**If you visit the Reverend Alison Joyce at the famous Wren church of St Bride's just off London's Fleet Street, there's a decent chance that she'll take you into the hub looking out onto Salisbury Court.**

There you'll find a stone memorial to a woman called Mary Ann Nichols, who is best known as one of Jack the Ripper's victims. Bespectacled and intelligent - one of those Oxbridge-educated reverends who is also a theologian - Joyce points it out as I'm leaving. "It's one of the

things I'm most proud of. If you read the history books she's a victim - but she was a member of this parish and we still owe her a duty of care."

The plaque is moving. But you have to be here in Wren's famous space to feel its full force. That's true also of the memorial over by the altar to journalists who have lost their lives the world over - among them James Foley and Clive James.

"Covid has impacted on every aspect of our life as a church," Joyce says. "The most challenging aspect has been the pastoral one. You add the Covid restrictions in a ministry where touch is very important - you need to be able to hold someone's hand. We are a sacramental church which means things like communion are very important."

The Biblical phrase which is most

applicable to the pandemic is that which is supposed to have been uttered by Jesus upon his resurrection: "Noli me tangere". Do not touch me. It's still not clear why he says this, whether it is a warning of the spiritual ramifications of touching him - or as theologians might say, touching his "riseness" - or whether to do so might be to incur some strange and insupportable physical sensation.

What's certain is that the church has had to operate for the last year without touch. Like museums, they've been sent online; also like cultural institutions they've found a global audience which they might not have expected to encounter in normal conditions.

Joyce explains St Bride's pivot to online: "All our services have gone out online. Since March 2020, we've never missed a service. ▶



Interior Durham Cathedral (Chapter of Durham Cathedral)



Durham Cathedral Cloister (Chapter of Durham Cathedral)





School Harvest at St. Edward's, Mottingham

► We can do that because we have an amazing choral tradition. And of course the lovely thing about that is, we've got people contributing to those services internationally. There's one woman who does readings from the States - so actually we've got an amazingly global congregation."

So the Anglican church, which stretches back to the marital woes of Henry VIII, cannot avoid the need to think about tech provision. Last summer I visited St Lawrence's in Ludlow and found myself immediately accosted by a warden extolling the virtues of the church's new app. At St. Lawrence's if you point at the famous misericords with your phone, you'll see them flicker into interactive life: a medieval woman cooking, a knight galloping towards you.

During the pandemic, I've often found myself wondering about Durham cathedral, my vote for the most beautiful building in Europe, where the remains of St Cuthbert are buried. At time of writing a visit lies numerous Covid tiers away.

Interested to know how they're doing, I catch up with Charlie Allen, the

residential canon at the cathedral. As expected, the cathedral also moved to online worship, and now has, according to Allen, "a global community of prayer of 340 members." (It is a feature of writing about the Anglican church that the numbers discussed can seem heartbreakingly small).

That's all well and good, but central to Christian experience for thousands of years has been the Eucharist. Allen concedes the problem: "It has been impossible to engage with the subtleties of the Eucharist in this way. The touch of a wafer and the taste of wine cannot be communicated in digital form."

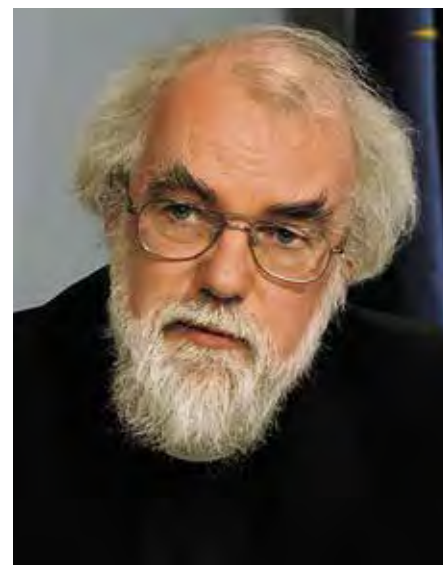
Even here Allen remains optimistic in a way which might help us all in our strange locked down lives: "We are looking forward to being able to gather physically again, but we are also aware that having to withdraw from contact for so long has heightened our senses and given us a deeper appreciation of that which we have missed."

It might interest readers to know how many job opportunities there are in the Church, even during an era of

apparently declining belief. That's partly because the decline takes place against a backdrop of extremely high belief: Christianity remains the religion of the nation, even if church attendance is extremely low. Locally, it's a part of the fabric of life, even if it is beset by indifference during a time when there is so much else to claim our attention. According to the Faith Survey, church attendance has declined from 6,484,300 to 3,081,500 for the period between 2008-2020. And yet as the state has shrunk, the church has sometimes rushed in to fill the void.

For instance, the *Church Times* still has a jobs section which shows a lively number of options for people wanting to be involved. It might even be crudely said that it's still possible to achieve stardom of a kind. This author recently visited the home of the former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams who joked that he had "made it big" in the church, while making me a Nespresso. His house was a vast receding grace-and-favour home round the corner from Magdalen College, which he would leave shortly after. Russian Christian art hung from the walls, and Williams' study was jammed with books.

We talked about the low attendance at typical London church services, and he likened the church today to those early services during the time of ►



Rowan Douglas Williams, Baron Williams of Oystermouth

► Paul of Tarsus, where meaning was arrived at not in spite of sporadic attendance - but partly because of it.

Williams' point may ring especially true during Covid, where people are especially searching for meaning. And if it does strike a chord in students, then job opportunities are there.

"As a cathedral we have a team of paid staff, and an even more extensive team of volunteers," Allen explains. One interesting figure who recently joined the ranks of the church is the great publisher and poet Christopher Hamilton-Emery, whose brilliant poem "And Then We", which we reproduce overleaf, celebrates his change of career.

Hamilton-Emery explains to me how he was "dislodged from my own [secular] convictions". His role at The Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham is a reminder that there are many roles available outside the route of taking holy orders. "At the Shrine, we have catering jobs, housekeepers and hospitality staff, education, facilities management, membership and retail: there's a considerable range of jobs for the laity," he says. "The Church has a lot to gain from experienced general managers coming into serve - so I hope people, even people with no faith, can see that the Church has lots to offer society and can come in and help develop businesses."

And what traits are required? "You don't need to believe, but you do need to sympathise," Hamilton-Emery continues. "You need empathy with the aims, you need to accept moral goodness and love (which may strike some as odd). But most of all you have to care for people and to put the human at the centre of everything you do."

That might appeal to some at a time when we've seen retired GPs volunteer to administer the vaccine, as well as an increase in people applying for nursing qualifications.

Of course, the career you have will depend on the locality of the institution

you end up at. Joyce's ministry at St. Bride's is highly unusual, with a small residential population, which in usual times would predominantly serve commuters. This segment evaporated overnight in March 2020. "We have a very different community to serve from somebody in rural Oxfordshire or a parish on the outskirts of Birmingham," Joyce explains.

"We're also lucky because obviously it's a famous building and we're also famous for being a journalist church. That in itself makes it an international ministry."

Things are somewhat different for a nearby ministry run by Rev Dr Catherine Shelley - that of St Edward's in Mottingham, in Kent, on the borders with south-east London.

This is a more impoverished area - but also in a suburban part of London where footfall has increased during coronavirus as more people work from home. Shelley implemented an unexpectedly eclectic online programme: "Karate and taekwondo, Zumba, dance and Slimming World have all been able to go online, though personally I cannot do Zumba online!"

However, the impoverished conditions of her parishioners differentiate

Mottingham from Joyce's parish, and from the wealthier area around Durham Cathedral. "A lot of the congregation and community do not have internet access," Shelley explains. "One third do not have email and local schools are still using booklets for remote learning as families cannot access online provision. The circulation of sheets has increased from 55 at the start of the pandemic to over 100 paper copies and we also send out over 50 by email to those who are online. Some of the increased circulation is to families we have known previously through sporting and social activities in the church hall; some of it is to families we have come to know through the ever-expanding food bank."

It's the food bank which has really taken off. "Pre-pandemic I would give out between 10-20 food parcels and fuel card top-ups per week," Shelley continues. "We are now giving out 150-200 parcels per week. We have also prepared regular hot meals for some who struggle to cook, collected medicines, shopped for those shielding or self-isolating, provided access to IT to support job searches, benefit applications and advice, IT access for virtual court hearings, housing support and so on... We never really know what is going to be asked next." ►



The Reverend Alison Joyce (Slater King)



► It is impossible not to admire the sheer range of the church's response – after hearing from Shelley, the church appears far from a quaint and marginalised aspect of our societal fabric. It feels integral.

Even so, Shelley is more pessimistic than Joyce, Allen or Hamilton-Emery about the financial position of many dioceses: “There have been rumours of significant cuts in clergy posts – with some mention of a reduction of 20 percent but it is too early to say what the picture will be across the country,” she says.

How does she think it will play out? “It will vary from diocese to diocese



St. Bride's Tower



St. Edward's Mottingham, Interior

because each diocese is a separate charity, with differing resources and priorities. It is suggested that some are in a precarious position financially so more mergers, such as happened in Wakefield, Bradford and Leeds a few years ago, appear likely.” And what's the prognosis in London? “One thing that will make a difference is the exodus of families from London. I am aware in my own area in South East London, that some parishes are losing up to 20 families who have decided to re-locate outside London because of the possibilities of home-working or due to redundancy.”

“That will probably have a larger impact on church and diocesan profiles and jobs than the pandemic itself.”

And if working in the church isn't of interest, what does it have to teach us at this time? All those I spoke with for this piece felt that there was great meaning to be found in lockdown – and everyone agreed that there would be a revelatory atmosphere in the world once restrictions are lifted.

Hamilton-Emery is optimistic for the future: “We all have a role to play in healing and recovering and seeking forgiveness. It's a moral failure if we don't do this within society. I see this as an opportunity for unity and reengagement rather than fracture and dissolution.”

Over at Durham, Allen seconds that: “The pandemic has invited each of us to face up to our own mortality, and to the mortality of those whom we love. Rather than making us morbid, my experience has been that this has given people a fresh appreciation of all that they value in life.”

That rings true. It may be that the Anglican church, far from being irrelevant, is about to find itself more relevant now that people have been given time to pause and consider the direction of their lives. Reality, it turns out, has a way of impacting on us, even if we can't touch one another. Perhaps somewhere in there is the true meaning of that mysterious phrase: *Noli Me Tangere*. <sup>f</sup>



Durham Cathedral, Stained Glass (*Chapter of Durham Cathedral*)

## And Then We

And then we embraced, sprawling on the green deck like scattered gulls.  
And then we knelt under bound flax sail cloth, stinking and making the day.  
And then we carried whom could not stand to the red chapel blithely.  
And then we walked through your pristine marsh without hours or love or trees.  
And then we drew about us buckram cloth and wool dyed with kermes and slept.  
And then we pierced cockleshells and yearned for a tangled feast of eels.  
And then we walked by sordid wolves and boars in corporal torment.  
And then we met with hirsute leather brigands and were lost.  
And then we starved, Lord, and knew concupiscence, gnawing your works.  
And then we heralded salt wind, seal routes and spectres and walked dully on.  
And then we saw your slipper chapel and spread our toes on a mile of stones.  
And then we wept. At the ruin of our bodies we wept. At our just ruin.  
And then we dressed and swayed, all the same, through the unifying street in a love queue.  
And then we bent and entered Nazareth to see her and to know her choice.  
And then we knew a high permanent land, our eyes fixed on accommodating angels.  
And then we fell in stone-sealed Walsingham, with our fiat ringing, unanchored, teeming.  
And then we left to see ice oak burials, flame drift farms, our backwards night talk blazing.  
And then we sailed on, working new bones, each a prayer to the star of the sea.

*Christopher Hamilton-Emery*



# Pivoting and Life in the New Now

Photographs and text  
by Will Purcell

**W**e live in a time of stolen moments and, as human interactions are increasingly restricted and often frowned upon when witnessed, little pockets of old city traditions raise their hands and prosper.

The butchers, bakers, greengrocers and fishmongers who have survived the almost all-encompassing tentacles of the supermarkets find themselves propelled into the spotlight, shining lone but defiant strip lights on otherwise shuttered streets.

The triangle of roads surrounding Electric Avenue in the heart of Brixton bustle with a respectful defiance, flourishing in the celebration of old village style traditions. Surrounding businesses and individuals inspired to adapt and succeed are a refreshing positive during these times of change.

Part homage, part documentary, these photos hold a candle to the prosperous little pockets of normality where human interaction remains joyful, bartering still exists and wheeled shopping trolleys and reusable bags are yet to be replaced by the delivery vans that lurk in the shadows on residential roads from dawn until nightfall and beyond.

Whilst a local fishmonger in South London won't make headlines for continuing to serve the community, their thriving independence is reflected in other businesses across other sectors, especially in the hospitality industry. Chicken shops on high streets have taped off their tables to keep the takeaway side of their businesses alive and as larger pubs tied to breweries



A local luggage salesman with his shop half shuttered turns to 'click and collect' and uses Whatsapp to confirm sales and stay open during Lockdown 3

mothballed their taps and closed their doors, independent owners used the rules to stay open and keep their heads above water. In becoming takeaway establishments for their neighbourhoods they have created little pockets of considered normality in these abnormal times. Just as businesses have pivoted and

changed direction to survive over the last 10 months so individuals affected by the pandemic have had to change direction and embrace new adventures and careers.

From becoming Deliveroo drivers instead of going to University, learning new technology to keep previously

cash dominated businesses alive to rediscovering local shops and regrowing previously lost relationships with neighbourhood suppliers these portraits also reflect a changing community that has often had to pivot to survive

and in some cases now thrive in the new now. The images were shot on both 35mm film and a Leica SL modern digital camera. The small unassuming Olympos Mju 35mm film camera I find not only to be a great conversation

starter but also much less imposing than a larger digital body and puts more subjects at ease. What is lost in mega pixels I find is more than made up for in warmth and openness. f



A local greengrocer wearing multiple layers and a face mask during a long shift in mid winter is typical of the current situation we find ourselves in





Derek's Tropical Fruit and Veg is a wondrous establishment made up of fruit and veg boxes and a single gazebo that come rain or shine sits proudly in the middle of Electric Avenue



A Deliveroo driver collects someone's lunch surrounded by signs of the time



A local fishmonger wearing his London pride front and centre, wraps up warm against the winter chill. There is a real satisfaction in people taking the wearing of masks and gloves seriously in the food industry, protecting everyone along the chain from supplier to eater



A greengrocer uses her phone and a card reader to minimise contact during sales and ensure that previously preferred cash transactions are not lost in this brave new technological world



A group of three Deliveroo drivers grab a break and a chat as they wait for their next order. After finishing education and with traditional job paths curtailed by the pandemic, joining Deliveroo has become a good, if slightly longer than intended, stop gap





A chicken shop on Brixton Road tapes off the seating area and continues to trade as a takeaway only



A lady sells beers from a sign at the front of the bar complete with local in joke and temperamental card machine that hates the cold



Joe, with plans of becoming a telephone engineer now shelved for a year, works as a dispatcher for a local business  
There was symmetry in Joe and Martin in both their attire and circumstance that nearly 30 years between them couldn't mask



Once Julia's Little Oyster Bar, now a traditional fishmongers in Brixton Market but with a little nod to the past



Martin, a DJ and music producer, now filling the gaps in his schedule as a delivery driver





Two men meet for a takeaway beer which they drink outside a closed pub in a nod to the pre-2020 freedom and Saturday tradition



# Gap in the Market

By Emily Prescott

**The year out used to be a reliable route to global travel, but that's all changed thanks to the pandemic, reports Emily Prescott**

The typical globetrotting gap year has been wrecked by Covid-19. Even young people who were hoping to take a more modest year away from education saving up money by working in their local pub seem like fantasists at the moment. Despite the difficulties, around 20,000 young people decided to defer their place at university to take time out between 2020-2021. I spoke to a few young people to find out how they are coping - and found everyone in remarkably resilient and optimistic mood.

Lydia Pressdee, 19, should be skiing in France right now but instead she's working in a Covid-19 ward. She doesn't lament the situation at all: "I'm actually kind of happy it's happened this way



Lydia Pressdee

because I've gained so much experience. I love what I do every day."

"It's a rehab ward. You see people's journeys, they come in and they're not able to walk and by the time they're going home they can walk out the ward, it is incredible," she enthuses.

Once she had finished her A Levels, Lydia was hoping to get a job as a

waitress in order to save funds for her ski season in France and travel around South East Asia.

Afterwards, Lydia wanted to do children's nursing at Oxford Brookes University. But when the pandemic hit and she finished school in March, Lydia found a job in a hospital as a health care assistant.

"I applied when it was a call to action.

"It's been quite scary but I've learned so much and it makes me really aware of the situation. This time it is definitely a lot worse," she adds.

Through her work on the COVID ward, Lydia has gained clarity and has changed her degree so she can focus on adult nursing.

Lydia's dreams of travelling haven't been dashed completely, she says. "Hopefully once I'm qualified I'll maybe be able to take a bit of time out, maybe before I start the actual job."

**Anna Scriven, 19, is also using her gap year to help the health services during the pandemic. Anna had accepted a place to study medicine at the University of Liverpool but her expected grades were moved down by the government's controversial algorithm in the summer.**

Fortunately, the university deferred her place and now she has passed the exams, she is set to start in 2021. In the meantime she has been volunteering at her local GP helping to marshal the flu clinic. She is also hoping to au pair for a family in Germany but that's looking less likely as the Covid-19 situation worsens.

Although the situation is uncertain, she strikes an optimistic note: "I'm hoping when I start uni in September that life's a bit more normal and I'll have a better time than I would have if I started this year as I know some people had quite a tough freshers. If I make it to Germany it will also be a fab experience that I wouldn't have had, as the pandemic made me take a gap year."

James Walker, 18, always planned to have a low-key gap year: he wanted to submit his application to study Maths at university and learn to drive and get a temporary job.

Reflecting on how it's panning out he says: "I've been lucky enough that

a lot of my plans haven't been seriously affected by Covid-19 and the pandemic, at least so far. I had no plans for abroad travel, for example, which could have been disrupted. Finding employment may be trickier than planned however, given the levels of unemployment due to the pandemic," he adds.

Since October he has been volunteering helping GCSE and A-Level students with their maths. He too doesn't lament the pandemic, saying: "Although my plans haven't been impacted massively, one surprising positive has been that it has made me feel more confident in my decision to take a year out."

**Meanwhile Jacinta Haden-Newman, 17, is planning her gap year in these uncertain times. She is studying music tech, biology and maths and is looking forward to taking some time out.**

"Motivation is generally so low in people my age because there's so much going on that study seems almost trivial, and the pandemic has definitely reminded us of the importance of relationships with others and taking care of ourselves. It's hard to focus on the same old stuff when everything and everyone's perspectives seem so different."

"I am looking forward to taking a gap year, definitely. Any plans have to be made with a pinch of salt, because of course we don't know what restrictions will look like in six, 12 or 18 months' time."

If the world returns to its pre Covid-19 state, Jacinta will work over summer away from home in the UK to earn money before travelling. In an ideal post-vaccine world, she would like to go interrailing in Europe for a month in autumn. In the winter months she hopes to go to Australia.

**"I'm not worried about the impact of the pandemic on my gap year because worrying about what's going to happen months in advance is not useful to anyone"**



Jacinta Haden-Newman

But she is remaining realistic, adding: "I'm not really worried about the impact of the pandemic on my gap year because I know that worrying about what's going to happen months in advance is just not useful to anyone, and I've made sure there are allowances in my plans so there's nothing more I could do to change whatever it will be like.

"I really do hope I can go abroad, of course, and I'm praying for good news about the vaccine, but if I end up having to have a chill year at home with my family, working on creative projects and hiking in Wales instead, that will still be a year well-spent and I don't think I'd regret it either way."



Katie

**Finally, we spoke to 19-year-old Katie. She is supposed to be somewhere in Australia or South East Asia but instead, she's in Kent. But she is trying to focus on the positives. When the tier system allows, she works in a family friend's independent shop. "It hasn't been a bad thing because I've been saving," she says.**

Katie, who has a place to study sport and exercise science at Kent university says: "I think I've been making the most of the situation. When I came back after shutting I actually really enjoyed it because I felt like everybody appreciated us more. We're an independent shop and everybody was shopping local and it was a nice feeling, like the community was coming together again."f



# —DON'T FOLLOW LEADERS—

## Bob Dylan at 80

BY CHRISTOPHER JACKSON

**T**o mark Bob Dylan's 80th birthday this year, Christopher Jackson looks at the career of the Nobel Laureate and asks what his life can teach us about making our way in the world.

"Twenty years of schoolin' and they put you on the day shift." So sang Bob Dylan with typical humour and exasperation in his 1965 classic "Subterranean Homesick Blues". It is a line that will resonate with many young people beginning their working life in the Covid-19 era.

Since arriving on the scene in Greenwich Village in 1962, the Nobel Laureate, who turns 80 on May 24th, has attracted continual reassessment. The brilliant opaque words, combined with a sense that in Dylan words matter to an unusual degree, have caused an immense critical literature to grow up. It's difficult to think of a living figure more discussed.

Commentary has tended to focus on Dylan's extraordinariness, and one can see why: he has achieved remarkable things, all while retaining his aloofness. When I asked singer-songwriter Emma Swift, who recently recorded an album of Dylan covers *Blonde on the Tracks* (2020), whether Dylan had been in touch about her album, she said:

"I'm often asked that. But Dylan is to me a mythical figure. I'd be just as surprised if Samuel Taylor Coleridge called."

Too often then, Dylan is treated as prophet and sage, and not as someone who hustled his way through the world - as we might do too. Our admiration for him might preclude us from seeing what he can teach.

### Get born, keep warm

It helps to remind ourselves that Dylan's upbringing was distinctly unpromising - so much so that, even at the time, it seems to have struck him as a cruel joke. Raised in Hibbing, Minnesota - a dead-end mining town - he told Martin Scorsese in the film *No Direction Home* (2005): "I felt like I was born to the wrong parents or something." We ought not to draw the conclusion from this that it is wise to be contemptuous of one's elders; one might instead say that we should have the gumption to imagine our way into the life we want - and be brave enough to take steps to secure it.

**"Dylan is to me a mythical figure. I'd be just as surprised if Samuel Taylor Coleridge called"**

It remains difficult to imagine Dylan in Hibbing. His life is a powerful example of a refusal to be defined by where you're born: our knowledge of his subsequent success makes it vexing to imagine him ever having been there at all. Hibbing consisted of the typical Main Street, dreary parades, small businesses and shops, all bound up in strict mores: a life Dylan found predominantly redundant. But thanks to the invention of the gramophone, another world was able to seep through to the young Dylan. This was the astonishing revelation of rock and roll.

Like so many who go on to achieve great things, one can sense the constraints that early life placed on him - and also that those constraints were lifted not only by force of personality but also by luck. Rerun the movie with slightly different conditions and you'd have another narrative.

Specifically, Dylan's life would have been different had he never encountered Little Richard. "His was the original spirit that moved me to do everything I would do," he would write on May 9th 2020 at the singer's death. ▶



Dylan's childhood home in Hibbing, Minnesota (Derek Montgomery)



► Though Dylan is a hero to many, he is also a man adept at having heroes. He admires people – but only as a way of discovering a way to become himself.

Dylan's first known performance was in 1958 at the Hibbing High School's Jacket Jamboree Talent Festival.

In Volume 1 of *Bob Dylan: Performing Artist* Paul Williams, Dylan's finest biographer, explains how in this performance: "Dylan followed the rock and roll music to a logical conclusion that was in fact quite alien to the music of the day: play as loud as possible. Not just wild. Not just raucous. Not even just loud, but AS LOUD AS POSSIBLE, preferably in a context that will allow for maximum outrage."

It is an image of the natural iconoclast. Moreover, at this young age, Dylan was allied to a true energy; he had made a decision that couldn't be reversed to devote his life to music, and was already seeking to stand out within his chosen sphere. Soon he would graduate from being the loudest musician to other superlatives: most thoughtful, most literary, most enigmatic, most laurelled.

In the process, he was clearing more obstacles than we perhaps realise, now that we inhabit a world where they were so convincingly traversed. One fact is not the less important for being so widely cited: Bob Dylan wasn't born Bob Dylan but Robert Zimmerman. Interestingly, a letter recently surfaced where Dylan explains that his decision to change his name was based on fears of anti-Semitism. "A lot of people are under the impression that Jews are just money lenders and merchants. A lot of people think that all Jews are like that. Well, they used to because that's all that was open to them. That's all they were allowed to do."

Some, including Joni Mitchell with whom Dylan has had (at least from Mitchell's side) a somewhat abrasive and competitive relationship, have held up the decision to change his name as a mark of inauthenticity. But the decision might equally remind us of the importance of flexibility and finding a way around obstacles.



President Obama awards Dylan the Presidential Medal of Freedom (McClatchy Newspapers)

### Try to be a success

Dylan's early years exhibit a fearlessness which we might do well to emulate. As a young man, having briefly enrolled in Minnesota University in 1960, he again exhibited that same restlessness which would manifest itself eventually in his celebrated Never Ending Tour.

By this time, he had decided that rock and roll wasn't enough, and that folk music offered a richer philosophical experience. It was the first of many twists and pivots and reinventions.

In time, he would merge the folk and rock genres – going electric in 1965 to what now looks like a rather quaint indignation from the folk establishment.

For now, seized with the urgency of the eternally confident, Dylan took a train to New York, intent on meeting his hero, the folk singer Woody Guthrie. Guthrie was already suffering from Huntington's Disease, which would eventually kill him in 1967. No matter, Dylan sought him out at his sick-bed in a New Jersey hospital and played him his homage 'Song to Woody', one of only two original compositions on what would become his debut album *Bob Dylan* (1962). A torch had been passed. It was a deft negotiation of what has been called 'the anxiety of influence'.

Young people will often underestimate the availability and flesh-and-bloodness

of those at the top: fear stymies them from exposure to examples of success.

By being in close proximity to our heroes – even if the encounter doesn't go well, and we betray our nerves – we may usefully humanise them and open up the possibility of the heroic in ourselves.

This trait of Dylan's finds its corollary in a story told by former President Barack Obama in his memoir *A Promised Land* (2020). When Dylan played at the White House during the Obama administration, at the end of the performance Dylan simply shook the then president's hand and left, saying nothing. "Even the president of the United States sometimes must have to stand naked," as he put it in "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)". One suspects that Bob Dylan has never been afraid of anyone.

The Guthrie story is a reminder that we tend to get to where we need to be by being out in the world and meeting people; we never achieve in a vacuum but by the dint and say-so of others. Music journalist Tom Moon tells me that today the Bob sphere is weird even in "normal" times' but at the outset of Dylan's career, when it mattered, the young singer made all the right moves, charming the crowds in Greenwich Village, signing with Columbia Records, and submitting to the aegis of manager Albert Grossman. He has always had the right friends when he has needed them ►

► In time he would assemble a band whom he could trust and who were inspired to get better over time.

His 1975 tour the Rolling Thunder Revue was, among many things, a celebration of friendship. And it's thanks to his capacity as a bandleader we now have that highly underrated achievement the Never Ending Tour, which began on June 7th 1988 and ended – or paused – with the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic in the early part of 2020.

In reference to his longevity, Emma Swift says: "There's a counter-narrative in our culture that says that music is for young people – that if you haven't made it as a musician by 13 you should just stop. Dylan's career runs counter to that and though he was working very much as a young man, he's continued that throughout his entire life. He makes a very persuasive argument that the time for art is always now."

From the vantage-point of today, Dylan's career might seem to be to do with longevity – but longevity must be teed up when young, and it helps to have made the right decisions from a young age.

Dylan has never grown bored; his energy remains astonishing. Harvard Professor Richard Thomas, author of *Why Dylan Matters*, concurs that Dylan's career showcases "resilience, energy, adaptability, mystique, humour" – qualities that would not have been sustainable had his original decision in Hibbing to pursue music not been the right one. "I'll know my song well before I start singing," as Dylan sings in "A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall" – yes, and to know that singing is what we should be doing in the first place.

In a March 2020 interview, Gina Gershon confirmed Dylan's boyish love for what he does: "He read me some lyrics he was writing and he was all excited"... she recalled. "I was thinking, Oh my God, this is so cool. You could see why he still loves doing what he does and why he's excited"...

When I speak to the great Dylan critic, author of *Visions of Sin* (2004), and former Professor of Poetry at Oxford University Christopher Ricks, he agrees with Swift: "He only ever repeats himself valuably, somehow anew, which is not true of the rest of us." This remains true in his touring, where Dylan – famously, and sometimes to fans' perplexity – will never perform a song in the same way twice.

### His Back Pages

Throughout this life of performance, of course, Dylan has been compiling the greatest songbook of any American songwriter in the post-war period. It is a vast corpus, where wisdom sits alongside glorious nonsense – and where solemnity and comedy, yearning and rage, all equally abide.

It must be said that the idea of plucking contemporary jobs tips from the Dylan oeuvre can seem an exceptionally unpromising avenue of enquiry. Dylan himself has sometimes been self-deprecating about the idea of extracting meaning from his songs.



As he wrote in "Mr. Tambourine Man", "If you hear vague traces of skipping reels of rhyme / it's just a ragged clown behind." Dylan here appears as something like Charlie Chaplin's Little Tramp: Don't pay him any mind.

Few have taken him at his word there. More problematically, the songwriter's reliance on the folk repertoire means that the economy he is describing in his songs tends to predate ours. One might seek in vain in the Dylan canon for direct advice about how to make it in the professions, or hints about how best to make LinkedIn work for you.

But this leaning so heavily on a rich hinterland of American song, might amount to another lesson. His work shows a remarkable respect for the past – as well as a willingness to question the present. Dylan's second studio album was called *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* (1963, a title which in itself is a reference to freedom). Paul Williams once said that Dylan's songs essentially teach us that when a man learns to be free only then can he be in with a shot of happiness. ►





► But we can only be free in relation to others. As much as he would distance himself from the label “protest singer” over time, Dylan’s repertoire contains songs of high-minded hatred towards the establishment. “*Masters of War*”, “*Only a Pawn in Their Game*”, “Pay in Blood”: these songs warn us off a career bereft of a healthy scepticism about the way things are. Dylan’s songs tell us that to question the status quo is a first step towards our finding a place in it.

This freedom is not only something that Dylan exhibits; it is something he bestows on the characters in his songs. Dylan’s is a world of freely moving drifters (“*The Drifter’s Escape*”), wronged boxers hurtling unimpeded towards their fates (“*Hurricane*”), mafiosi (“*Joey*”), and a whole range of po’ boys and girls, who seem almost liberated by their impoverishment.

Everything – everyone – is in continual motion. Whenever there’s pause, trouble comes: “Only one thing I did wrong/ stayed in Mississippi a day too long.” William Zanzinger, the murderer in “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll” is too still, and accordingly is “doomed and determined to destroy all the gentle.”

Professor Richard Thomas explains that “*Workingman’s Blues #2*” is in part about working” but he agrees the middle class doesn’t feature. “His actual experience is tempered by what the folk tradition, always where much of his songs go back to, deals with”.

**“I believe he cares deeply about what matters to him, and that is the first ingredient of a good teacher”**

### All I Really Want to Do

While Dylan turns a sceptical eye on “*the masters of war*” who too often prosper in the present, he teaches an intense respect for the wisdom contained in the folkloric tradition.

This resonates in other professions. Anyone who has spoken to Sir Martin Sorrell will find him as passionate about advertising as it used to be as much as it is now. Likewise, readers of Andrew Marr’s survey of journalism *My Trade* (2004), will note that secreted in the BBC man adept in a modern medium, is a historian. Success is to do with a sense of how this moment fits into the preceding and those which will come; this can only be achieved by hard study, and utter commitment.

It is apt that while Dylan’s milieu is the past, he has nevertheless managed to prosper within the contemporary moment, and there is no-one alive today whose works seem more assured of a future audience.



(Chris Hakken)

This fact was especially brought home in late 2020 when Dylan sold his songbook to Universal for a reported figure in the \$300 million range.

This respect for tradition is a lesson he bequeaths to his musicians. As Professor Thomas explains: “The musicians he has worked with are in awe of him as a teacher of the musical traditions he wants them to be up on”.

So would Dylan have made a good teacher? Thomas says: “While I can’t see him in a classroom (“the mongrel dogs who teach” (“My Back Pages”), though that’s some time ago), I believe he cares deeply about what matters to him, and that is the first ingredient of a good teacher.”

Fleetingly, and perhaps jokingly, Dylan once imagined in an interview with AARP an alternate route for himself: “If I had to do it all over again, I’d be a schoolteacher.” In what subject? “Roman history or theology.” ►

(Picture credits: halcyongallery.com)



Under the Bridge Painting



Metal Sculptures

### When I Paint My Masterpiece

► It might be hard to imagine the Dylan energy contained in a school. In fact, it isn’t even contained within music.

In recent years, Dylan-watchers have become increasingly aware of the scope of their man’s achievement in the visual arts. A recent episode of the HBO drama *Billions* shows hedge fund billionaire Bobby Axelrod with some of Dylan’s work in his home. During the Covid-19 pandemic – according to insiders at London’s Halcyon Gallery – Dylan was not only commissioned to produce a metalwork sculpture for Ronald Reagan Airport, but delivered some 20 works to the gallery.

The appreciation of Dylan as artist and as sculptor is still in its infancy. Emma Swift tells me: “Dylan has taught me a lot about the interconnectedness of art forms. I used to think about poetry and music and visual art separately. Now I don’t.

“All the video clips for my Dylan record

are animated, so they’re very much a celebration of the visual to go alongside the music.” Dylan’s career here again emerges as an exercise in creative freedom – both within his own art form and in an interdisciplinary sense.

I head up to central London, for a behind-the-scenes tour of the Halcyon’s Bob Dylan Editions show. In many of the pictures, the influence of Edward Hopper is paramount. This is an America which has to some extent lapsed. We find motels and diners, parking-lots, cinemas and burger-joints. It is an image of everyday America, which isn’t meant to feel contemporary. Like his music, these are artefacts of collective memory; the paintings feel like acts of nostalgic preservation.

Most marvellous of all are the metal-sculptures. Upstairs, Georgia Hughes, an art consultant at the Halcyon, shows me a blown-up picture of Dylan in his California studio. Wiry and tough-looking even in old age, he stares



Kingman, Arizona Painting

eagle-like on his metals, the materials of his art. Hughes explains how Dylan rescues the metals from the scrapyards around California. I quote back at her the lines of “When I Paint My Masterpiece”: “Well, the streets of Rome are filled with rubble.” She replies: “Dylan’s art has to do with finding what lies near to hand and transforming it.” I particularly like two wall-hangings (see above), where the pieces of metal, the discarded spanners and wrenches, feel somehow like a sea-creature peculiarly adapted to its environment.

Dylan’s art career shows us that his is a porous existence where all options are on the table. Whenever one thinks of the successful, they always seem free of the doubts which seem to constrict others. If their lives often feel peculiarly uncompartimentalised, then perhaps it is because they proceed in freedom. ►



### Money doesn't talk, it swears

► Of course, if we wanted direct lessons about our lives from Dylan then his business interests are there for all to see. Put simply, Dylan has not been afraid to monetise himself.

Bobdylan.com, in addition to providing information about tour dates and the artist's songbook, is primarily a shop, hawking everything from key rings and hip flasks, to tote bags and his new Heaven's Door whiskey. In the past he has let Apple, Chrysler, Cadillac and Pepsi use his songs.

Emma Swift gives her reaction: "He does all kinds of things that are kind of shocking, and I think it opens it up for everybody else. You know, if Dylan puts his song in an ad...okay, I guess it's fine." Again, there is fearlessness here - he is prepared to risk being labelled a sell-out and happy to let the songs speak for themselves in whatever context they happen to be used.



Emma Swift (sloucher.org)



Joni Mitchell (Matt Campbell)

When I ask Thomas what lessons Dylan's life ultimately has to teach, he replies: "Read, listen, read, enquire, don't be presentist!"

If one were to ask oneself why Dylan's work is richer than that of his contemporaries then it has something to do with the range of reference brought to bear in a setting where one might not normally expect it. This is the case even when his work is compared to that of literary contemporaries such as Paul Simon and Joni Mitchell, though there will always be some - the late Clive James among them - who would prefer the poetry of Leonard Cohen.

And not being "presentist"? On the face of it, this might not seem to fit Dylan. Joni Mitchell had this to say about him: "Bob is not authentic at all. He's a plagiarist, and his name and voice are fake. Everything about Bob

is a deception." Harsh as this is, it is a frustration Paul Simon has also aired: "One of my deficiencies is my voice sounds sincere. I've tried to sound ironic. I don't. I can't. Dylan, everything he sings has two meanings. He's telling you the truth and making fun of you at the same time. I sound sincere every time."

But one suspects that Dylan would have no audience at all, if there wasn't truth at the core of his work. It is rather that he has been true to his nature by being opaque. He hasn't let his desire to tell the truth get in the way of being mysterious - and vice versa. At the Halcyon exhibition there is a wall of about 200 magazine covers devoted to Dylan. It doesn't matter how much we photograph or try to know him; his eyes won't let us in entirely. ►



Professor Christopher Ricks (arneisquartet.com)

### Forever Young

► As Dylan enters his ninth decade, there is much his career has to teach those who are embarking on their own lives. It's true that there is dispute in academic circles about the extent of his literary achievement, a debate inflamed by his winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016. But Dylan has been plausibly compared to William Shakespeare and to John Keats.

We know far more about Dylan's life than we do about the Elizabethan, and Dylan has lived out his talent far more than Keats, who died at 26.

In spite of the singularity of his achievement, Dylan continues to repay study. Besides, the man who wrote 'Don't follow leaders. / Watch your parking meters', isn't so much telling us what to do, as inviting us in.

Once we accept his invitation, we find we become richer, wiser. There is a generosity somewhere near the core of his art. Dylan once said: 'Every song tails off with "Good Luck, - I hope you make it."

He never said where - but he didn't have to. As often with Dylan, we sort of know what he means, but we have to fill in the gaps ourselves. **f**





# HOW WILL BIDEN AFFECT JOBS IN THE UK?

BY GEORGIA HENEAGE



**T**here has been much hype around what the new Biden administration signifies for a politically divided country infected with issues of social inequality, racial injustice and a deadly virus which has killed over a million of its people.

In his first months in office, Biden has already conducted (or at least promised) a systemic upheaval of many of the

unpopular and controversial policies in place during the Trump administration, such as its sceptical approach to climate change, immigration and foreign policy.

With Kamala Harris as the first female vice president of colour, there is a new mood around questions of diversity and inequality which were largely ignored under the Republican regime.

But the impact this seismic shift for

America will have on the UK is yet to be seen: will it really be that seismic? And, if it is, will the effects be negative or positive?

The view of those working in these key areas in the UK is that the large scale shake-up which Biden is promising should urge us to follow suit, but the likelihood that it will is less than certain. ►

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Black Lives Matter protests in Trafalgar Square

### The Young Ones

For 21 year-old Connor Brady, Staffordshire University's Labour Student's Society manager, the "tone" and "conversation" in the UK changed immediately following Biden's inauguration.

Though he is unsure that "policy-wise" much will change in America for young people, Brady believes that Biden's environmental policies will play a large part in emphasising the UK's thin approach to climate: "His new policies highlight the fact that we're not really having that discussion in the UK. I don't think that we are going to make the changes necessary to save the planet, whereas in America the thought process is at least there".

The fault, says Brady, lies with a media system in the UK much less attuned to climate worries than across the pond, and a political culture "defined by indecision".

"I'd love it to be the sort of example that we'd follow," says Brady, "and say that we need to take it seriously because they are. But I don't think we really have a political class that are ever going to really take notice of the way other countries are doing better: we've seen it with Covid."

Staffordshire's society's communications officer Jagdeep Jhamat, 20, said Biden and Harris' appointment was "a sigh

of relief; the moment we found out the results we realised that a saga had just ended in American politics, and it was not a good one".

For Jhamat, though, the appointment of Kamala Harris does not signal a substantial benefit for people of colour in America or the UK. "Just because she has credentials of being the first woman of colour doesn't excuse the fact that she was a judge who sentenced people of colour to prison with insufficient evidence. It's not the best representation of minorities in America."

And Jhamat sees a parallel in this respect with UK politics: "I have nothing in common with ethnically 'diverse' MPs like Rishi Sunak or Priti Patel: all I see is them selling out to the interests of a ruling white international capitalist class."

Despite this, Connor Brady says the Black Lives Matter protests which started in America last year had a hugely positive affect on young people in the UK who are increasingly "politically disenfranchised".

"The movements that we've seen over the past year have shown that young people are ready for change, and they are going to fight for change," says Brady. "They aren't going to wait five or 10 years. They are willing to stand up and say no: we need change now, and

we're going to take it. That's what I'm really excited about."

His worry, though, is that "if Biden and Kamala don't follow through on their promises, or if their policies aren't radical enough, then it's going to increase the disenfranchisement of young people in the UK who look up to them".

### Green Shoots

One of the areas most transformed by the Biden administration to date is his climate policies.

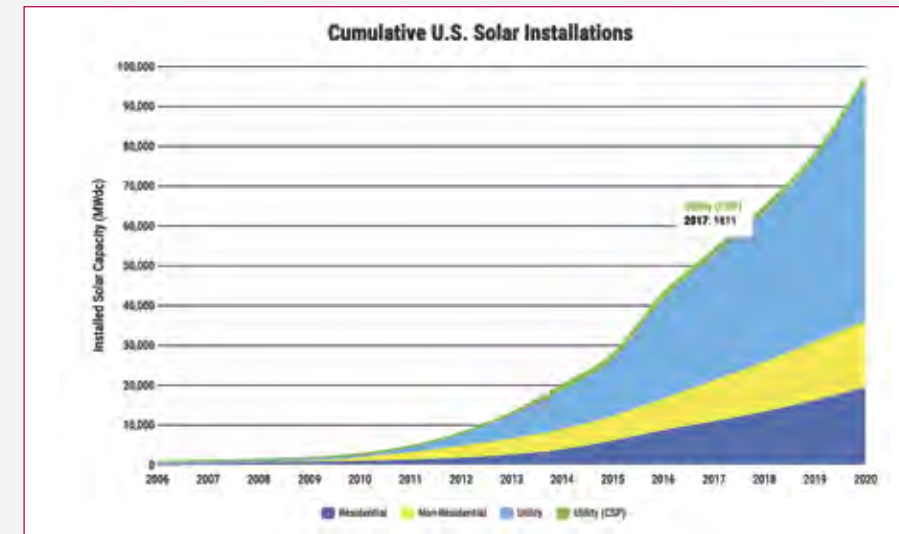
After years of climate denialism and environmental destruction under Trump, the White House has now recognised global warming as an "emergency": they've rejoined the Paris accord, promised new opportunities for clean energies and green technologies, and signed an executive order to freeze new oil and gas leases on public lands and double offshore wind production by 2030.

These are just a few of hundreds of ambitious executive decisions established in an effort to position climate change as an essential part of all American foreign and domestic policy going forward.

Biden's extensive environmental policies show his awareness that beating ►



Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle



► climate change requires systemic change; a scooping out and refilling of the American economic and political systems rather than a sprinkling on top.

So where does this all leave the UK? For Natalie Bennett, former leader of the Green Party from 2012-2016, Biden's appointment signals a golden age for the global fight against climate change.

More importantly, she says it puts a huge amount of pressure on the UK as the chair of COP and highlights what a mess the UK is in.

"Embarrassment can be a very useful tool," says Bennett. "If a country like the USA, which has so many similar problems to us like poverty, inequality and the dominance of giant multinational companies, is doing better than we are, that makes us look really bad."

Bennett says the US' Green New Deal is far more sophisticated than the Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution announced by the UK government in November last year.

"The Biden administration has come in with a very clear plan of action on whole areas of key policy, whereas our plan looks like something written down on the back of an envelope then hastily sketched up into something. It's not long-term thinking," she said.

Bennett sees these issues with making long-term executive decisions in the UK as part and parcel of a binary, first-past-the-post electoral system which means that "we are terrible at decision-making", and the "last significant change in Westminster was women getting the vote 100 years ago".

It's also down to our deeply centralised political system, where power and resources are concentrated in Westminster and local government's ability to make independent decisions has been "slashed to ribbons, to the point where most local governments have their hands tied". Bennett says the

rhetoric of the Green New Deal is, by its natural structure, locally based: it's about doing things in communities, whereas "our industrial strategy is about what the top level decides and what companies invest in."

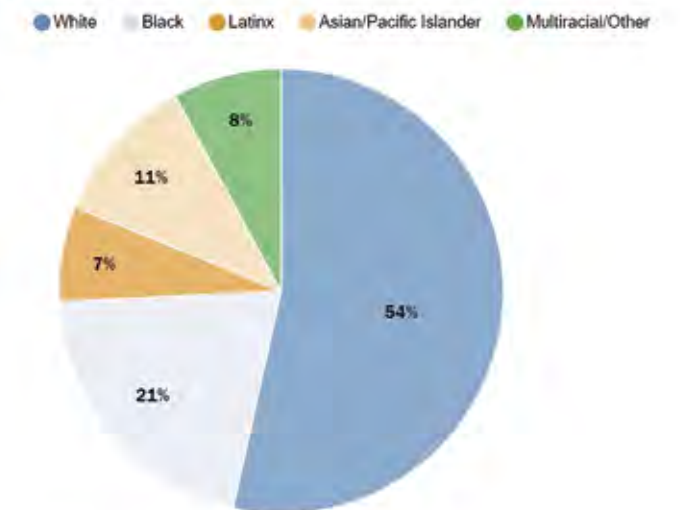
Despite the UK government's promise to create 250,000 jobs in the green sector, Bennett says Biden's new policies are far more rooted in a recognition that climate change should be rooted in the labour movement, technological progress and job creation. His "just transition" policy "suggests change everywhere", whereas in the UK there's a sense that everything needs to level up to the status quo set in London.

"What we are talking about here is business as usual with added technology. Biden is talking about transformation," says Bennett.

### Racial Tensions

One of the most predominant issues brought to the international stage last year was racial injustice: these were voiced in mass Black Lives Matter protests which started in America, a country for whom racial discrimination is a daily reality for millions and is deeply embedded in the political and justice system. ►

### Diversity of the Protests in the US



Source: Fisher, D. R (2019). *American Resistance: From the Women's March to the Blue Wave. All Post-George Floyd Protests (N = 374)*

BROOKINGS





Kamala Harris, Vice President

► Biden's appointment signals a shift in this area, partly because of his pledge to tackle social and racial inequality in America, partly because of the sheer weight lifted by expelling a president who many deem openly racist, and partly because America is now enjoying the first woman of colour as its vice president.

Though some see Kamala Harris as an exciting new change in political black representation for women, Lee Pinkerton, communications officer

for ROTA (Race on the Agenda), a leading social mobility think tank, agrees with student Jagdeep Jhamat that Kamala Harris' appointment will "in truth have very little real effect on people of colour around the world".

"They had a short feel-good moment, but it will have very little real impact on the quality of black people's lives in America in terms of things like employment or criminal justice", says Pinkerton, "especially because Harris wasn't all that popular among black communities when she was a judge".

In the UK a similar kind of "superficial" diverse representation can be seen in government. "The Tories are boasting of the most racially diverse cabinet in UK history - which is factually true - but it hasn't improved things for black people at all. If you look at the back story of MPs like Home Secretary Priti Patel or Chancellor Rishi Sunak, they come from the same privileged, privately-educated backgrounds as their white peers. They are cut from the same cloth, and in terms of diversity of thought- there's little to none".

### A Farewell to Arms?

The ethical, political and economic impact of the UK's involvement in the war in Yemen, in part a result of us being the second largest exporter of weapons to Saudi Arabia, has long been a source of controversy.

Earlier in the year, tensions intensified as the new Biden administration announced its intention to freeze all arms sales to Saudi Arabia and work towards a lasting peace agreement to end the war that has now killed around a quarter of a million people and placed at least four million on the brink of famine.

When asked for its response the day after Biden's move was announced, the UK government was clear on one thing: they are not going to alter their approach towards selling weapons to the Saudis, many of which reportedly end up killing innocent civilians.

The UK's arms export licensing information reports that licenses worth £5.4 billion for sales to Saudi Arabia have been issued since March 2015, though they also consider this an underestimate. According to the ►

► Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, since 2015 Saudi has been the largest importer of arms in the world, with the UK accounting for about 15 per cent of these exports, and the US around 75 per cent. Saudi Arabia represented 40 per cent of the volume of UK arms exports between 2010 and 2019.

So will America's decision to roll back from its heavy involvement in Yemen have any impact on the UK?

For Dr David Blagden, senior lecturer in International Security and Strategy at the University of Exeter, Biden's decision will "potentially leave the UK's tacit support in Yemen even less tenable".

But Blagden says following suit may be unlikely, since the key difference between the UKs involvement and the US' is that, whilst America "is less and less dependent on Gulf hydrocarbons and it doesn't really need Gulf oil anymore," in the UK we still rely on Middle-Eastern oil and gas and have in fact been "doubling down on Gulf commitment over the last few years with the new base in Bahrain and Oman."

Blagden says the UK previously used the US's involvement in the Gulf as "cover" and because America was so involved the UK didn't really stand out.

"But the US revising its position on that will, I think, produce some even starker tensions for the UK."

Blagden suggests that our continued support may be rooted in the fact that the arms sales contributes to so many "highly paid and highly trained jobs" in manufacturing and munitions sales. But according to Oliver Feeley-Sprague, Amnesty International UK's Military, Security and Police Programme Director "the jobs argument is overstated in terms of the impact. Yes of course big contracts would suffer, but in the overall scale of things, Saudi is only one of many destinations we sell to and we're not talking about stopping every sale of equipment to the Gulf."

Feeley-Sprague also doubts the validity of the argument that arms sales contribute so much to our economy: "If you look at the economies of scale, the UK is the second largest arms supplier after the United States. But the US is by far the largest: 75 per cent of all weaponry over the last five years that Saudi has imported in terms of monetary value has come from the USA".

"Yes we are the second, but the US is by far the largest, so if we flip that argument on its head it's a much more valuable market for the US than for the UK. If the US has said it will stop, that puts the UK in a very isolated position".

Feeley-Sprague says the biggest impact of the US decision for the UK will be felt on individual companies: "In a globalised market the arms trade is intrinsically linked to international supply chains. US restrictions will have practical implications on companies reliant on US defense companies for their own sales."

This should never be a reason not to take the ethical path, though. "We always say you should never allow strategic, economic, political factors to override the pure principles of international law, which is the protection of innocent civilians in armed conflict," says Feeley-Sprague.

For Paul Tippell, Constituency Coordinator for UNA-UK Yemen, the UK's leading source of analysis on the UN, the biggest issue in the UK's position with regards to Yemen is not arms sales but its failure to play a part in the ceasefire of a war which has been called the biggest humanitarian crisis of our time.

"Our job is to set the agenda and come up with resolutions; we have a big responsibility and there's a real opportunity to work with the new administration in the US to try and secure peace. The UK has been singularly lacking in this respect."

So why have we been so 'singularly lacking'? Feeley-Sprague says the UK has had a "blind spot" for Saudi Arabia for decades, and are prepared to tolerate more issues than almost any other "customer", because they are seen as "a key market for money and a strategic partner in the UK's foothold into the wider region".

But Brexit has placed the UK in a precarious position on the international world stage, and we must be careful: "If ever there was a way of announcing on the world stage that we were a major power who considered human rights and the rule of law to be important, now is the time".

"Because the UK hasn't done that, I think it puts a question mark in the post-Brexit role that the UK wants to play in the world" says Feeley-Sprague.

### Inflated Opinions

As we say in our second leader to this issue, Democratic administrations tend to be good for the economy. The unemployment rate has historically fallen under the left, while tending to increase when the White House has been under Republican control. Under Barack Obama and Bill Clinton, unemployment fell by 3.1 per cent in each instance; under George W. Bush it rose, after the 2007-8 recession, by 3.6 per cent. Trump also presided over a 1.6 per cent increase in joblessness.

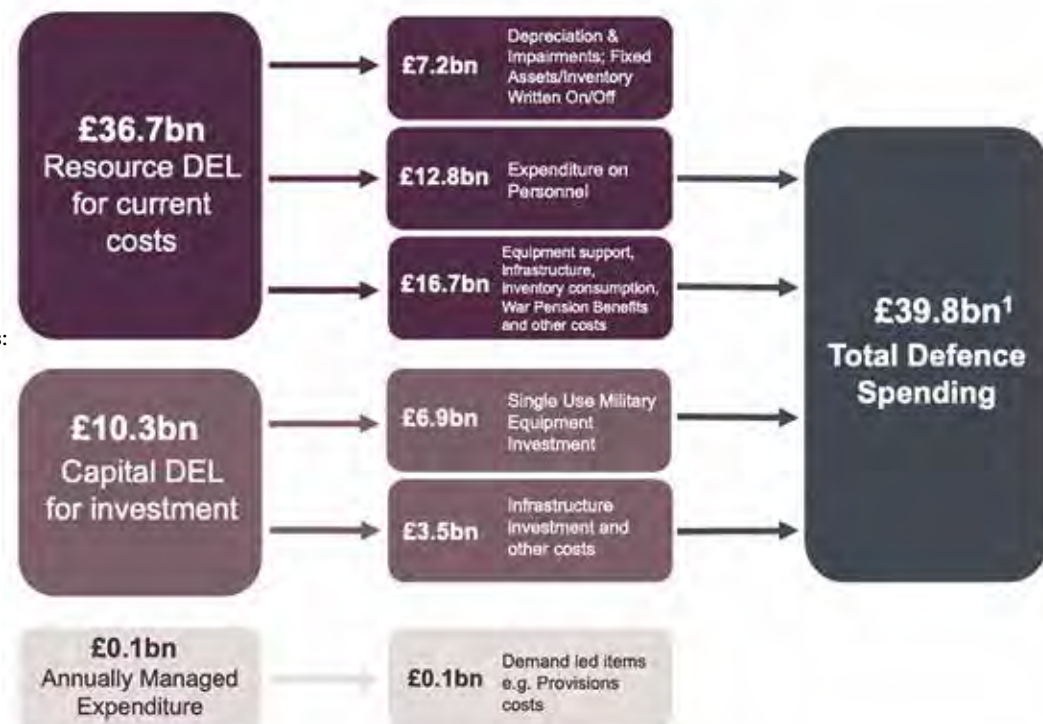
Within those startling statistics, there are other stories - about youth unemployment, and especially youth unemployment among minorities. Zoltan Hajnal and Jeremy Horowitz, in an important study, found: "Across 35 years of Republican presidencies, black unemployment went up a net of 13.7 percentage points. Across 22 years with Democrats, the black unemployment rate fell 7.9 points."

According to the US Bureau for Labor Statistics, there is a currently an increase in demand for hires in computer and ►

### UK DEFENCE SPENDING 2019/20

#### NOTES:

Defence Spending excludes AME and is calculated as follows: RDEL + CDEL - Depreciation & Impairments, and Fixed Assets/ Inventory Written On/Off.



Source: Departmental Resource Accounts





Janet Yellen Secretary to the Treasury

► peripheral equipment manufacturing, residential building construction, and pharmaceuticals. Biden’s \$1.9 trillion Covid relief package will go some way towards supporting job opportunities for graduates in the hard-hit aviation and hospitality sectors.

Of course, there have been worries expressed about inflation. For legendary economist Jim O’Neill, time will tell.

“Today, I worry that the American democratic system is struggling”, he tells us. “The country is having to adjust to the fact that for the past 20 years, US economic growth has been so unequal. There’s been no rise in real wages during that time, which has caused this remarkable split politically.” So what are his predictions? O’Neill is tentative, but not without concerns: “If we don’t see renewed economic growth post-COVID - and alongside it, shared economic growth - then the fragility will only grow more.”

That sounds worrying - and there’s another cause for concern according to another giant Sir Martin Sorrell, who at a recent talk alongside Oren Kaniel at a UK Israel Business event expressed his concerns about Biden’s relationship with China.

In the huge legislation Biden passed within his first 50 days, we can see the scale of the new administration’s ambition. “In essence, this is why the Americans have voted in a Biden type presidency,” continues O’Neill. “It’s because they wanted to see some experimentation, taxes and more government spending.”

That’s certainly what Americans will get as the meaning of those government cheques for \$1,400, together with the landmark expansion of child tax credits, seeps into the collective consciousness. The Biden administration therefore initially appears to turn on the question of inflation, and whether the bill is too big.

In a *Washington Post* op-ed, Larry Summers argued that the “proposed stimulus will total in the neighbourhood of \$150 billion a month...at least three times the size of the output shortfall... [T]here is a chance [this] will set off inflationary pressures of a kind we have not seen in a generation, with consequences for the value of the dollar and financial stability...”

Yet many commentators from economists at Goldman Sachs, to new Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Paul Krugman, would disagree. Paul Krugman



Lawrence Summers



Paul Krugman (Prolineserver)

told CNN: “There is something weird about the way in which the 1970s still dominates people’s nightmares.”

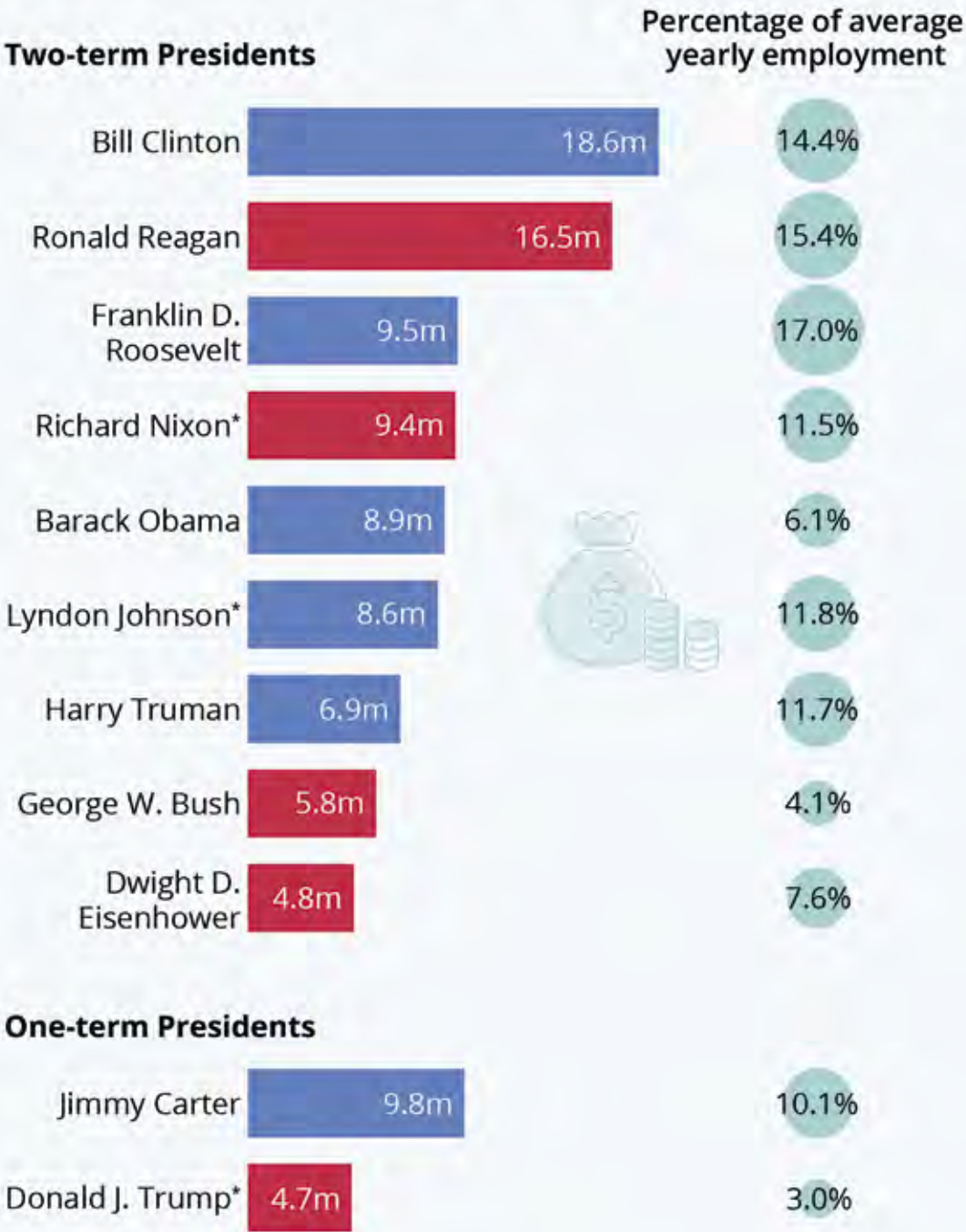
He didn’t mention Summers by name, but then he didn’t have to. “If we were going to spend 20 per cent of GDP on debt finance and government spending, I’d say that’s inflationary. But given where we are and we have a long history of stable prices, the idea that we’re going to run away into a price spiral overnight doesn’t make sense.”

These are the macro arguments - and we’ll see how they play out. Brexit and an indecisive government may place the UK in an isolated or precarious position on the international stage, but the entrance of Biden means the return of America as a neoliberal international economy with one eye always turned outwards. It signals a golden dawn, full of hope, for young people.

Gone are the days of protectionism and reckless international policies which governed America under Trump; the age which a new Biden administration ushers in appears to be one of global consensus, free trade and rigorous attention to the key issues. Let’s hope he achieves what he promises to. f

# Which President Created the Most Jobs?

Number of new jobs created and their percentage of total employment for each president



\* Including incomplete terms  
Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, The Balance



Source: Statista



# — What does Obama have to teach — Biden - and the rest of us?

IRIS SPARK ASKS WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM  
THE ULTIMATE WRITER-PRESIDENT

**With the arrival of Joe Biden in the White House, there have now been 45 people who have risen to become President of the United States during America's 250 year history. It's only rarely that someone with the sensibility of a writer assumes the highest office in the land.**

It's easy to see why this might be so. On the face of it, the pressure and flux of the job would appear to mitigate against anyone with a penchant for the sedentary life taking it on. Barack Obama did. That means that in *The Promised Land* - which in its first volume already runs to 768 pages - we have a unique document with much to teach us about politics - and about Biden's America.

But the value of the memoir is still greater than that. In reality, things happen so quickly in the Oval Office, and with such drama, that we find in the pages of Obama's book a condensed primer on human nature; it is a book so good it has much to teach us all.

## The Way You Tell 'Em

The former president's eye for detail means that the reader is given a unique sense of the White House as a working environment.

Here, for instance, is Obama, newly charged with the weight of the world's problems, taking time to notice the gardeners at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue:

*They were men of few words; even with one another they made their points with a gesture or a nod, each of them focused on his individual task but all of them moving with synchronised grace.*

So the man of many words notes straightaway the men of few. This is a book about many kinds of work - it is about the job of being president -

and therefore being a leader, and it is also about preserving the dignity of work for as many Americans as possible. But every word reads like a proclamation of vocation: in bearing witness to his experience, he hopes to redeem his presidency of its faults, and to comprehend - and even compensate for - his errors.

In the wake of Biden's win, Obama has less to redeem than if we were now inhabiting the first months of Donald Trump's second term. Biden is a different kind of president to Obama - in some ways already a bolder one - but he campaigned on the back of Obama nostalgia, and at the policy level, though he is sometimes tugged to the left of the 44th president, Biden is pledged to build on Obama-ism.

But what American president doesn't have regrets? It is a position of such power that any ugliness in the planet is often held to be their fault. And so this is a redemptive book, even if - perhaps especially if - Obama can hardly think of anything he could have done differently. One wonders if witnessing Biden's early successes makes him feel envious.

But Obama is more than a writer. In *The Promised Land*, even as he is observing with the writer half of his brain, we watch him operating in the real world. It is a rare skill. What can we learn from it?

## Surveying the Terrain

Obama's book begins with a potted description of his early life - distinct from the sweep of his early masterpiece *Dreams from My Father*. It is always interesting to read of the early lives of presidents, or figures whom we know shall prove historic, since we can see how in retrospect so much of what happened was to their advantage.

But Obama's story is also defined by a strong counter-intuitive streak. At one point, having described his ascent to be the first black editor of the Harvard Law Review ("enthusiasm makes up for a whole host of deficiencies"), we discover his contrarian spirit, which may be more marked than we might think in this man who has become famous as a consensus politician:

*Job offers arrived from around the country, and it was assumed that my path was now charted, just as it had been for my predecessors at the Law Review: I'd clerk for a Supreme Court justice, work for a top law firm or the Office of the United States Attorney... It was heady stuff. The only person who questioned this smooth path of ascent seemed to be me.*

It's a fascinating career progression: the future president became a community organizer, then realising the limitations of that position when it came to implementing real change, went to Harvard Law School. ▶





► There was a brief accommodation with corporate America when he trained at Sidley Austin a big Chicago law firm. But then he saw an opening in local politics and rose through the state legislature – via a book deal – to Congress and then the presidency.

What comes across is that it's not enough to know what you want to do – you have to be on the lookout for opportunity, to react to the contingencies of the world. With Obama, we can see that he retained throughout crucial flexibility; that the urge to grow was correctly traversed alongside a need to navigate the world. In the box opposite, Finito mentor Sophia Petrides reacts to what we can learn from Obama's early years.

### The Great Campaigner

What is remarkable about Obama's rise to the presidency is how frictionless it seems. It is as if once he had chosen politics, he was able to move upwards with very little acting against his ascent.

The reader who knows about Obama's story might wince at one point, when he writes of his wedding to Michelle on October 3rd, 1992: "The service was officiated by the church's pastor, Reverend Jeremiah A. Wright Jr." That association would not turn out well for Obama, when on March 13th 2008, Obama woke to find videos of Wright's inflammatory rhetoric playing on repeat across the live media. Some choice excerpts included him calling America, "the USA of KKK", and his saying, "Not God bless America. God damn America".

It was the only moment when, the reader feels, Obama might really have lost the 2008 election; it was possible that with poor handling, he might either have found himself defeated by Hillary Clinton to the Democratic nomination, or perhaps ►

### When trying to find your career path, be aggressively curious and open to various opportunities: do not limit yourself.

Obama offers a great template for that kind of approach. By exploring different avenues and asking inquisitive questions, you start to feel what resonates with you and slowly you create a desire to explore this avenue even further. There's a recognition in Obama's case that even if the corporate life wasn't for him, he couldn't know that without being open to the possibility in his early career.

Sometimes you can only identify a role that speaks to your heart and values by comparing with a role that isn't for you. It's finding a balance between your head and your heart. As in Obama's case, if your first instincts are to work in the community, chances are you might well find yourself back there one day after a stint in the private sector. This pathway helps you work out where you really want to spend your time. Similarly, others might feel like they should work in public service but love the business world.

What matters most is the importance of basing your choices on your values and belief system – otherwise, instead of being a leader of your life, you become a follower of someone else's. This in turn can lead to future regrets regarding the opportunities you may have missed along the way trying to be something you don't really want to be deep down.

It's also important to remember that nobody is watching, nobody is judging – and there are no prizes for coming first or last. This is life: you can't always choose a career path any more than you can choose who you fall in love with or if you like Marmite or hate it. However, what you must do is be mindful of how you are feeling. Convincing yourself you love a job when your heart isn't in it is toxic and ultimately holds you back.

In order to embark on your own perfect career ladder, it can feel like you need to be a fortune-teller – but again, we have the Obama template. He started his own mentoring foundation because he benefited hugely from mentors in the worlds of community activism (Frank Marshall Davis) law and government (Abner Mikva). You need to identify the experts in the industry you want to pursue and grow, as they will be guiding and supporting you along your career journey.

Don't make the mistake of focusing too much on what the future may bring. What matters is that you are living your life in the now and actively listening to your own inner voice, and the people around you. There will be many opportunities. Your challenge is choosing the ones that suit you best – and that may not be the ones you think. You need to work out the difference between what you think you should do, what you might do, what you can do and what you want to do. You might be surprised to find those things – as in Obama's case – were very closely aligned to begin with.

*Sophia Petrides.*



*Sophia Petrides*

► that he might have held on but found the Reverend Wright's remarks a millstone around his neck in the subsequent general election battle against John McCain. "It felt as if a torpedo had blown through our hull," he writes.

Obama did two things from there which are worth noting. In the first place, he shouldered responsibility: "I may not have been in church for any of the sermons in question or heard Reverend Wright use such explosive language. But I knew all too well the occasional spasms of anger within the Black community – my community – that Reverend Wright was channelling." It might be too simplistic to state that Obama strikes one as an honest person – although his time in office was notable for an almost total absence of scandal. What mattered was his realisation of the importance of the moment: "Anyway it was too late. And while there are moments in politics, as in life, when avoidance, if not retreat, is the better part of valour, there are other times when the only option is to steel yourself and go for broke," Obama recalls.

What followed was a masterclass in the importance of rhetoric, and the weaponising of language. In the box below we asked the poet and biographer Christopher Jackson to talk about level-headedness under pressure, and the importance of language in our careers.

### Nobody manages to succeed without being able to negotiate high stress situations. But what are the techniques we might use to do so?

The first thing must surely be to step back and realise that the pressure we might be feeling is negligible in the grand scheme of things. Insodoing we must also trust in the better angels of human nature. In Obama's Jeremiah Wright speech, the future president assumes a high level of sophistication in his audience.

He gives his full eloquence to his moral predicament, trusting America to assimilate for itself what he has to say.

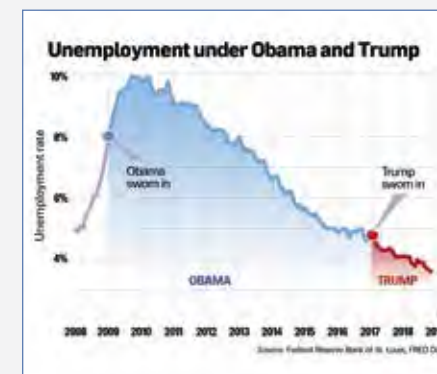
### Mr Obama Goes to Washington

All this was heading, as we know, towards the presidency, and of course *The Promised Land* pivots there, just as his life altered.

Obama is soon in receipt of his daily briefing and problems rush his way, anxious to be solved. There is the fact of the global economy crashing; the healthcare system he has promised to fix; the immigration system which needs absolute overhaul – and above all, a climate which needed fixing.

Obama took a number of decisions. The first was to prioritise the economy; the second was to pursue sweeping healthcare legislation. Insodoing he inevitably placed other things on the backburner, including wide-ranging climate change legislation and sweeping immigration reform.

How successful was Obama's strategy? As is clear from the data above right Obama was vindicated by an impressive run of job growth throughout his presidency. However, his decision not to pursue bolder economic policies arguably led to a slow recovery and sluggish GDP growth. Meanwhile, income inequality continued to rise during his administration, which in turn led to the sense of disenfranchisement which caused the Trump presidency.



Throughout the book Obama makes clear that he had little choice but to right the economy. Even so, it is impossible not to detect an air of melancholy about the way in which his presidency would cede to that of a man to whom he was diametrically opposed.

In retrospect, Obama faced a classic conundrum of prioritisation. This is something that we all face in our careers. Overleaf Finito mentor Andy Inman gives his tips as to how to navigate such situations. ►

**“There are times when the only option is to steel yourself and go for broke”**

He lets us in. It has been remarked that Obama isn't a quotable speech-maker: the only line of his I can think of fit for the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* would be "Yes, We Can" – a line that wasn't his. What made his oratory great was the way in which he was able to work on our empathy. The best measure of an Obama speech has always been how we feel afterwards – more compassionate, more aware of the complexity of the world but resolved to navigate it.

Perhaps the most salient point about the Reverend Wright speech is that he made it at all: doing so was an empathetic act. It was a foretaste of his finest speech – and arguably his greatest

act as president – his eulogy to Clementa Pinckney on 26th June 2015. He was always a politician who could sense the mood in the world around him – what was salvable, and what was not. In our own lives, whenever we come up against a difficulty it is worth following Obama's example, and fronting up to it. Almost always when we have a problem it would benefit from spending time with it at the level of language. Nobody in life is without problems; and when we meet ours head on, and give them articulation, we are more likely to find a receptive audience than not.

*Christopher Jackson.*



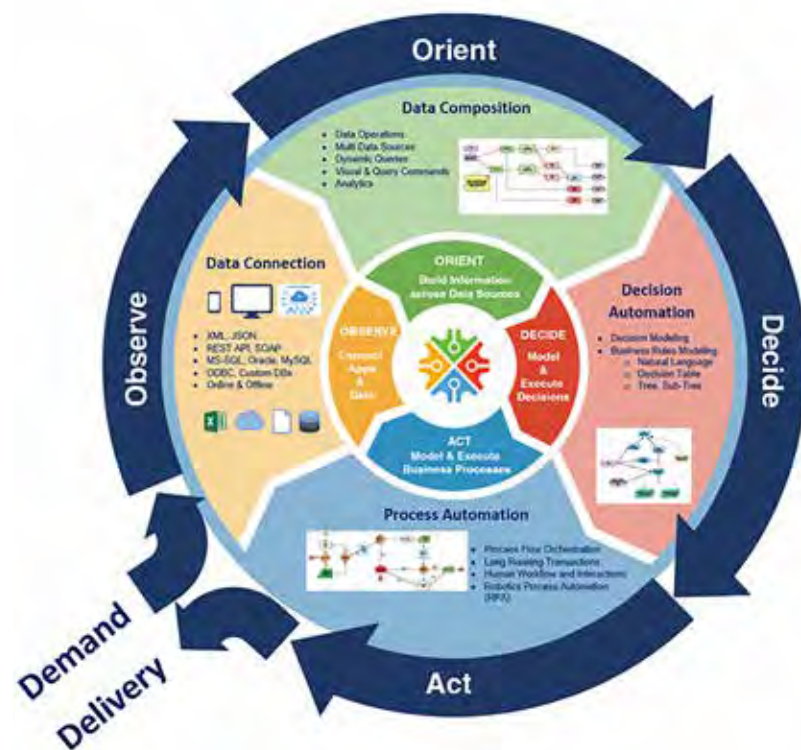
**There are so many variables for each individual when talking about their priorities that it is impossible to give a one size fits all answer to how to successfully prioritise.**

Clearly time critical elements need to climb the ladder of what to deal with next, and important elements must win over things that may be more trivial. There is a useful tool that individuals can use to analyse situations and work out where to put them in their list of priorities. Business is increasingly using a technique borrowed from the Military known as the OODA an acronym which stands for Observe Orientate Decide Act. By observing, we look at what is facing us and really understand it. Then we need to orientate ourselves, by bringing whatever it is we're facing into the environment in which we find ourselves. For example, a fire on the ground can be dealt with in a very different way to one when in the air. Then you need to decide - that is, work out what you're going to

do about it. Finally, you have to act, and be prepared to begin OODA all over again. Being able to prioritise effectively is a key skill for any employee and it is one we can develop with practice if we are not very good at it. Working through the tasks at hand in a methodical manner, bringing the OODA Loop into play on each task and being on top of your admin so that you effectively complete each task, are good places to start.

We all have to sift our priorities and in making these choices we often find that our what we're capable of, and what we want to do, amount to one and the same thing

*Andy Inman.*



**Government is back-breakingly busy: everything happens simultaneously. It's not like you say to the prime minister - sort out Brexit this week, and next week we'll do China and then we'll deal with schools, because all these pressures are occurring simultaneously.**

I remember one meeting I was in with David Cameron: I was in the room when he had to take a decision about whether to authorise the rescue of a British hostage somewhere in the world. As PM, you have to quiz your military chiefs and your intelligence chiefs about how certain you are the hostage is in this location, what the risk is of loss of life for the hostages or rescuers, and ask if you go in, what the wider diplomatic fallout is going to be, and what the risk is we don't get another opportunity. Over the course of half an hour, but not more, the PM has to take a decision either to go ahead or not, leave the room and then go straight into the discuss the budget with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, or arbitrate in a wrangle between two ministers about a spending issue, or it might be a visiting head of government. So you have to take the decision to switch off, focus on the next thing and also know having taken the decision, that if it all goes wrong, you have to be the one to go and explain at the despatch-box why it is. That's true the day they take office and the day they leave.

*Sir David Lidington.*



► The nature of high office as with any important role is to present extremely stressful situations on a routine basis. Obama navigated the difficulty of the job with a mixture of humour and grace. He had always been told by his mother Ann that he was innately calm from having grown up by the sea in Hawaii. On the panel on the previous page Sir David Lidington describes the sort of pressure Obama was under.

#### Toxicity, Actually

As the book progresses, a pattern becomes established. The reader repeatedly finds Obama opting for incremental progress - irritating those who would desire bigger or more progressive legislation, but also being painted as a radical by the Republican right for attempting to implement any changes at all.

His approach looks especially cautious in 2021 now that we know what Biden was able to legislate - but of course, we forget that Biden has benefitted from learning up close from Obama.

It's fascinating to think on this in respect to our careers. We must all be aware of the importance of not being too idealistic - of achieving something versus letting things drift. But as the book unfolds and Trump's birther controversy takes hold ("like algae in a stagnant pond, the number of stories on his conspiratorial musings proliferated with each passing week"), Obama's book comes to seem a classic case of a toxic work environment. The Republicans refused to work with him throughout his two terms, but Obama rose above the slurs, never stooping to the level of his tormentors. This approach was encapsulated by Michelle Obama's famous dictum: "When they go low, we go high."

But there will always be people who think he should have called them out more and been somehow more bullish. In our lives we are all likely to meet our own Mitch McConnells and even our Donald Trumps. How should we deal with them? Opposite, Dana James-Edwards gives her thoughts.

**When I was growing up, I heard the words, "You can be whatever and whoever you want to be" all the time. But a part of me never truly believed it until the moment Barack Obama won the US election.**

Here was someone who while highly educated, was not from a particularly wealthy background and had the same colour skin as me, holding the highest office in the United States of America. Some might even say the most powerful position in the world. I was elated. However, my feelings of achievement and pride were coloured by some of the media and social media coverage and commentary at the time.

I watched aghast as he was called a Nazi, a monkey, and depicted as an African witch doctor complete with grass skirt. I remember deactivating my Facebook account to take some time off social media in the wake of his election, because every time I logged in I would see something about the desperate need to pray for America in the hands of Obama and how the country was going to be ruined under his leadership. I got angry at those making the comments and false assertions, but will admit that a part of me was also cross with Obama himself.

"Why isn't he fighting back?", I thought. "He has all of this power and all of this reach and access to resources. Why isn't he using it to quash all these aspersions!", I grumbled to anyone who would listen. I watched the mudslinging happen again and again across his first term, and a myriad of indignities and injustices unleashed not just against him but against his entire family, and it made me more and more enraged.

Then, during his re-election campaign I remember Michelle Obama saying, "When they go low, we go high". And I heard her. Because she was

right. Going low is easy. It's what you do when you feel pain and rage and want revenge. Looking back, every time I wished the Obamas would go low, I was coming from a place of fury. I wanted the people taking away my sense of pride and spreading misinformation couched as fact, to be punished. I wasn't thinking about what the effects of the Obamas unleashing that anger would be in the future and what message it would send. I just wanted someone to pay in that moment, and no good action starts in that space.

The Obamas, I think, knew that while a temporary release of anger in public might feel good in the moment it would overall do more harm than good. They had to think longer-term. In addition, they had the eyes of the world on them. Some, just waiting for a misstep that they could spin and amplify. They also had a generation looking toward them as role models, just as I was. By taking the high road they maintained their dignity while in office and protected their legacy in a way that still enables them to be seen as exemplars today. Had they gone low it would have just been more fuel to the fire, and they would have played into the trope of the "angry black man" and "angry black woman" that still exists and continues to surface negatively today.

What is important to note is that Michelle Obama never said that taking the high road is easy, and exempts you from the pain and anger that arises when others are hurtful. But she did say that you feel the pain and hurt, and rise above it, which I think is something that we can all continue to learn from.

*Dana James-Edwards.*



## The Hand of History

This is a remarkable book by a remarkable writer: lucid, wheeling, complex. It leaves the reader in no doubt that for eight years a first-class mind occupied the Oval Office.

Despite that, how Obama will be judged by history remains uncertain. On the one hand, the very existence of the Biden administration shows that during the Trump years a sizeable portion of America yearned for a return to many of the Obama administration's policies since these were so much front and centre of Biden's campaign. On climate, Iran, immigration, healthcare and much else besides, Biden pledged to build on the direction Obama set.

But now as the Biden agenda begins to

take shape, things look different again.

The 46th president's policies are demonstrably more radical than anything Obama was able to achieve, and arguably make him look excessively cautious.

This in turn feeds into criticisms which have long been levelled at him: that he was an ingénu in Washington, incapable of the glad-handing required to get things done in the Senate, and temperamentally disinclined to seize the moment. Is he now more likely to be lumped together with Bill Clinton as a too centrist Commander-in-Chief? Perhaps.

But against that we don't yet know whether the fears of Larry Summers and others as to the possibly inflationary

impact of Biden's relief legislation will be realised.

History, which can seem so rooted in the past, is in fact always changing as the present acts upon it, altering its look.

What seems certain is that Obama will always be an example worth studying. More than any other president - and far more than Biden - he matters to people, and makes us think about our personal journeys. His voice is intimate, familiar.

He found his way into our collective mind like very few alive today, and so he accompanies us as we forge our life.

That's true for our mentors here in the UK - but it's also true for policy-makers in the Biden administration now charged with creating the next chapter in the world's story. [f](#)



(Susan Walsh)

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# New at Work? Meet the Team

BY STUART THOMSON

**There can be significant pressure on anyone entering the workforce to prove themselves from the outset. You want to show that your employer made the right decision in taking you on rather than all those others that they doubtless saw. But draw a breath and take the time to look at those around you. It will be a wise investment.**

Many of those initial pressures will often be self-imposed. They often return time and again as you move roles or employers so it is not something that ever completely goes away. But if you only concentrate on yourself and what you are doing, valuable learning opportunities can be missed.

Some of the most important workplace lessons I have learned, both positively and negatively, came from taking a breath and looking at what my colleagues were doing and how they actually went about their jobs. This didn't just have to do with the technical detail of how to do the job; it was also about style and approach.

Colleagues, if they are any good, should proactively offer help and support but, if not, you should not be afraid to ask. Many reading this will have the confidence to ask but others may not want to push too much, or may prefer to be deferential to more established colleagues.

But the key thing to remember is that they too were once in the same position as you. They will also have to be appraised and doubtless they will be measured on how successfully they support others across the firm.

I was extremely fortunate in my first role to join a small team all of whom were willing to offer their help, support and advice. Of course, I started to learn how to do my job but as the months went by I started to appreciate that each of my colleagues had their own strengths and some even seemed to have a weakness or two.

These are particularly difficult to spot early on but you start to recognise them. They may even start to annoy you!

Some of those around me had an absolute eye for detail, others had a confidence and way of looking after clients, and others had a particular flair for business development and getting work in. You start to become a mix of all these traits, adopting the parts most suited to you.

It's not just about learning and getting better at the job, you should be learning from their soft skills as well. What became clear to me is that there is no "one way" of doing any role. On first coming into a job there can be a presumption that you will be taught how to do it. But it soon became clear to me by looking around at colleagues that that wasn't the case. That came as a bit of a shock. When you saw the team discussing how to approach an issue, you could see this. Each brought their skills, ideas and contributions to a discussion. They listened to each other and a final idea or solution emerged. They had different approaches and that is what made the team all the more effective.

By taking elements of each and applying them to myself, it enabled me to start to become my own person in the workplace and gave me the confidence to do things my way. That did not mean getting everything right or never making mistakes; those are part of the learning curve too.

Working in public affairs means lots of engagement with political and policy-making audiences. Coming straight out of completing a PhD in political science meant that I knew about political processes but not the realities of engagement. The team helped me to turn theory into practice. So, yes, it was about core skills but alongside me recognising and drawing on their different ways of approaching, in essence, the same job.

Even if you report to one person or they have responsibility for you, try to broaden your perspective to hear from others as well. You do not want to end up as a carbon copy of them. You may benefit from their strengths but you could equally suffer from their weaknesses. Have the confidence not to be an identikit employee but to become your own person.

The lessons learned from that small supportive team then, I still apply now. So the approach should not be to try to rush through it all with an utter determination to succeed at all costs but to instead step back a little and look at those around you.

I still find myself thinking back to that time and asking myself what would they do and I use that as guide for my advice even today. [f](#)



Stuart Thomson is Head of Public Affairs at BDB Pitmans

# How do we Tackle Job-Hopping?

BY BUSINESS MENTOR SOPHIA PETRIDES

**W**here are we with new talent? As we know, 24-39 year-olds have become known as the "hopping generation", on account of the fact they tend to change jobs frequently. This is causing problems within organisations because of the high cost of employment, which includes the price tag for recruitment and training and development. That's before you even taken into account the loss of knowledge within an organisation from high employee turnover.

In fact, job-hopping is costing the UK economy an estimated £71 billion and the US economy \$30.5 billion annually, according to Gallup. The cost for employing someone new into the organisation is an average of £11,000 per person in the UK and \$20,000 in the US.

So what accounts for this trend? First, it's a question of annual remuneration and promotion in an era where middle-ranking jobs are in decline. Technology means we don't need so many middle managers, project managers and administrative jobs. That means there's often little hope of promotion within organisations.

Nowadays, if you want a salary increase or a promotion, you need to leave the company and apply for another job. I experienced this situation first-hand many years ago, when I was leading a business within investment banking. Even though I was in a director role, the excuse I was given for not being promoted was that the organisation had surpassed the number of director promotions for that year and I would have to wait for another year. Following this conversation, I started working on my exit plan.

But it's not just the money. There's also a clear lack of respect and authentic communication from leaders and management. Today's organisations often fail to create "safe" environments,

where people can openly express their ideas without judgement.

In order for leaders to retain and attract new talent, they need to demonstrate empathy and compassion - a vital ingredient when it comes to humanising workplaces. In addition to that, visibility is important: today's leaders shouldn't let their workforce face adversity alone. This must go hand in hand with authentic communication, and clear training and development programmes.

**“Nowadays, if you want a salary increase or a promotion, you need to leave the company and apply for another job”**

In 2020, we have seen a surge in businesses collapsing and ongoing redundancies within organisations. All this has pushed global unemployment to a record high. The good news is that once the economy starts to bounce back, we are going to see an increase in talent hiring. Even so, that still means organisations will lose their talent to other organisations, and experience a drop in productivity in the process. Leaders need to act now, by investing in learning and development, and by deploying the wisdom in the older workforce to nurture talent.

Demographic trendlines also need to be taken into account. Birth rates have been decreasing over the last quarter century, so much so that we've now reached a 20-year low.

This means in turn that less talent will come into the future market. It also means we need our middle-aged workforce more than ever to stay in jobs and support the economy by contributing towards taxes for the financial support of the older retired generation.

So now is not the time to stop hiring the 50+ age group or to be pushing towards early retirement, as some professional services have the tendency of doing.

This issue of organisations failing to hire certain age groups is causing another ripple effect which has led to the increase of mental health difficulties. This is a global problem. Since Covid-19 struck, mental health has taken secondary priority, and it's costing global economies billions. In the UK, the annual estimate of loss is £34.9 billion and in the US \$53 billion.

Another group we need to take into consideration for the ongoing growth of our economy is returning to work mothers. They are insufficiently supported by organisations, even though they're a huge asset. During times of adversity, they're able to support leaders by staying close to employees and nurture them through the challenging times by putting into practice their agility, adaptability and resilience - traits they've learned and enhanced during motherhood.

In order to achieve a smooth return of women back into the workplace, organisations need to create appropriate training and development programmes. These need to build trust and respect, develop technological skills and also instigate clear communications around project management and deadlines.

There's a lot to do. But if we're successful, it will be a recipe to inspire significant growth in the global economy. [f](#)



# — Why we need Sustainable Learning —

BY NEIL CARMICHAEL

**Sustainable learning is a must have in a world battered by COVID19, where uncertainties are the norm; technology drives exponential change; society and the economy have become increasingly atomised in nature; and, international relationships are, increasingly, tense and mercantile.**

“Sustainable” is a much-used word, sometimes with values implied or attached, but longevity, durability and resilience all included. For education, it is all about laying foundations, learning to learn, “making well-considered choices”, proactive learning, combining knowledge with skills and being responsive to new situations. In short, sustainable learning is a linear process, starting from as early as possible and morphing into lifelong learning with embedded and evolving skills always being at the individual’s disposal.

Sustainable learning today must reflect the new world - even if parts of it are inclined to go backwards - because nations are interconnected. Of course, an interconnected world does not mean everybody is connected; in England, the levels of social deprivation in some regions and within many cities are shocking and usually reflect poor economic productivity. True sustainable learning would help to tackle poverty and many of its causes.

Another facet of today’s world is the twin need for individuals to be “work ready” and, by extension, adaptable. Business and professional organisations occasionally complain about the lack of work readiness of candidates for employment, often citing the absence of communication skills, limited ability to be creative and low levels of motivation as causes for concern.

There is a combination of underlying causes of the disconnect between students leaving education and the job market. The narrowness of the curriculum is often debated within this context with the funnelling down to three or four often comparable A-Levels being a common source of concern, often exacerbated by the impact of “unintended consequences” as schools, fighting for position in league tables, might encourage the university route rather than vocational and training courses.

The lack of work experience or even familiarity with the options available hamper the student when making subject selections. The scarcity of consistent and properly resourced careers advice is notorious and, so far, not adequately addressed. This is where business must step in.

This author has visited the Porsche car factory in Lower Saxony. It occupies a site once used for producing huge pump engines for the Soviet Union but today there is an air of efficiency, productivity and modernity. One of the keys to the success of this factory and, indeed, the business, is the relentless focus on the importance of the employee; so much so, schools, colleges and universities are part of the supply chain. This is an example to emulate because it demonstrates the role employers must take in delivering sustainable learning.

Sustainable learning helps to provide the individual with the tools to develop his or her career. Knowledge is necessary but it is not sufficient; being able to apply knowledge depends on skills and these are honed both in formal learning settings but also by practice and example. We must do all we can to create the framework for young people to climb towards their goals. [f](#)



Neil Carmichael was Member of Parliament for Stroud (2010-17), serving on the Education Select Committee throughout the period and latterly as Chair, and took the Antarctic Act 2013 through Parliament. He was chair of the Pearson UK Commission on Sustainable Learning for Work, Life and a Changing Economy

# — The Job-Seeker —

GEORGIA HENEAGE LEFT UNIVERSITY IN 2020 WITH THE PLAN TO BECOME A JOURNALIST BUT IS ALREADY WIDENING HER HORIZONS

**L**eaving school or university and stepping into the category of the unemployed is daunting at best, terrifying at worst. As a generation born into a consumerist, perhaps even individualist society, we have been engineered to believe that our identities are irrevocably tied up in our career prospects: simply, we are led to believe that what we “do” with our lives is central.

To some extent, that’s true. Jenni Russell recently wrote in a *Times* article: “Work is how society allocates so much of what we seek: money, status, social networks, mental challenges, companionship, prospects, marriageability, hope.” It’s hard to argue with that.

But placing our work life on a pedestal can be damaging to the process of finding a job in the first place. There is overwhelming pressure on young people to achieve great things early on in their career and to hit upon the “perfect” job straight away. This pressure can be stultifying, and creates an atmosphere of dog-eat-dog competitiveness which can hit hard as you enter the jobs market.

This has certainly been my experience as a postgraduate seeking an entry-level job in journalism: even at higher levels, it’s a ruthless and merciless industry, as seasoned journalists remind me all too often. As a graduate, that’s especially so.

Journalism - and print journalism, in particular - was a volatile and constantly shifting industry even before the pandemic. Now, newspapers are hardly hiring at all, and the few roles advertised are fiercely competitive.

That means that more and more journalists are forced to go freelance and accept a paycheck that is reliant on the next available commission. Much of the advice that I’ve been given has focused on freelancing, a process which can be demoralising and difficult for a little-

known journalist finding her feet in the Grub Street world of the press.

The direction of my career has altered slightly as a result, and I am now seeking the safety of a stable job and income. Having taken a moment of self-reflection, I realised that my knack for writing and researching and my interest in the big ideas shaping our world could land me a job which had similar characteristics to journalism, but which didn’t have to be confined to the industry.

I have now pooled my skills, values and motivations, and decided to broaden my job search to include the media as a whole and the publishing industry, which has resulted in my first interview with the How To Academy, an organisation which hosts talks and debates from some of the most influential speakers in the world.

The best advice that I have received so far has been to relax and remember that most careers are not a linear path to success, and that the concept of a “job ladder” is a myth. Careers are twisting, fickle journeys, with unexpected bumps along the way which, once you’ve traversed them, come to look necessary in retrospect. Imagining my future in this way is liberating. It loosens societal expectations to dive head-first into the ideal job, and opens up the possibility of finding jobs which may not have been immediately appealing.

If I look at the data, I realise the scale of my challenge. The Office for Budget Responsibility reckons that unemployment more than doubled in 2020, and that 3.5 million are now affected. For young people entering the jobs market, this is disastrous. High levels of redundancy continue to mean that graduate-level or school-level jobseekers are now competing with a pool of skilled workers with years of

experience and expertise under their belts.

It’s true that there are silver linings. For instance, the global transition to a remote-working culture and the development of the “gig economy” may be what the future of white-collar working in a post-pandemic world looks like, and may provide more opportunities for those without work. Research has tended to find that working from home can have a significant positive impact on workers’ mental health and well-being, which in itself can improve productivity. A paper published in 2017 in the *American Economic Review* found that workers were even willing to take an 8 per cent pay cut to work from home.

But frankly, I find that cold consolation. The prospect of not going into an office every day strikes me as unnerving. The routine of commuting and mixing regularly with colleagues is attractive to me, and I don’t want to miss out through no fault of my own.

It has also been argued that the pandemic, for all its setbacks, presents an opportunity to rewire the world of work. Though this may be true for seasoned white-collar workers, at what cost does this come for those uneasy newcomers entering the workplace for the first time? [f](#)



Georgia Heneage is an Oxford postgraduate and freelance journalist



# Why Engineering can offer a Bright Future

BY HILARY LEEVERS, CEO OF ENGINEERINGUK

**With lockdown and restrictions affecting everything from socialising to exams, there's no denying that there is much that young people might be worrying about. Nine out of 10 young people want a career that tackles social issues, from addressing environmental issues to keeping people safe and well. We also know that factors such as job opportunity and security are really important too, especially at this time of change.**

For many young people, the job security and real fulfilment they seek could be found in engineering.

The engineering industry is incredibly diverse, with exciting career opportunities in everything from space and energy to design and food, sport and entertainment to gaming and technology. Engineers are at the forefront of shaping the world we live in, helping to solve our biggest challenges. From dealing with cyber security and minimising the impact of natural disasters to developing sustainable energy, food, housing and products - engineers help pave the way to a better future for everyone.

You can make flying more environmentally friendly as an aerospace engineer or drive the use of renewable energy as an electrical or energy engineer. Biomedical engineers develop life-saving equipment and chemical engineers can stop the spread of disease. Meanwhile, as a manufacturing engineer you could develop new ways of creating medical products. Mechanical engineering could see you designing prosthetic limbs and you can support international development or disaster recovery as a civil or structural engineer.

Recently, the coronavirus crisis has shone a spotlight on the brilliant work of scientists, technicians and engineers responding to the needs of the nation. We've seen exceptional examples of

engineering across essential services and infrastructure - from the design and delivery of thousands of ventilators to the building of NHS Nightingale field hospitals. In fact, over three quarters of young people said they recognised the importance of engineers to developing new ventilators, keeping people connected through the crisis and turning spaces like exhibitions centres into hospitals.

As an engineer it's possible you can save far more lives than as a medic. This is a powerful message but one that sometimes gets lost in the stereotypes that many people still hold about what an engineer is, and what they do.

The beauty of engineering is that it is just so diverse - not just in the range of problems engineers solve but in the types of people and the pathways they take into the industry. You don't have to be a mathematical genius or chemistry wizard to become an engineer. A good understanding of maths and science (especially physics) will stand you in great stead, but so will skills in computing, D&T, construction and electronics. At its heart, engineering is all about creativity, problem-solving, teamwork and curiosity.

Engineers come from all different backgrounds and have achieved success through very different routes into the industry, including through apprenticeships, vocational training and university degrees. Employers and organisations like EngineeringUK have responded to our current crisis by making sure that information, advice, guidance and engineering experiences are now available online and remotely. The industry has really stepped up to support young people to explore their future and potential as engineers, including by pledging to work together to make engineering careers accessible for this generation of young people. If there are upsides of our current coronavirus world, it is that

for young people, accessing engineering experiences can be done at any time, from anywhere.

Skills that engineers acquire - such as problem-solving, teamwork, project management and numeracy - are sought after by employers in nearly every industry, meaning that engineers are highly employable and can easily transfer their skills to different areas. Even though the pandemic is seeing shifts in the engineering workforce, employers are still reporting skills gaps, so there remains significant demand for engineering skills, with fantastic earning potential at all levels. And with the government's commitments to investing in infrastructure, construction and decarbonisation, and innovation, now and into the future, hundreds of thousands more engineers will be needed.

At a time when young people are unsure about their futures, it is so important that they can explore career options, plan ahead, and be motivated to study. Now's not the time to give up or feel frustrated. It's the time to explore, plan and access as much support as possible to lay the path towards a fulfilling and secure career.

My message is that, while there are challenges ahead, there are also amazing career opportunities - not least in the world of engineering. I truly believe the future is bright for young people. Their desire to pursue careers that make a difference will bring them fulfilment and continue to help the UK engineering sector soar. [f](#)



Hilary Leever, CEO of EngineeringUK

# Why Homeschooling is the Answer

MINERVA TUTORS CEO, HUGH VINEY, EXPLAINS WHY THE GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO LOOK TO A FUTURE OF LEARNING IN THE HOME

**We're used to seeing "homeschooling" in the news, but what isn't commonly known is that compared to most countries around the world, the UK has very relaxed rules about educating your child at home.**

In America, where it's hugely popular, you might expect visits from official homeschooling inspectors to check you're doing it right. Meanwhile, in places like Portugal or Turkey it's banned altogether. But over here, it's remarkably easy - you don't have to enroll your child at school, you can teach them whatever you like, so long as you let your local council know.

Now, this doesn't mean the majority of homeschooling families are throwing the national curriculum in the bin and dressing their kids in hemp. Quite the opposite. Most are in it, like any sensible parent, to ensure their child has the best opportunities in their life ahead. To do this means getting qualified. You need to take GCSEs and A Levels, study just as hard as you would do at school, sit exams as a private candidate - usually at a local "centre" - and pitch for your place at university like all the others.

But coronavirus changed things. If home-educating parents had used a professional homeschooling agency in 2020, then their child would have received their GCSE qualifications after the summer exams were cancelled. Such agencies were able to provide impartial predicted grades, which, like grades predicted by teachers at schools, the government accepted. What happened to the tens of thousands of kids who were being homeschooled by their parents or individual tutors? The government decided parents couldn't be trusted to rate their own children, and no results were awarded. That's a colossal shame, and highlights that the government has long had its eyes closed to alternative forms of education.

It's time they woke up. Figures show that 57,132 children were registered as homeschooled children in 2018 in the UK. That's up from 24,824 in 2013, an increase of a mighty 130 per cent. And the numbers further increased in 2019 by 80 per cent again. Why the increase?

Pre-coronavirus, there was a growing feeling among parents that school wasn't equipping students for the modern world. Common complaints include: lack of encouragement of self-learning; a dearth of communication skills mixed with technical skills; lack of creative problem-solving; and an absence of skills that might actually be useful for the workplace, such as organising your daily to-do list or calendar.

Traditional, brick-and-mortar schools are also increasingly unable to meet the flexible lives led by some families who aren't always able to reside in the same place. And with most schools unable to support children with special educational and emotional needs, it often means homeschooling is the best way to go from a mental health point of view, too.

Now, post-Covid, most of the UK has woken up to the fact that not only is homeschooling possible, but in some cases, it might also be preferable. Many children have thrived in lockdown. Despite some tabloid horror stories, so too have parents. Even a glimpse of a new parent-teacher model was enough to prompt thousands of enquiries to our companies inbox.

The story was largely the same. Parents started seeing homeschooling as a viable alternative to school. They loved spending more time with their kids, and they wanted to know if there was a professional, regulated way to do this. Combine this with the UK becoming Zoom-qualified overnight, and our latest venture essentially founded itself. It's an online school called Minerva's Virtual Academy, and it teaches children (currently GCSE only) the proper curriculum through an online virtual platform, with minimal requirement for human teachers. Mentors (real humans) keep track of pupils' progress and our students make friends with other online homeschoolers through group classes and "after-school" clubs.

We're not alone. Other new companies are springing up to meet the demand. Existing solutions, such as Wolsey Hall Oxford, have been quoted as turning away a sharp rise in demand. Even Harrow School joined the party, launching an "online" version of their illustrious school a few years ago.

So can the government learn anything from this model? At the moment, online schools like ours are private, which means we charge fees. But this is much cheaper than hiring a personal tutor to teach your children or local councils paying for expensive tutoring companies to support homeschooled kids. It's also a fraction of the cost of sending your kids to an actual private school.

The government is backing the National Tutoring Program, led by the EEF, with £150 million to provide much needed after-school tutoring to hundreds of thousands of pupils across the UK post Covid-19. This is highly commendable. But could online homeschooling also be used to empower some of the lost "Covid Generation" of pupils, taking some of the burden off the schools for the mammoth catch-up task ahead?

The government needs to see the bigger picture. With scalable, innovative tech platforms that teach the GCSE and A level syllabus without the need for a teacher, and dedicated one-to-one mentors that support and nurture each child and ensure they don't fall behind, online homeschooling solutions should have a part to play in the future. If traditional schools and their teachers are going to continue to be stretched, then online homeschooling done in the right way could be a solution. We may be outliers at the moment, but innovation in education is happening. I'm calling on the government to get with the program. [f](#)



Hugh Viney is the founder of Minerva Tutors, whose Virtual Academy designs bespoke homeschooling programs for pupils aged 6-18, either at home or online



# —The A-Z of launching a business—

BY SIMON HAY AND JOE MATHEWSON

**S**ometimes businesses get started for the most every day reasons. In our case it was procrastination. We were both studying for our GCSEs and were happy to do anything other than revision.

It was 1999 and the Internet was really taking off. We were frustrated that we couldn't access any school work online. During study leave we'd need to cycle back and forth to school to pick up printouts, revision advice and tests. Our bedrooms were in complete chaos with paper and revision notes everywhere.

There's no denying we were techie teenagers. We surveyed the mess, applied our teenage ingenuity, and thought it would be fun to write some software that could make the situation better.

At the same time, our physics teacher was an early evangelist for technology, so we created the first version of our platform with the physics department. From there, pupil power spread the word. By the time we started A-Levels our school was using it across all subjects and we were being called out of lessons to troubleshoot.

It was exciting to have made such a difference at our school, but we soon realised schools across the world faced similar challenges with technology. By the time we left sixth form we had a handful of founding customers.

Even then, we didn't see its full potential as a business. We went to university and travelled; Joe became a semi-pro DJ, and we took up jobs in the City. Our families probably thought we would settle down. But all the time we were working on the trading floor we had a second job running Firefly.

It was challenging. We'd be taking calls from schools in the middle of the day.

These constraints forced us to produce a really strong product that was easy to use and reliable - and it reduced the calls.

When we secured our thirtieth school customer, we thought "right let's do this". It was a hugely important moment.

We were leaving well paid, enjoyable jobs to launch into the unknown. But we knew we had a product the market wanted.

Since then, Firefly has grown rapidly. We've raised £10 million in investment to support expansion into 40 countries and now have nearly 1.5 million students, teachers and parents using the platform.

**“The strongest companies have been started during downturns”**

We're often asked for advice on starting a business. First I'd say, "Find a buddy."

We constantly challenge each other, and develop and refine our thinking. We'd also suggest you don't drop everything rightaway. We slowly incubated Firefly while we went to university and got jobs. We wouldn't have been successful without the experience we got along the way.

It's also important to think really hard about the right shape of your product - what should be in and out of scope. Early clients will want you to build features that won't have widespread application. You must learn to say no nicely, but firmly.

The great thing is that people are usually ready to help young entrepreneurs. We received lots of advice and people were really generous with their time: but you must remember to say thank you. Perhaps most importantly, you have to look continually ahead to make sure your produce remains relevant.

We are still doing this and recently launched our Parent Portal in response to what schools now need.

The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated how innovation, courage and dogged hard work can make a difference to individuals, communities and the world. These are the qualities needed to launch business ideas. It's a tough economic climate, but history shows that many of the strongest and longest-lasting companies have been started during downturns.

As technology advances, the barriers to getting started are getting lower and lower, and there are also more successful UK tech start-ups to light the way. We are keenly aware that young people have been affected significantly by the pandemic. However, we know they are also going to be key to taking us forward. We really encourage any young person with a smart tech idea to give it a go. Scratch that itch and you might have a success on your hands. [f](#)



Simon Hay and Joe Mathewson are co-founders of Firefly Learning, an education technology company. Go to [fireflylearning.com](https://fireflylearning.com)

# —The Disruption in Global Education—

BY JOHANNA MITCHELL

**I**worked as a career civil servant in Whitehall before moving into education consultancy. My opposite numbers at the Russian and Chinese embassies liked to speak with me about their children's education, eager for advice on selecting schools, or universities. I'd sit in meetings thinking, "We're supposed to be in a bilateral discussing UK/China science policy. But here I am explaining the British education system." After a spell as head of a small private school run by the Lawn Tennis Association, I set up my own company.

Education consultancy combines a love of people, travel and languages with a desire to share my education expertise. A careers advisor may not have this as an obvious choice. I have to be a counsellor, psychologist, diplomat and problem-solver all rolled into one. There is also instinct involved. Where would the family be happiest, thrive and achieve their potential? People need to trust you.

Our clients often feel beleaguered, especially during the pandemic, and need help navigating UK and global education systems. It feels good that we are able to mitigate this stress. It is fascinating to see what drives another person, the life path they have chosen and what led them to this place - whether it be parental influence, inherited wealth or a childhood which may have been characterised by early hardship. Our experiences are primarily formed by the culture and political situation in which we and our nearest ancestors lived.

For instance, I have an enduring memory of a Russian client, now a dear friend, at the Lotte in Moscow saying "Johanna, what is it with you British? When you're in your 20s and 30s, you just want to

have a nice life and be happy. In Russia, we work hard in our 20s and 30s. And if we're miserable, so what? But when we're 40 and have achieved the pinnacle of financial success, only then can we relax and enjoy it."

Covid-19 has changed our view of global mobility. Since my business is so international in flavour, working with families based from London, to New York to Azerbaijan, I've had to adapt. We have three distinct client groups: London-based families; families with homes in multiple jurisdictions; and those relocating to the UK for work or education. For the two latter groups, especially, we've overcome fresh challenges, negotiating changing travel corridors, specific visas and a combination of online university lectures, schooling and specialist tutors.

Despite the pandemic, British education is still in great demand, especially for families who are able to move easily to the UK. For instance, with US schools closed for a long period in 2020, we saw a rise in relocating US families. One family moved to Kensington prior to the US election, with their four young children. As one spouse worked from home as a stock trader, the family could live anywhere with reliable internet. London, with its top schools, was an attractive proposition. Another US couple have enrolled their daughter in a London school for a year, while they take time to enjoy the city and study for an MA in Art History at UCL.

With several families moving from Europe, we also trained one firm's senior management team to recognise differences in British and French work culture. The company is delighted with their new employee, who keeps them well-stocked with French wines and cheese. Our next challenge is to support a group of families from Hong Kong who

will be taking advantage of the British National (Overseas) visa to settle in the UK. They will access UK schools and universities for their children. Pastoral care and access to nature now feature highly on wish lists of relocating families.

I've been consistently impressed by how well the schools and universities with which we work have adapted to organisational and economic challenges. They have embraced EdTech and adjusted to offer an inclusive community - both in person and online - to combat the social isolation experienced by both students and their parents. Parents, more than ever, are looking for a high quality mix of one-to-one tutoring and school-based learning.

We are living with the largest disruption to the global education system in modern history. The pandemic has been a catalyst to education change in the UK. While we are not yet in a position to see exactly where the cards will fall, I am certain that schools and universities will continue to evolve to provide outstanding education opportunities for both UK and international students. [f](#)



Johanna Mitchell is the Director of Lumos Education



# Letter from Nigeria

WITHOUT A SIGNIFICANT MOVE BY THE UK GOVERNMENT,  
AFRICA'S MOST POPULOUS COUNTRY WILL IMplode  
BY NOVELIST CHUKS ILOEGBUNAM

**Thanks to social media, news of the massacre of peaceful protesters in Lekki, Lagos, rapidly spread throughout the world. How did it happen that, in apparently democratic Nigeria, soldiers opened fire on their fellow citizens peacefully protesting systemic police brutality by waving the Nigerian flag and singing the national anthem?**

Lekki needs to be put in context. Even in colonial Nigeria, massacres were commonplace. When the civil war came in 1967, it accentuated the devaluation of human life. At the war's end in 1970, millions lay dead, finished off by indiscriminate bombing and strafing, as well as starvation and protein malnutrition.

It is a country which doesn't look after its young. Youth unemployment stands at 13.9 million according to the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), which also states that the Nigerian youth population eligible for work is a staggering 40 million.

Insecurity caused by Boko Haram terrorists, Fulani herdsmen terrorists and Niger Delta militants are often cited as reasons for this, but a sizeable portion of the unemployed are also unemployable due to the lack of basic skills. The country lacks the sort of social security taken for granted in Britain and elsewhere in Europe and North America. There are no unemployment benefits. As a matter of fact, the employed are often owed unpaid salaries for upwards of ten months, even years.

The government also has a history of keeping this state of affairs in position - and again it does so with violence.

On February 1, 1971, Kunle Adepeju, an undergraduate of the University of Ibadan was killed during a students' demonstration against poor catering services. The Police claimed that a stray bullet from one of its guns had felled Adepeju. The nation was scandalised. The university was shut down and a board of inquiry instituted to determine what truly happened.

Many other examples might be cited - from the Bakalori massacre on 28th April 1980 to the destruction of Odi on November 20th 1999. It is a long and melancholy history of government suppression.

Today, Nigeria boasts about 172 tertiary institutions, annually churning out tens of thousands of young men and women with little hope of employment. Only unserious societies remain blissfully uncaring about the place and disposition of alienated youths about half of whom have been trained in the sciences and have at their fingertips the knowhow to upset the applecart.

Graduates with intent to do business or go into manufacturing are hampered by lack of funds. The government has not created any new industries in the last five years. It has not paid any attention to setting up new refineries.

The national currency, the Naira, has continued to plummet in value. There was a time when the naira was superior to both the dollar and the pound sterling. But \$1 today exchanges for anything between N400 and N450.

The displacement of whole populations that end up across Nigerian borders, or inside Internally Displaced People's

(IDPs) camps mean a devaluation of farming, grave loss to incomes and hikes in food prices.

But the world is changing - and Nigeria with it. In 2015, earthmoving equipment was used to dig mass graves into which hundreds of slain Shiites were buried. But video clips of the dastardly act are in existence. Now, nearly everyone wields the immense power that is the cell phone. For this, grotesqueries like Lekki rebuff concealment. In real time, the massacre was filmed and transmitted across the globe. Official denials that it happened have been quite thoroughly discredited through credible investigations by various standards-setting organisations, including CNN.

Bizarrely, the authorities are hounding those thought to have led the #endSARS demonstrations, instead of addressing their grievances. They are confiscating passports, freezing bank accounts and shoving into detention people guilty only of participating in peaceful demonstrations. In this regard, informed Nigerians cannot get over Britain's taciturnity in relation to a country it colonised and in which it still wields incomparable influence. In fact, repeated Downing Street administrations are seen as complicit in Nigeria's determined abysmal plunge.

This complicity may explain why the International Criminal Court (ICC) which indicted al-Bashir has not considered a similar action on certain Nigerians whose wantonness makes the former Sudanese dictator to look like a Sunday school teacher. That is why British opinion influencers with conscience must look beyond Whitehall and systematically mobilise voices to interrogate Nigeria before it implodes. [f](#)

# Letter from Dubai

ACADEMIC, POET AND ESSAYIST OMAR SABBAGH  
AIRS HIS WORRIES FOR THE YOUNGER  
GENERATION IN DUBAI

**Over the course of the last year, I have felt quite fortunate to live and work in Dubai. Whether during the period between spring and summer 2020, when lockdown regulations meant you had to apply for a permit to go from one place to the next (via a user-friendly app), or whether it was the rigors of the rules about numbers permitted in cars, taxis and social gatherings, the high levels of technological efficiency proved to be a blessing here.**

So Dubai has been a comparatively good place to be during lockdown. Malls, for instance, immediately set-up mass temperature monitors at their entrances. The university where I teach built a new gate and passageway at its entrance for this purpose. In pandemic times, a highly monitored society, with efficient avenues for top-down governmental action, puts the "brotherhood" into any pat notion of "Big Brother."

Of course, Dubai - and the UAE more generally - has suffered economically, like anywhere else in the world. Things have contracted: shops for a long while curtailed their hours of availability; work-hours in the second half of 2020 were shortened; and there are fewer jobs. A close relative spoke of laying-off a third of his staff, and having to halve salaries in the Q3 of 2020. Another was forced to take paid leave for a month from his sales job in retail.

That said, it was announced early on that the government would take keen action to make sure the country would be protected. Tourism - an important aspect of Dubai's economy - has also suffered, but it was clear to all that as

soon as it was safe enough to reopen that was done. I myself have travelled more than three times in the last year, needing only to follow PCR-testing regulations. Returning to Dubai, it usually takes less than twenty-four hours for your PCR-test at the airport to ping as an SMS on your phone. The services have always been stellar here.

I have been teaching, too, since spring last year, online and at times via a new "Hyflex" system, whereby students can opt in advance, during registration, to attend in person or remotely online. For teachers like myself this involved a scramble to learn new technologies in the classroom, by which one would lecture in person but simultaneously with a camera and microphone to engage with those learning remotely. I was anxious about the burden of learning to use the technology, but the inhibition before the event turned soon to enthusiasm on my part.

Young people's prospects here are good; this is one of the best places in the Middle East to study alongside Beirut and Cairo. The majority of students will end up in business, media, engineering and perhaps architecture or design.

That said, the students seem to have lost some of their gusto. When I see the odd stray young person on campus, he or she invariably seems to me to look lonely. It's much easier for an academic like myself - a person who revels in a week spent on the couch reading or thinking, writing or teaching - to deal with these circumstances than for other kinds of people. It's also much easier for a man nearing forty, too, than for

someone half my age to accept the reality of the pandemic.

I dare not let my wife catch on, but being homebound suits me like pie and goes down like sugar. Bookworms or not, it's the young I feel for. Of course, they're getting on with their lives, and many are learning by other means. But if things are concerning in Dubai, if I look across at my native Lebanon, I am forced to imagine what absolute lockdown would be like. That country is suffering from its infrastructural weaknesses, in a country which was weakened already by internal strife and corruption.

I remain hopeful. Perhaps when things improve, and our old outdoorsy life recommences, we will have - in a manner of speaking - gone back to the future. It might even be that this hiatus will bring forth new fruits. To paraphrase that great fabulist Lawrence Durrell: in the midst of winter we can feel the inventions of spring. [f](#)



Dubai Skyline



# SPECIAL REPORT: Finito World Jobs Guide to the Wealth Industry

AN OVERVIEW OF THE WEALTH SECTOR, OUTLINING OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE TO YOUNG PEOPLE, BY PERCHERON ADVISORY CO-FOUNDER DAVID HAWKINS

**W**hen I was at university (Durham 1993-96), the prevailing trend was to apply to accountancy, the law, management consultancy or banking.

Whilst I didn't immediately enter the world of finance, I am quite unique in the "wealth" and family office space in that I started in politics and government relations, with a sojourn in PR, corporate affairs and private equity before working for a high-net-worth (HNW) family for their philanthropy, reputation and business interests - effectively establishing their family office in London.

I'm not sure what those of us applying for "banking" were really thinking that the career would constitute. Investment banking sounded so grown-up, alpha-male, "greed is good" and en vogue (the mid-1990s saw a huge consolidation of investment banks and the end of "merchant" banks).

Private banking and wealth management by contrast seemed distant, purposely opaque and a bit stuffy. It wasn't an attractive career option because it didn't really care to explain what it was.

Wealth has to be managed - that is the focus of wealth management - and with this term I mean a form of investment management and financial planning that provides solutions to clients with £1 million plus in assets or ultra-high-net-worth (UHNW) with £30 million plus in assets.

It is a discipline which we can also call private banking and which includes financial planning, investment management, tax planning, luxury assets and some other services such as corporate finance

and investment banking. It can also extend to trust companies which hold assets and even the private client law firms which advise, structure and act to protect the wealth of their clients.

So breaking this down, it can offer a career as a financial planner - working with clients on their strategy for wealth preservation and growth: which can include retirement planning, tax, legacy and succession and business planning. Once this wealth strategy has been devised, an investment manager then works day-to-day to deliver returns that the client and their planner has objectified. Tax planning is a third role and is vital as the tax implications for a HNW - whether dividend, CGT, inheritance, corporation tax or cross-border tax - can be huge. As HNWs purchase luxury assets - houses, jets, yachts, art - these need managing, financing and servicing.

When HNWs need support in their business ventures, wealth teams often bring in the corporate finance teams of their institutions to support clients in corporate objectives - eg financing a new factory or the acquisition of a digital business. A trust company holds assets on behalf of an individual, family or business - generally to minimise tax but also to reduce other risks and acts according to a constitution which has been agreed on behalf of the various beneficiaries.

Changes have come, but a lack of trust in banks and the wealth sector has driven a long-term move among UHNWs towards family offices. The ongoing criticism of private banking and wealth management is the high turnover of staff, that the investment manager operates in his (or their) own interests rather

than always for the client, and that they are increasingly limited by compliance from suggesting entrepreneurial solutions that suit the client. This has been further aggravated by the fact that clients themselves have been changing: the values of the rising next generation in particular have not been mirrored by their advisor, while clients want more bespoke products that banks struggled to keep up with.

All these factors combined have been the catalyst behind the rise of the family office, a privately held company which handles investment management and wealth management for a wealthy family, with the goal being to grow effectively and transfer wealth across generations. They also have impacted the less affluent as we shall see below.

To be an effective single-family office handling your own family's investment requires a significant sum of cash as staff costs and compliance costs can be very high.

The definition of a family office can differ from one family to another - a family office advisor once wrote that to be a real family office - similar to the archetypal established by John D. Rockefeller - one needs to follow the APPLE model: investment should be Active, Passive, there should be Philanthropy, Legacy-planning and Estates-planning.

Family offices may also handle tasks such as managing household staff, making travel arrangements, property management, day-to-day accounting and payroll activities, management

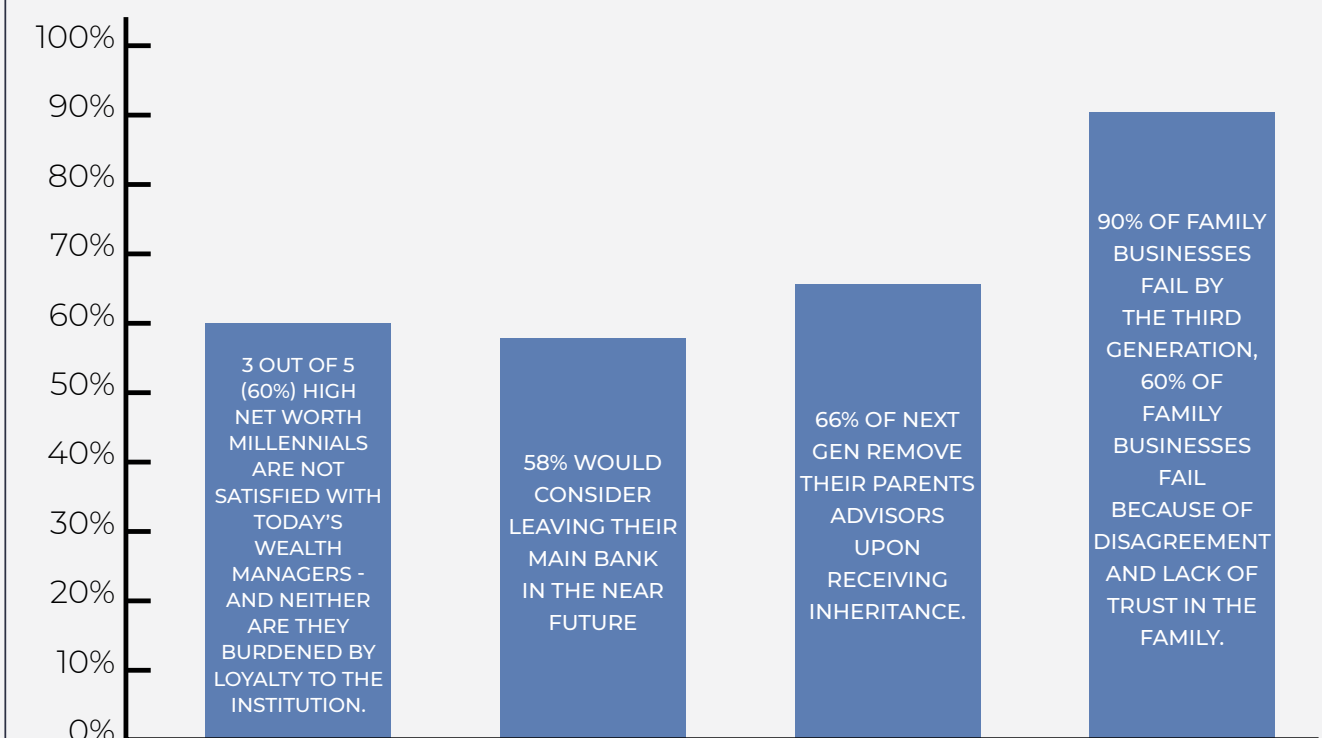
of legal affairs, family management services, family governance, financial and investor education, coordination of philanthropy and private foundations, and succession planning.

Sometimes families combine costs and can be structured as a multi-family office (MFO) - professional staff representing a number of affluent families and individuals, often creating their own co-investment products.

Given the very discreet nature of family offices, they are very hard to apply for internships or work - however multi-family offices: Stanhope Capital, Schrodgers Global Family Office Services, Stonehage Fleming are easier to identify and approach for jobs.

OF UK INVESTMENT ASSOCIATION MEMBERS, PRIVATE CLIENT ASSETS UNDER MANAGEMENT WERE £610 BILLION BETWEEN 2019-20.

BY 2046, WORLD-WIDE BABY BOOMERS WOULD HAVE TRANSFERRED USD 30 TRILLION OF THEIR WEALTH.



Regular reviews of the family enterprises, building-up resilience and agility ensuring clear reporting, metrics and efficiencies allows for clear strategic decisions to be taken, whilst looking at family governance - that is a family constitution, family council and conflict resolution, can build a resilient family that helps drive the business and removes threats to the business that can come from conflict and disputes.



One of the key areas affecting recruitment into the wealth sector is the widening gulf in values between the rising next generation of clients and their existing advisors.

Millennials and Generation Z have a series of values that has fundamentally shifted from the generation above them. They are a more socially-conscious generation which seeks businesses that mirror their values, are digitally enabled and allow for ease of use.

From this arises two distinct problems for the wealth industry. Firstly, the recruitment of the next generation of staff - when most smart graduates would rather go into a tech start-up, the wealth sector is not selling itself effectively. Secondly, how does the wealth sector engage the next generation of HNWs, the clients of tomorrow, when their staff don't immediately mirror the values and thinking of their clients?

In their study from 2019, pricing consultants Simon Kuchner & Partners surveyed almost 650 high net worth millennials worldwide from six countries (Australia, China, Hong Kong, Singapore, the UK, and the US) to examine their attitude towards private banks and wealth management.

The report found that all of the participants had at least one private banking relationship in the family and/or at least 500,000 US dollars of investable assets in their personal accounts, with a significant portion of the wealth being inherited from the previous generation.

The study also found that 60 percent of millennials were dissatisfied with their present banking and wanted a substantial improvement. The survey found that to attract future customers and build ongoing relationships with millennials, private banks have to comprehensively analyse their processes, assess their current shortcomings and potentially re-build a new bank from

the ground up even if this means taking short-term losses for sustainable long-term profits.

There were other findings. Private banks also need a fundamental new brand position - old, male, pale and stale won't cut it anymore - diversity is key and having staff that reflect the new client is key.

So private banks need to act fast and develop a "WOW" digital ecosystem that highlights self-service capabilities or they risk becoming irrelevant. Millennials want the option of immediate and bespoke banking services - even so far as online bespoke investment and portfolio choice. To attract this generation, banks have to reposition themselves as millennial-centric and highlight the values which

millennials look for, which according to the Simon Kuchner & Partners survey is quality and brand.

A number of banks have been developing their next gen offering, whilst some of the larger MFOs have been active too. But more needs to be done to clearly define why millennials should pay for their financial advisory services. With a clear value proposition outlining what private banks and the wealth sector can offer, millennials are willing to spend more on financial services.

If the wealth industry moves quickly it can meet the challenges outlined above: reduce its opaqueness, become digitally-enabled and truly bespoke and so attract the next generation of clients but also of staff. [f](#)



David Hawkins is the Founder of Percheron Advisory, a firm which works with entrepreneurs, HNW clients and business families with a focus on building resilient and agile operational business frameworks and developing effective family governance structures

# Exclusive CEO Survey

BY SOPHIA PETRIDES

**Over the last three months I have been speaking with CEOs, leaders and entrepreneurs about leading through the pandemic and lockdowns of 2020 and 21. It will probably come as no surprise that the results show that the 50 leaders I spoke to all reported new challenges as they explored new ways of working remotely.**

They had to learn, as if from scratch, how to manage teams, and engage with clients and how to manage the group of CFOs, COOs and CIOs sometimes known as the C-suite. The leaders I spoke to head up small, mid and large cap organisations across financial services, technology, healthcare, sports, consumer brands and manufacturing. I am grateful that they gave their time during a period when - as you will see - that is a commodity more valuable than ever.

Encouragingly, all of them shared an overwhelmingly positive outlook for their organisations and each expects to see a strong global economic recovery once our vaccination programmes are fully in place. At the same time most of these business leaders acknowledged that we are unlikely to return to pre-Covid-19 workplace norms anytime soon, if ever. All these CEOs took part on the understanding that my findings would be reproduced anonymously.

When it comes to the specifics of how they approached the lockdowns, it is clear that the direction of travel over the last decade towards a more of a people-centric employee experience, better communication across organisational hierarchies and more inclusive company culture has been greatly accelerated by the pandemic and the needs of working remotely. As one CEO put it,

"The pandemic has a silver lining. It's an opportunity to do things differently, with the time pressure needed to overcome complacency with the current way of doing things."

## Digital headaches

I asked the question: "What are your frustrations and challenges that prevent you from being a better leader?" and it yielded some interesting answers which show the most important friction points during the pandemic. These will likely also affect us all going forwards too. The results can be seen in *Fig.1*.

The fact remains that digital leadership is difficult. A large part of the leadership challenge has always been aligning the company and its stakeholders around a clear vision. However, in the age of virtual meetings such as Google Meet, Zoom, and other online meeting platforms it has become a more significant challenge. In many respects, engaging with teams digitally underpins most of the major frustrations of the CEOs I spoke to - the problem is the loss of those unplanned moments of interaction that are so important to

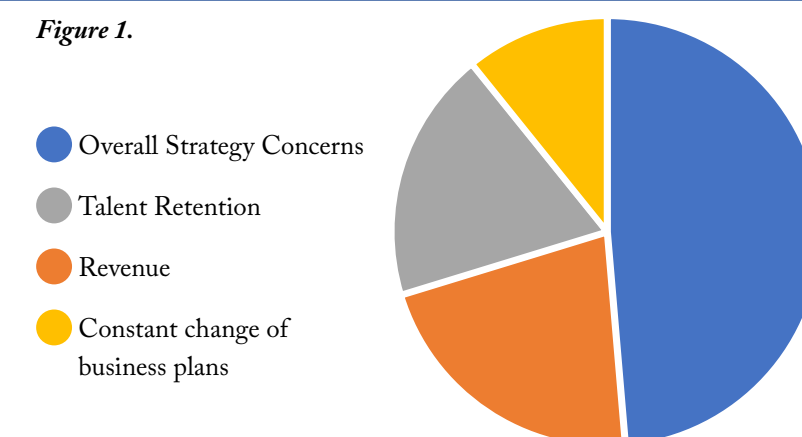
create a sense of momentum and social cohesion behind the leadership team. There's no office buzz online, and that informal energy is essential to align teams behind the leadership vision.

Another major headache - around 19 per cent of issues - was retaining new talent in an age when many of the new hires hadn't been able to meet their management and colleagues in person, or participate in any of the usual social, informal onboarding experiences that are a normal expectation of everyday working life. However, virtual meetings were noted as providing positive experiences too, in that they also give a safe space where younger professionals can voice their views with confidence.

As one CEO put it, "I miss walking around the floor and connecting with people at all levels. You can't connect on a human level through virtual meetings, there's no spontaneity, no chit chat, no watercooler moments. People struggle with burn out, home schooling and not being physically together and you need to find a platform to support innovation because it is lost when people are 100 per cent working from home."

## "WHAT ARE YOUR FRUSTRATIONS AND CHALLENGES THAT PREVENT YOU FROM BEING A BETTER LEADER?"

Figure 1.



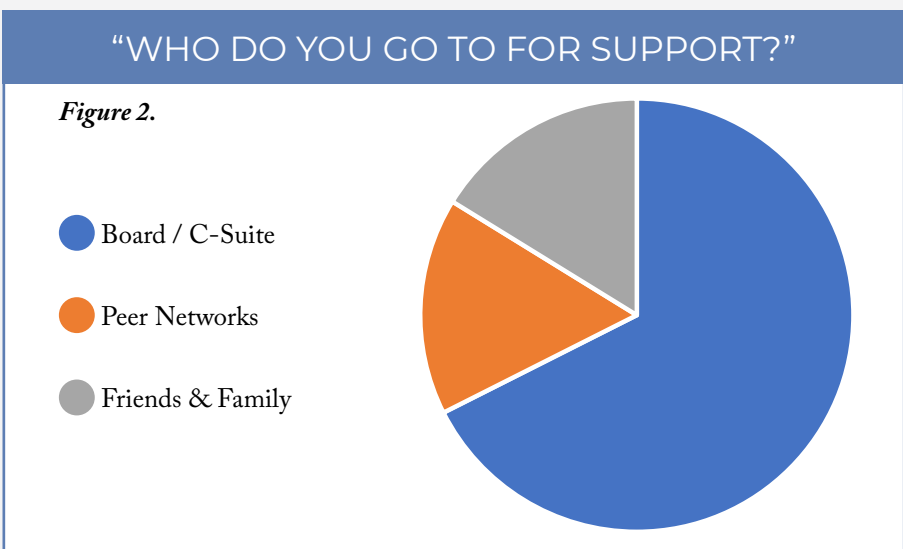


Also in relation to *Figure 1*, I found that around 11 per cent of leaders felt that reaction to the pandemic had caused a shift to short-term strategies and away from the big picture plans in place before. There was a sudden need to have a Covid-19 response, and this in turn triggered a slew of new HR policies. Some 22 per cent blamed the sudden disruption for the loss of normal KPI reporting and measurements, along with the loss of travel and sales activities, for reducing revenues and growth. One leader told me: “You are challenged by balancing staff well-being and HR policies with Return on Investment (ROI) and frustrated because you can’t spend time with clients like you used to.”

#### No Boardroom Blues

Secondly, I asked CEOs what support mechanisms they had found themselves seeking out during Covid-19. These results are displayed in *Figure 2*. One interesting - and unexpected - result of the survey was the overwhelmingly positive response to online board meetings. Over 68 per cent of my survey group immediately said their boards, trustees and non-executive directors were providing an extremely high level of support. This was attributable to the pandemic, as another unexpected silver lining, not just in providing support to CEOs, but offering mentorship and support to the organisation at a higher level than ever before. One leader was particularly enthusiastic about the reaction of their board: “Pre-Covid-19, it was challenging to get the board of trustees visible and engaged with the team. Now there’s 100 per cent visibility and presence through online meetings, which means the board has moved closer to employees.”

For those without a traditional board structure to fall back on, there was a fairly even split between two other kinds of support network. Firstly, many leaders sought out colleagues at a similar level who they could talk to about the challenges they were facing off the record. Secondly the role of friends - and in particular, family - in their lives became of increasing importance.



In many cases, the opportunity to work from home came hand-in-hand with the chance to make a meaningful change to their work-life balance. Spending more time with the family has proven to be a positive way to recoup lost energy and online meeting fatigue.

#### The Human Side

Thirdly I asked what the CEOs in question had done to humanise their workplace. There was a follow-up in the question whereby I also asked what the surveyed individuals had done to improve the employee experience. These results are collected in *Figures 3* and *4*.

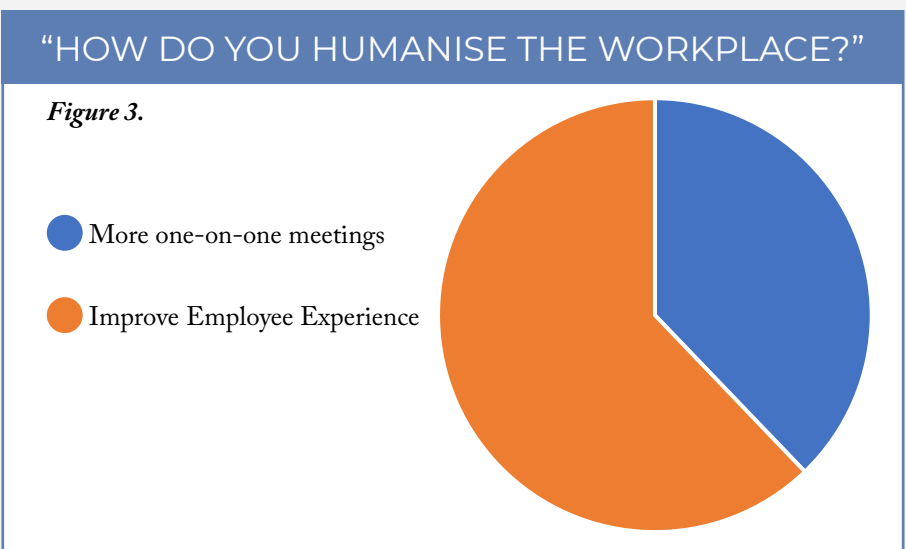
The results were clear. Covid-19 has accelerated the importance of the employee experience. When I asked how to humanise the workplace there was a split between those who felt the emphasis should be on designing a better employee experience (62 per cent) and those who felt that what was required was more effective two-way communication across the traditional company hierarchy (38 per cent).

When I delved into what an elevation of the employee experience might look like to these business leaders, many interesting initiatives were listed. These ranged from holding nutrition and exercise sessions for employees by providing free access to online personal trainers through to ensuring each employee took a scheduled 45-minute mindfulness break daily. A number of workplaces also prioritised in-office

working options for people who were feeling lonely or isolated working from home. One CEO confided: “We delivered fresh food hampers, gym kit, games for kids and Amazon vouchers. It was about paying attention to mental and physical needs and connecting with everyone no matter what level.”

Leaders also emphasised the importance of creating a culture of fun within their teams. Many added that this required more organisation in the virtual meeting world, and included everything from introducing fun icebreakers in meetings to organised weekly virtual events. However, the most significant aspect of all the employee experience initiatives was limiting working hours, not sending emails over the weekend and ensuring staff took breaks throughout the day. Another CEO explained: “Burnout is an issue. There’s a temptation to work longer hours, but it’s not all about hours - it’s about your output, and that suffers if you don’t get the balance right.”

In addition, many leaders discussed the importance of making themselves accessible to all levels of staff, including scheduling one-to-one sessions with new recruits to ensure they are settling in. This was especially on the mind of one CEO: “I am very conscious to have regular calls with the team. We have to bring all levels of people closer together and be more approachable and available 24/7.”



**“On my first day, I literally took the door to my office off its hinges. I needed to make a statement that everyone is welcome”**

#### Company Morale

There are, of course, many different tools available to leaders for improving employee experience. The primary one was focusing on company culture (37 per cent) and trying to build better bonds between team members through the kinds of employee experiences we see outlined above. It is important to note that there are two other broad categories of tool for improving employee experience.

One is Continuing Professional Development (CPD). This is an essential aspect of making sure employees are staying true to their ambitions. This need for training and continuing development for teams represented 23 per cent of answers. As another put it: “Training and development are vital for sustaining a cohesive team and understand how they fit within

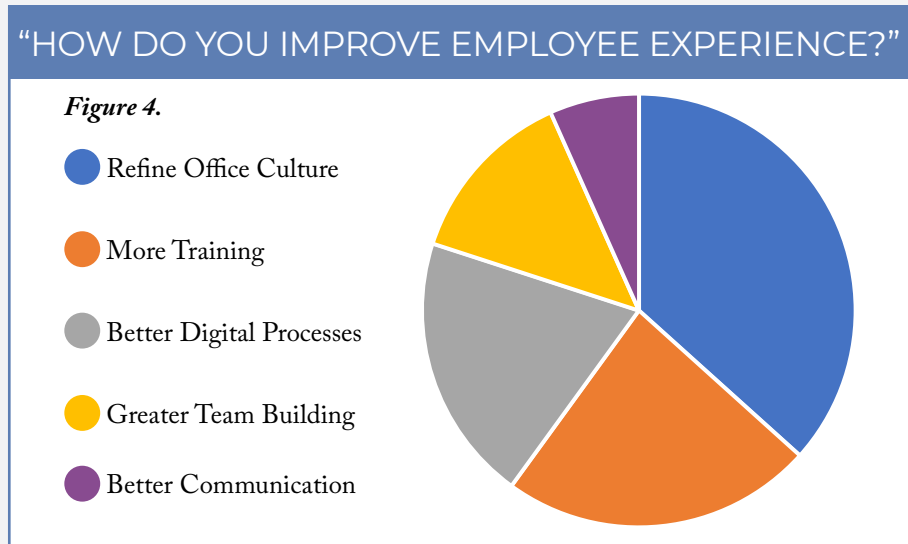
an organisation.” There is a clear role for training to make employees feel respected and empowered, and many CEOs related this need to team performance. Another said: “Empowered means people who make better decisions more cohesively, without the need for constant supervision.”

In addition, 20 per cent of respondents talked about giving people the space to make their own digital processes, chats, support channels and online activities to boost team morale. In all, 13 per cent suggested that the best employee experience was being on a winning team and being rewarded as part of a growing business. However, there was a general sense that while digital was essential, automation had a negative effect on team experience because it isolated people during previously social activities like training. Another CEO confided: “We invest billions in making computers

more human and making humans more automated. Then we spend billions more trying to humanise humans. Person-to-person contact is impossible to replicate.”

It is fascinating to look back at the lockdown year and consider how much we have learned about working digitally. It brings new challenges in terms of burnout and a lack of team dynamism. The workplace spark, the spontaneity, the atmosphere of a team environment has not digitised effectively. However, there are clear benefits - and arguably greater long-term gains to come - not least in the way digital working has refocused leaders on authentic communications, a flatter hierarchy and better employee experiences.

It seems fitting to end on a quote from one CEO, who succinctly explained the need for better comms and experiences, as well as the advantages of working together in the same place. These remarks suggesting a new home-work hybrid might offer a renaissance for the modern workplace: “On my first day, I literally took the door to my office off its hinges. I needed to make a statement that everyone is welcome. Everyone deserves time and empathy. It is vital to feel the pulse of the employees, because that’s the pulse of the business.” It is a pleasant thought that, cooped up in our houses as we’ve been, that we might soon inhabit a working world which has become richer as a result of the pandemic. f







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# Culture, Books & Travel



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How the Spanish flu led  
to the Roaring Twenties

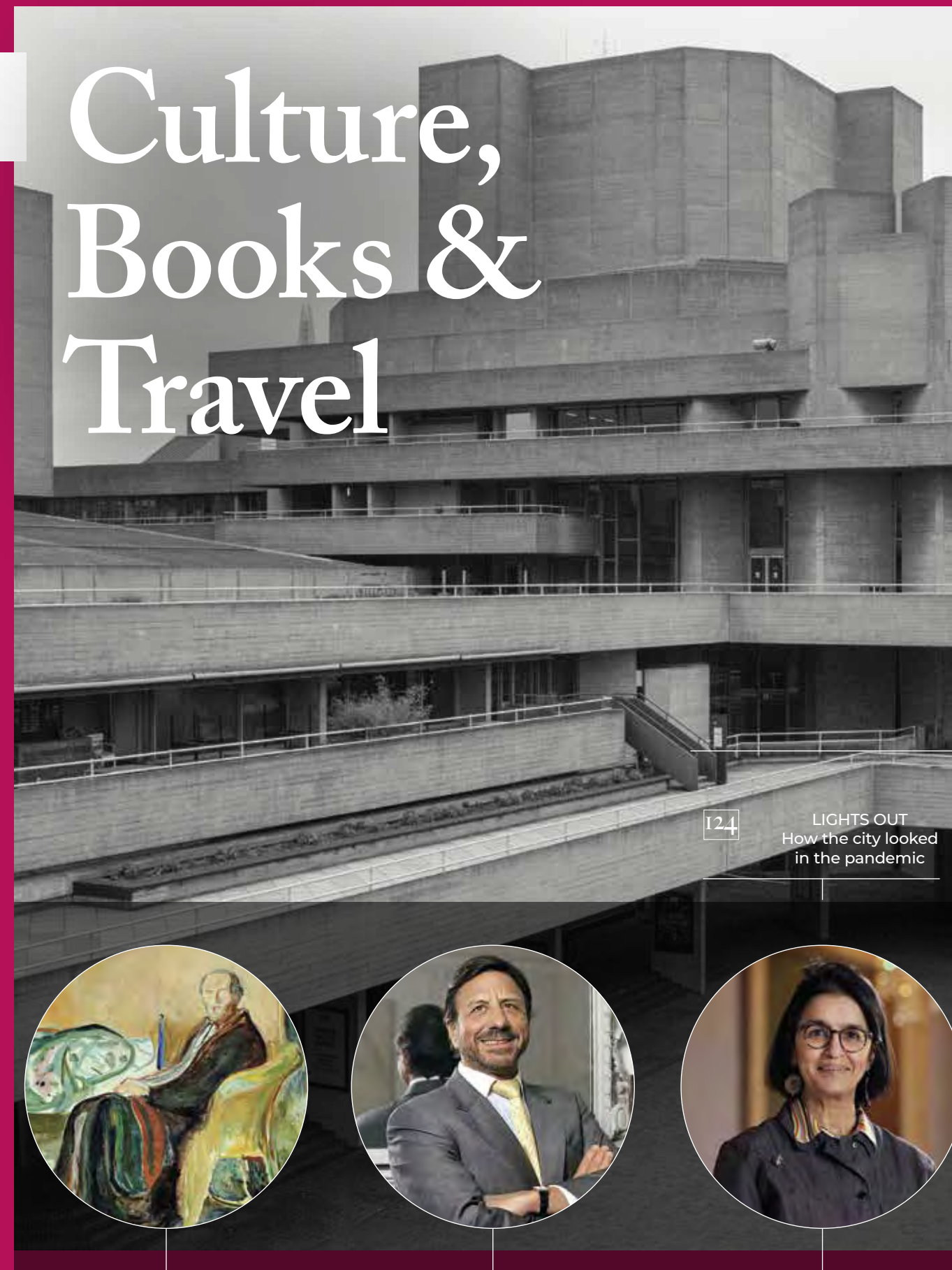


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Sir Rocco on waiting for  
the economy to reopen  
*(Shutterstock)*



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How the city looked  
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# The Sound of Silence

HOW THE MUSIC INDUSTRY ENTERED A COVID QUAGMIRE

BY GEORGIA HENEAGE

**R**ishi Sunak's announcement of the March 2021 Budget marked a beacon of hope for the struggling arts and culture sector. In what he called "a historic package", Sunak pledged a £400 million bonus to help keep afloat gigs, theatres and galleries. At the same time, his Covid Recovery Fund, which has so far supported over 3,000 organisations, would be increased to £1.87 billion.

"This industry is a significant driver of economic activity, employing more than 700,000 people in jobs across the UK", Sunak said. "I am committed to ensuring the arts are equipped to captivate audiences in the months and years to come."

The Chancellor's words were music to sore ears. An industry which is financially reliant on live events, the music sector has been hard hit by the pandemic. The sector generates £5.2 billion a year for the economy, £2.7 billion in exports and sustains 210,000 jobs.

But eight in every 10 pounds of the average musician's income derives from live performances; recording revenues have drastically dwindled in the digital age. Musicians receive next to nothing from Spotify plays, and live gigs and festivals have provided the backbone of their income over the past decade.

Even before the pandemic, the industry was under close inspection by the government because of the poor financial model used by streaming services like Spotify.



The Songs We're not Singing. The music industry has suffered during the pandemic

A poll by Musicians' Union last year found that eight out of 10 musicians (82 per cent) earn less than £200 each year from online streaming: 92 per cent said that streaming made up less than 5 per cent of their yearly salary and half that their income from recorded music had declined over the past decade. Sunak's financial offering pales in comparison to the huge deficit which faces thousands of struggling musicians, venues and organisations.

With such a small fraction of money made from streaming and a greater financial emphasis on live performance, it is no wonder that musicians have suffered over the past year. There's a glint of hope for live performers in the rapid vaccine roll-out but it will take decades for the industry to recover from the Covid -19 shock.

There's been little to no activity in the music industry since the first lockdown in March, apart from a select few big names at well-established records labels, like Laura Marling or Dua Lipa.

As usual, the hardest hit have been the least known. This has halted the emergence of new talent - the veins of the UK's globally-renowned music scene - many of whom are scouted in-person at gigs. In an *NME* interview, co-founder of indie label Speedy Wunderground said that "it's a very difficult time to be a musician" because the pandemic has meant that there will be a backlog of talent "blocking the road", and Brexit will likely impact touring Europe.

But with most live events set to reopen in May and return to full capacity in June, and given financial fuel by Sunak, the future is looking brighter for musicians.



Booking Agent Phil Simpson had 200 shows cancelled in 2020

Like other art forms, could it have impacted the industry in a positive way? Has it been a catalyst for change?

For Phil Simpson, a booking agent who pre-pandemic coordinated the entire live careers for musicians - including booking tours and festival appearances - the pandemic has been "really difficult".

"With booking I'm always thinking 12 months ahead, and the way I make money is that I take a commission from what the band earns at a live event. So obviously if the gig doesn't happen and the band doesn't get paid, then I don't get paid," says Simpson.

"That's why this year has been so hard. I had almost 200 shows booked for 2020, and when everything first kicked off we moved the shows to autumn, which was a massive process. As things got worse we had to move them again and again. In some instances we moved shows three or four times." Simpson says they've been stuck in a "terrible limbo" where old shows haven't happened, but they've done all the work for them, and new shows haven't been able to happen. Most venues don't have availability until spring next year.

Because he was seeing such a shortfall of income, Simpson decided to step away from his company and go back to being an independent agent. "We are seeing that a lot in the industry at the moment," he says. "All the bigger companies are having to make redundancies and branch off into smaller outlets, just to keep overhead down and be agile."

The pandemic shifted Simpson's career in other ways: he wrote a book on his experiences being a booking agent, and started mentoring and teaching music. "We've all been doing everything we can to diversify our work lives and keep the trickle of income coming in," he says.

Some of his friends in the wider business of professional music have had to go back into other employment and take on part time jobs. "Some", says Simpson, "have even given up professional music altogether. I'm lucky that most of my clients are quite well established so that they can find other means to make money like selling CDs or merchandise".

The effect of the pandemic on musicians has not been exclusively financial. "Musicians are particularly susceptible to mental health issues," Simpson tells me, "because the highs are high, and the lows are very low".

The catch-22 is that the quagmire which the industry is in predominantly effects younger, lesser known artists who are just starting to emerge onto the scene: Simpson says that going forward, the event organisers will be looking for artists who will guarantee them tickets. The unwillingness to take risks will result in younger artists getting less of a chance than their older, better established peers.

## Reay of Hope

As one of those lesser known artists, the pandemic brought huge challenges for Anna Reay. A singer from Newcastle, before lockdown Reay sang at big weddings and corporate events, and had just got a big contract with a cruise liner.

"It was a really worrying time", she says. "Being a single parent my main income is music. The first couple of weeks were just horrific. I cried every day."

Once she decided to move back in with her parents and share the homeschooling load, things started to turn around for Reay. "Singing is like a kind of therapy for me, so I started to come up with new ideas just to keep me sane".

From this sprung an ingenious idea which became hugely popular and has

kept her career going since: virtual singing Annagrams.. Reay began recording a song every Thursday to coincide with the Clap for Carers: kids, adults, artists and businesses began sending in videos and photos every week which documented their lockdown activities, which Reay then turned into videos which she shared on social media. She soon got a following, and started to get requests to sing songs for birthdays, cancelled weddings, cancelled parties and postponed events.

At the same time, Reay did doorstep performances, her mic powered by a car generator. She also had Covid-safety checks in place like "keep your distance" signs. For her first ever performance Reay sang for a family who'd just lost a young girl to a rare disease.

"To be honest I've never been so busy. I've even managed to get a mortgage from it," says Reay.

"It all just fell into place for me, I think because I panicked and my creative survival kicked in. Every business has had to diversify. So I thought, 'If they can do it, why can't we?'"

As Reay says, she's been "lucky" that she's been able to "pivot" her business and adapt to the pandemic. Others haven't. "I've seen musicians that have decided to hang their microphones up. It really saddens me how much everything has changed." **f**



Over lockdown, Newcastle musician Anna Reay started doing door-step performances



# — Lessons from the Last Pandemic —

AS THE WORLD COMES OUT OF COVID-19, IRIS SPARK LOOKS FOR LESSONS FROM ART CREATED DURING THE SPANISH FLU PANDEMIC ABOUT WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

Consider this woman opposite. Unless we were to look closely at her, we might not know that she is set to die tomorrow. It's true that her gaze is melancholy, but we might miss that her sadness has a leaden weight to it, distinct from the sadness we see in many romantic portraits. The clue to her condition is her gnarled and crooked hand, which tells the rapid encroachment of death more than her face, which still - heartbreakingly - has youth on its side. The more you look, the more signs of the seriousness of her condition are brought home. There are the strokes of discoloration on her cheeks. The lips are thin, a sign of the cyanosis which accompanied a deadly case of influenza.

The woman's name was Edith Schiele, and she was married to that brief star of the modernist period Egon Schiele, whose works today can fetch as much as \$40 million. Egon himself would die three days after drawing this picture. He was 28. It was an unhappy end to a life about to take off. As inauspicious as this story might seem, as we seek to emerge from the other side of the pandemic, it is a useful place to start if we wish to consider what can be learned from a study of the last pandemic about our current direction of travel.

We all know the statistics about the pandemic: the numbers dead or infected; and the jobs lost. But the data does not tell the full story.



Edith Schiele, Egon Schiele, 1918



Schiele, *The Family*. The picture is a reminder that the sheer oddity of what we have come through needs to be reckoned with and assimilated

## Modern Family

Statistics blur over time; what's left is the poetry and the art which a society creates. If we consider the so-called Spanish flu pandemic, which raged from 1918- 1919, and which killed 100 million people, infecting 500 million, we can see clearly in the era's painting a trajectory which might well prove relevant for our times as we implement our vaccination programmes.

We have to start with an acknowledgement of the enormity of what has happened to us with the pandemic.

This was evident too during the Spanish influenza. It can be seen, for instance, in the pictures Schiele made towards the end of his life. One is *The Family* (1918) - one of his last, and it would remain unfinished. This is a picture which in its mood is capable of placing us back in February 2020. It contains the foreboding of a vitality about to be stymied.

In this picture, two things alert us to the tragic state of affairs about to engulf the family: the first is the artist's decision to depict his unborn child as if he wished to personify a child who

would not survive the womb. The second is his painting of his own expression as blank and melancholy, his skin as jaundiced.

The baby might stand as a symbol for all the unborn projects which are stymied by the arrival of disease. But the definition of the musculature and the solidity of the forms make one feel uncomfortable about calling this an entirely pessimistic picture: there is will to endure here, and we can't say it is any the less important simply because, in this instance, nobody in the picture survived.



## Fever Pitch

But surveying the art which arose out of the 1918 pandemic, the most noteworthy thing is how difficult it is to depict illness. In pandemics we seem to enter a disjointed dreamscape. Illness isolates us, cuts us off from the solidity of the world. It partakes of the insubstantial, and can only be communicated in kaleidoscopic colours and the pictorial language of dreams.

In 1918, those artists who did experience a brush (or worse) with the Spanish flu, had already begun to intuit life as being at its core somewhat feverish and strange. This means we cannot always see how the influenza affected artists - they were, in some sense, feeling rather fluey about life beforehand.

Most notable among these was Edvard Munch (1863-1944) who also contracted the flu and produced two portraits about the experience *Self-Portrait with the Spanish Flu* and *Self-Portrait after the Spanish Flu*. In the first (see opposite), Munch is depicted in a seated position with a blanket over his knees. The sheet beside him seems to be developing into a face, as if artist or sitter is hallucinating. The detail of his face is subservient to a swirl of colour. But how different is this picture philosophically to 1893's famous picture *The Scream*?

When I talk to art specialist Angelina Giovanni she explains: "It's very interesting that in the case of Munch - probably because themes of loss and death had already been present in his work - the way he depicts himself is no different in terms of style. Instead, it has a certain linearity within his existing body of work."

Giovanni explains that it is as if Munch found some sort of confirmation of his prior experience by falling ill. The world had seemed disjointed before; and it

continued to feel so when the influenza struck him. Giovanni continues: 'Munch can so effortlessly depict himself within his predicament that were it not for the historical information that tells us that the work was painted when he had contracted the Spanish Flu, we might not have been able to place it in a particular point in time.'

While pandemics might illustrate our vulnerability vividly, they might not fundamentally change our method of vision. The world is elastic, and will return to its former shapes and structures.

But there is also no doubt that pandemics create an atmosphere of reflection which can be harnessed in

future years. When I catch up with *Fake or Fortune* star Phillip Mould, he says: "When you're locked down, and you remain in your own habitat, it's a more meditative cultural experience and you think about the outside world in a different way." Mould even wonders whether we shall have more full-length portraits in future, now that we are all looking at each other from six feet away.

For Mould this meditative spirit is best captured by Lorna May Wadsworth's superb still lives painted during lockdown, in which mere things - cups and vases - attain a meditative quality which, in his view, supersedes her previous work as a portrait painter.



Edvard Munch, *Self-Portrait with the Spanish Flu*, 1919

It was the American novelist Saul Bellow who once wrote that "Death is the dark backing a mirror needs if we are to see anything." The Spanish flu and Covid-19 pandemics caused a widespread awareness of mortality: what appears to happen is that our relationship to death is placed again under the microscope.

In 1919, the experience of finding oneself so suddenly vulnerable expressed itself visually.

## Death Becomes Us

Egon Schiele was not the only major artist to be claimed by the influenza. The other was Gustav Klimt, who suffered a stroke and died as a result of catching the infection. He was famous at the time for his painting *Death and Life* (1916). Here we have a close approximation of what death meant to the early 20th century mind - albeit through the prism of an individual of genius.

Death hovers to one side of the main grouping, his clothing patterned with crucifixes. These religious symbols act as a reminder that as radical as we think him, Klimt inhabited a world where Christian imagery was more prevalent than it is in our time.

How are we to feel about the figures on the right? Are they detached from death - in a kind of legitimate bliss of colour, and shared bodily warmth? Or are we to feel that they are failing to be awake to the menace of death as shown by the Reaper on the left-hand side of the painting? It's likely that the picture contains both interpretations.

For Philip Mould the art of this period presents a problem in that "it is always hard to be sure what devolves from the First World War and what from the flu pandemic." What is clear is that with death more prevalent, something like a medieval acquaintance with death had been transposed into a modern setting.



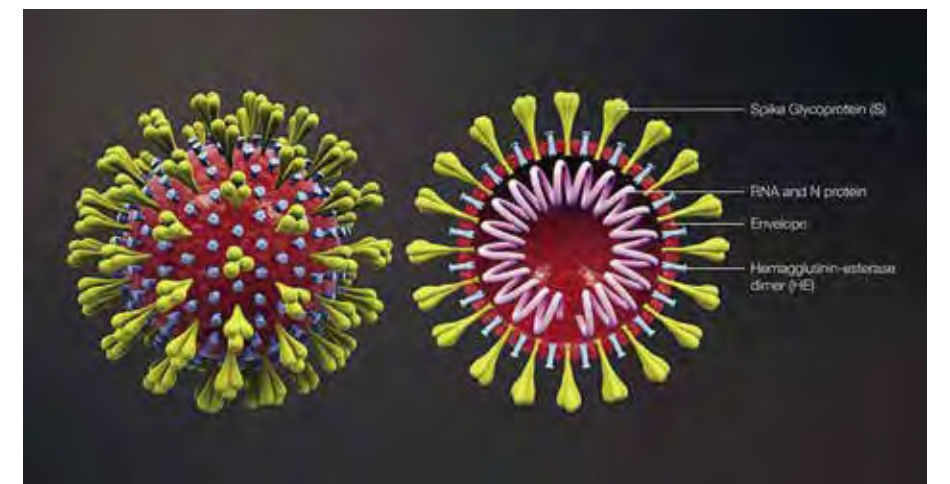
Gustav Klimt, *Death and Life* (1916)

This can connect us with primitive political instincts - as was shown in the 1920s rise of fascism and as may be evident also in the riots in the Capitol, Washington D.C. on January 6th 2020.

Of course, in our own times, death has been depicted somewhat differently. Whereas death is still symbolised in Klimt by the medieval figure of the

Grim Reaper, today death is represented with scientific diagrams such as the one below. Such images give a different sense of death. Here the virus appears as something spherical, prickly, and undeniably alien: an intruder.

The Klimt picture shows death as demonic - which is to say almost human. It is an indicator of how our society has shifted.



Covid-19 Virus



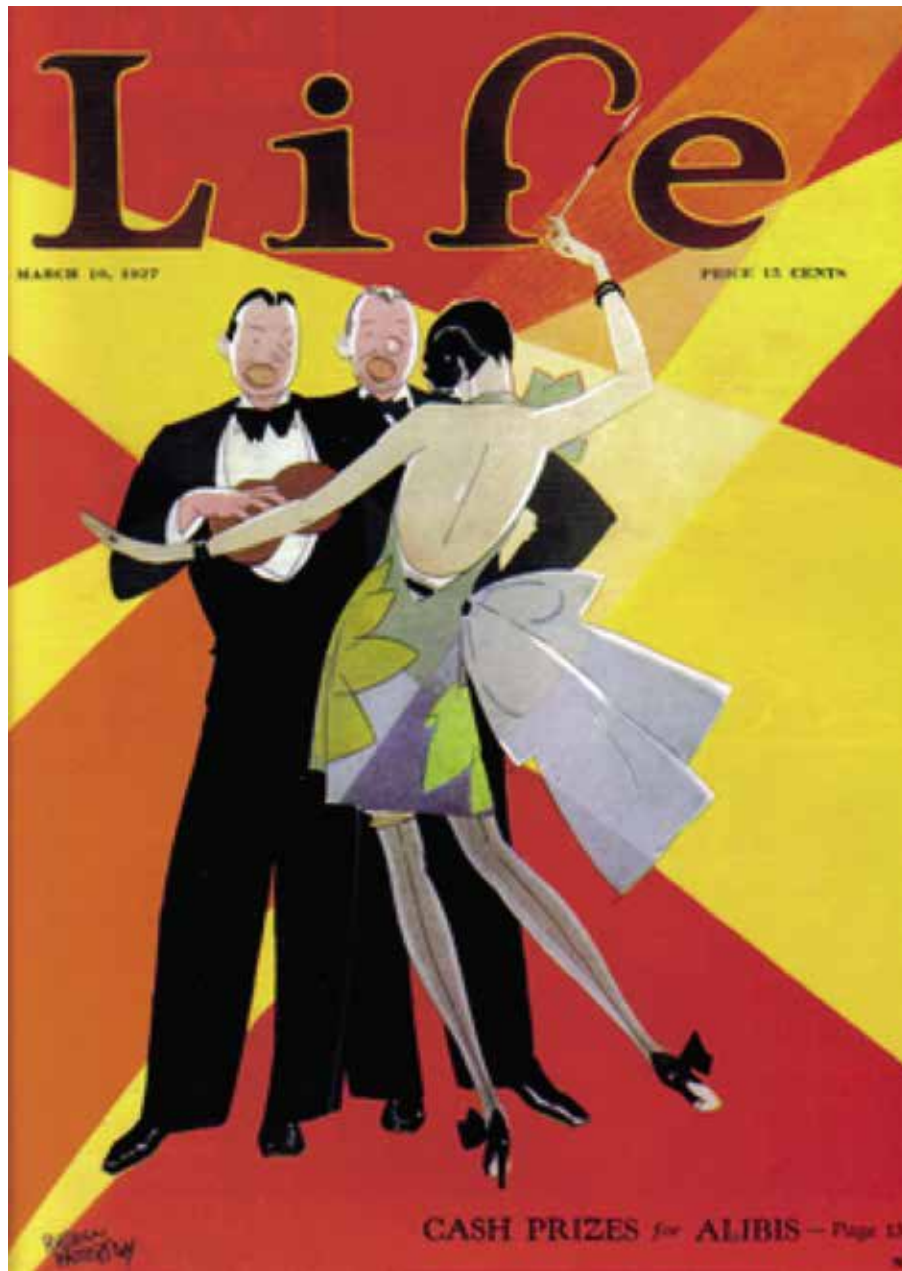
## Cocktail Hour

But what happens in the 1920s once society has recovered from a pandemic and we are able to interact confidently again? In the visual arts of the 1920s, we see the return of the line.

The Art Deco style, as shown by the superb Russell Patterson illustration 'Where there's smoke there's fire' (see below) couldn't be further from the blur of the Munch paintings. Society has returned to health. The owner of this body is again confident not just in herself but also in the bodily pleasure of smoking. Likewise, a renewed bodily confidence is again suggested in the cover of *Life* (opposite) which shows the joy of dancing - and again, all told in a strong line and healthful colours.

So might we find that once the world returns to normal we shall see the meditative aspects of our art today cede to something more dynamic, more fitting to the partying spirit?

That remains to be seen, of course, but as everyone knows, the 1920s are not the end of the story. We find a move towards health and life in the art of the 1920s, but it is a fine line between this development and excess. In literature, the crucial text would be *The Great Gatsby*, in which F. Scott Fitzgerald's own 'crack-up' is prefigured.



Life magazine cover

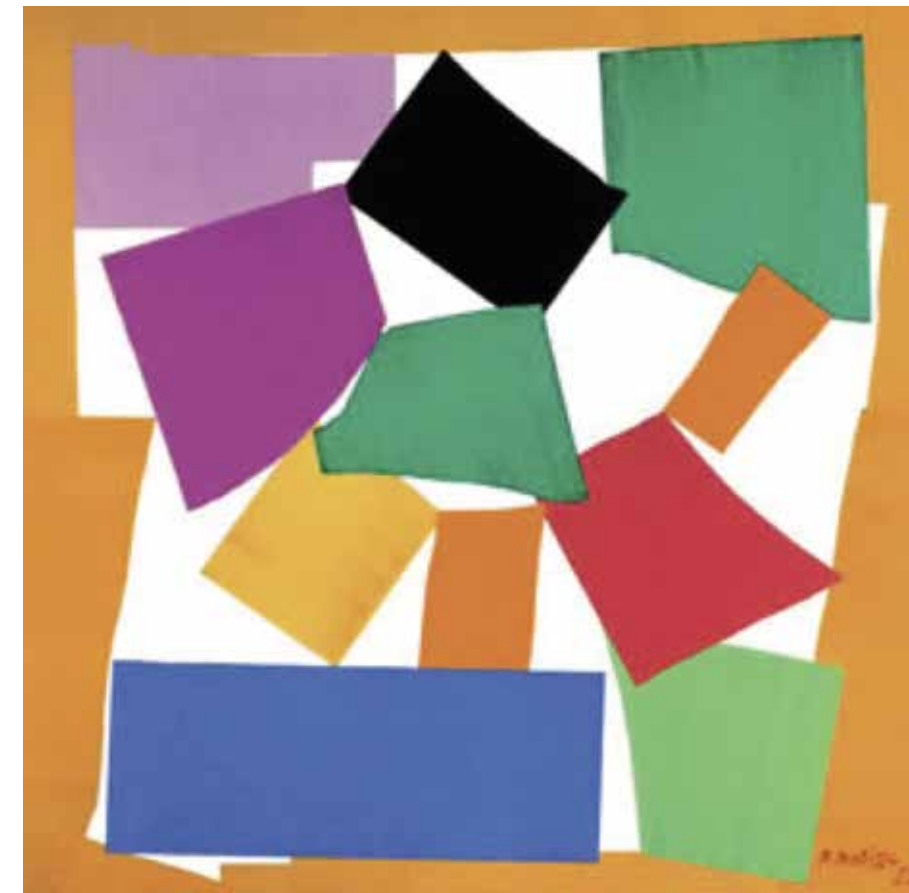


Russell Patterson, "Where there's smoke there's fire"

His friend Ernest Hemingway would soon find his work affected by the excesses of drink - alcoholism would also lead to suicide.

In the visual arts, it might be said that the artistic world bifurcates along two vectors of greatness: towards Henri Matisse (1869-1954) on the one hand and Pablo Picasso (1881- 1973) on the other. Both were active at the time of the Spanish flu, though neither experienced a sufficiently severe case for us to say with certainty how it impacted their creative output.

Picasso's own commitment to the line was always, with the invention of



Henri Matisse, *The Snail*, 1953, Gouache on Paper

Cubism, synonymous with the notion of fragmentation. He seems in his pictures from 1906 onwards to see round things - to intuit time and meaning at work within the appearance of a given object.

But by the time we reach *La Guernica* (1937), his vast oil painting depicting the Spanish Civil War, we can see how he is no longer depicting the complexity within objects as some fundamental fracture in society. Here, we find the sorts of visions which might be intuited in the work of Schiele and Munch with which we began. It is as if we are now confronted with their worst fears enacted.

So what had happened in the intervening time? The short answer, of course, is fascism and there will be few who have witnessed developments in America these past years who can be certain that once the deprivations of coronavirus have passed, we might not head in that direction.

But the art of Henri Matisse shows a more hopeful story. In old age, he became a celebrator of simple colour,

simple pattern, and graceful movement. If Picasso's nightmarish canvas shows the fears of Schiele and Munch more than realised, then we might argue that Matisse's scissor art in its childlike delight at colour and shape shows what they'd have liked to go on living for - they indicate something of the joy we feel about the life which we all fear departing one day.

Perhaps all this is encapsulated in his great late cut-out *The Snail*, which Matisse worked on after his stroke from 1952-3.

It is an exercise in chromatic colour but it is the title which might strike us:



Pablo Picasso, *La Guernica*, oil on canvas, 1937

since there is no sense in which this is a realistic depiction of a snail we are liberated into feeling that Matisse is here showing us something of the feeling he gets from looking at one of nature's humbler creatures.

In 2021, we should hope for just such an arrival in ourselves. Locked down in our homes we have seen the world at a slower pace, and with more centredness, than we had been used to doing during our frenetic pre-pandemic lives. Matisse reminds us that we must retain what we might call the joy of the sedentary.

Like this, the art of the past has its messages. We must never forget what happened to Schiele, and to Klimt - and pay it appropriate respect and remembrance. But we must realise how superior a life of activity is, as shown by the advent of the Art Deco, while not forgetting that an abundance of energy, if it is misdirected, can lead to the horrors that Picasso depicted in *La Guernica*.

And if we look at Edith Schiele again, it is possible to imagine that all this is somehow contained in those nearly hooded eyes. She sees us and doesn't see us - just as we see and do not always recognise ourselves. But this is the help art gives us. There is one sitting across from her - an artist who happens to be her husband - who gauges her with unusual intensity.

This is the privilege of art - to come from us, and yet somehow to know more than we do. When the art galleries open again post-lockdown there shall be wonderful things to see. f



# Architecture in the Time of Covid

PHOTOGRAPHS AND TEXT BY WILL PURCELL

**While it is easy to wallow in the emptiness of this pandemic there is a lot to celebrate in the architecture of the city and its surrounding suburbs. One long year ago, silent buildings were normally associated with being readied for demolition or redevelopment. Silence, however, now befalls many structures across the postcodes, stranded by nature rather**

**than man's desire for progression or the need to reimagine past efforts.**

It's fascinating how architecture designed for people stands up when the footfall is removed. The City of London certainly looms ominously in the quiet with tall glass structures, curved and reflective, towering over the old London banking lanes and largely empty passageways.

The neighbouring Barbican with its closed theatre and eerily muted walkways

with Wyndham-esque pods somehow manages to retain a sense of warmth. Although deserted, save for the odd body at a desk in an adjacent block, it keeps the interest of the observer. It is a hard development surrounded by equally gritty high rises but in its textured and rough industrial concrete balconies there remains, even with everyone tucked away and hidden, a consoling sense of presence, even warmth.



A Grade II-listed building stands imperious and derelict in Woolwich, South East London as it awaits redevelopment

South of the river, the National Theatre with its Brutalist layered concrete feels more than ever cold and alone. In sunlight, filled with people and life it can really soar, but during the winter of our pandemic it can appear an inexplicable relic. It is not alone, but just like the office blocks that surround Victoria Station, and which are usually lit up and full, the glass panels lie in darkness reflecting the world outside its walls.



Satellite dishes adorn a tower block in Loughborough Junction in South West London in a visual nod to the *Netflix* and other providers of TV that we have been at home devouring over the last year

In contrast, as habits change, people work from home and exercise and socialise near to where they live. Residences that sit in the middle of the action come to the fore. The suburbs are no longer the exclusive realm of the terraced house. High-rise flats demand attention on the horizon. Floor to ceiling bedroom windows overlooking community parks look like fixtures of the future.



125 Victoria Street. A partly occupied office block largely in darkness during the middle of a normal working day



Victoria Coach station empty at rush hour as everyone stays at home

Deprived of so many people, London becomes a myriad of lines and angles. With the softening sounds of chatter, footsteps temporarily suspended, and with the constant noise of the cars, buses and aeroplanes also reduced, it is an opportune time to explore the silent shadows of the city's architecture and search out the little pockets of hope and colour that still exist across the boroughs waiting for the return of laughter and light switches. **f**



Brixton Market defiantly open in full colour waiting patiently for its lanes to once again be filled with noise





Victoria Train station is a heady mix of angles, lines and patterns that grab the attention when not covered by people



The new overshadows the old in the deserted financial district



The National Theatre stands alone and empty. Of all the buildings I photographed this and its surrounding structures really miss the interaction with people and the softness that they bring



A single computer screen illuminates an otherwise deserted office block



Imposing but protective structures surround the Barbican providing a real sense of strength



The timeless Barbican, empty and imperious at once from both the past and the future



A new build in Stockwell with bedrooms that directly overlook the protected Skate Park



The Barbican and its glass neighbours living in perfectly quiet and peaceful harmony



A new build in South West London shows that the direction of travel is most definitely up when it comes to finding space in an already overcrowded city



# Uplifting Books for Troubling Times

## —How to Avoid a Climate Disaster: The Solutions We Have and the Breakthroughs We Need

BY BILL GATES,  
PENGUIN, £20.00

**A** climate disaster is looming and although its impact is mostly invisible in our day-to-day lives, the damage humans have done to the planet already seems dauntingly irreversible. As Bill Gates points out, “fifty-one billion is how many tons of greenhouse gases the world typically adds to the atmosphere every year” and merely aiming to reduce emissions by 2030 is not an adequate target.

He explains: “The climate is like a bathtub that’s slowly filling up with water. Even if we slow the flow of water to a trickle, the tub will eventually fill up and water will come spilling out onto the floor. That’s the disaster we have to prevent.” Simply put, “if nothing else changes, the world will keep producing greenhouse gases, climate change will keep getting worse, and the impact on humans will in all likelihood be catastrophic,” Gates says. But *How to Avoid a Climate Disaster* focuses on the “if,” as Gates considers the changes needed and sets out an optimistic road map of how we can avert a climate disaster.

By his own admission, the burger-loving billionaire founder of Microsoft is an unlikely poster boy for saving the

environment. “I own big houses and fly in private planes – in fact, I took one to Paris for the climate conference,” he confesses.

While Extinction Rebellion seemingly sees anti-capitalism as crucial to the cause of environmentalism with many of its followers protesting by causing disruption in London’s financial district, Bill Gates is proposing a way to reduce greenhouse gases which will be palatable to big businesses. In each chapter, he considers the financial implications of his suggestions. He proposes that countries should implement what he calls “green premiums.”

He explains: “Most of these zero-carbon solutions are more expensive than their fossil-fuel counterparts. In part, that’s because the prices of fossil fuels don’t reflect the environmental damage they inflict, so they seem cheaper than the alternative. These additional costs are what I call Green Premiums. During every conversation I have about climate change, Green Premiums are in the back of my mind.”

Indeed, Gates is pragmatic in his approach and is constantly aware of the feasibility of his proposals. In the chapter about eating meat, for instance, he says although animal consumption causes a lot of environmental damage, it is unrealistic to stop it entirely. He looks at meat alternatives, such as Beyond Meat, a company which he has invested in. He reasons: “Artificial meats come with hefty Green Premiums, however. On average, a ground-beef substitute costs 86 percent more than the real thing. But as sales for these alternatives increase, and as more of them hit the market, I’m optimistic that they’ll eventually be cheaper than animal meat.”

Gate remains optimistic throughout the book and suggests the threat of a climate disaster provides mankind with an opportunity to be innovative. He is always looking for the silver linings. For instance, he says: “I never thought I’d find something to like about malaria. It kills 400,000 people a year, most of them children, and the Gates Foundation is part of a global push to eradicate it. So I was surprised when I learned there is actually one nice thing you can say about malaria: “It helped give us air conditioning.”

In the most compelling chapter, “What each of us can do,” he suggests we should all be hopeful. He says: “It’s easy to feel powerless in the face of a problem as big as climate change. But you’re not powerless. And you don’t have to be a politician or a philanthropist to make a difference.” Of course, we hope he is right. Gates was a coronavirus Cassandra. In a 2015 Ted Talk he warned: “If anything kills over 10 million people in the next few decades, it’s likely to be a highly infectious virus rather than a war.” “We need preparedness,” he demanded. This time, hopefully people will listen. **f**

**BILL GATES**  
**HOW TO**  
**AVOID A**  
**CLIMATE**  
**DISASTER**  
THE SOLUTIONS WE HAVE AND THE  
BREAKTHROUGHS WE NEED

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## I Never Promised You a Rose Garden

BY JONNY OATES  
BITEBACK  
PUBLISHING £20.00

**J**onny Oates has run away from home, stolen his father's credit card and is on a plane to Ethiopia. The teenager's plan is to help people who are suffering in the 1985 famine and, in the process, relieve his inner turmoil. Fast forward a few years and he is on a plane to Ethiopia again, this time sat with the deputy prime minister, Nick Clegg. *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* elegantly charts Oates's extraordinary journey from life as a suicidal teenager to life working in the top ranks of government.

Throughout, Oates hits key emotional notes, sometimes rather literally with regular references to music. For instance, when describing the letter he wrote to his parents before he ran away he says: "It starts off abruptly with an ill-judged quote from Billy Joel's 'Innocent Man'... Underneath, the stark sentence: 'By the time you read this letter I will be in Addis Ababa and heading for the famine camps.'" And so, he captures the ridiculousness of the action as well as the youthful emotional intensity.

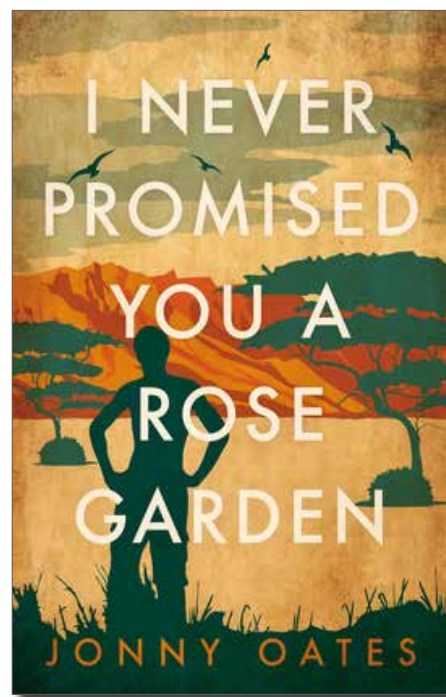
Later on, when he's sharing a bed with a man who does not love him back, Lou Reed's 'Perfect Day' is playing in the background. On a lighter note, he describes attending his friend's gigs during his days at University of Exeter. That friend happens to be Thom Yorke. For the first few chapters, Oates adopts a third person omniscient perspective as he describes his struggles as a teenager. Although this is unusual for a memoir and takes a while to get used to, the perspective has a tender

and sympathetic quality. Oates writes: "A sense of aloneness and desperation overwhelms him. For the first time since he stepped off the plane at Bole Airport he can no longer master his emotions, and he begins to cry - quiet tears which flow in rivulets down his cheeks. "Please help me, please help me," he whispers."

Oates switches to a first-person perspective as the content becomes more typical of a political memoir. He reveals some of the difficulties of working in a coalition government as chief of staff to Nick Clegg and regales his readers with anecdotes about David Cameron and George Osborne. For instance, he reveals that David Cameron was so desperate to avoid a TV debate during the lead up to the 2015 election, the prime minister offered to get former Conservative MP, Olympic icon and Sheffield local Seb Coe to come out in favour of Nick in his Sheffield Hallam constituency. Oates explains: "The quid pro quo for this generous offer is that Nick pulls out of the TV debate with Farage to give Cameron some cover in also refusing to take part"

He says Nick was too decent to agree to such a deal. But Oates isn't entirely scathing about his Tory colleagues and his time in government as he describes his bond with the Tory special advisors as well as the joy of being involved in the process of legalising gay marriage.

This memoir does a lot. It provides an introspective study of a young boy struggling with his sexuality and charts some of the most significant historic and political events in Africa and the UK. The thread that ties this book together is Oates's continual reverence for and acknowledgement of the kind people surrounding him, from the religious leader who saves him from suicide in Ethiopia, to his dedicated political allies. Although the subject matter is often harrowing, this is an unusual and uplifting account of life in politics. **f**



## Gardening With A Chainsaw

**I**wanted to tell her that chainsaws rarely work spending ninety per cent of their time being fed oil, the torque strengthened the plug scraped free of soot and the chain adjusted

only then do the wood chips fly like confetti

as trees kiss the vertical goodbye waving, swaying, then crashing to the shagpile forest floor

the desire to cut and chop, make something from the wild lingers

we gather cabbage tops, think on the big gesture of a copse projects

passed on like a half-built shed or a thrown bouquet

the chainsaw bides its time as it leaks upon the shelf teeth grinding

upon the oily tongue of blade like a bull who's just seen a cow

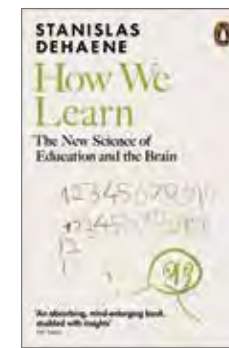
I curate a smile, turn the key in the lock walk out into the sudden garden of quiet devastation

*Gareth Writer-Davies.*

## How We Learn: The New Science of Education and the Brain

BY STANISLAS DEHAENE,  
PENGUIN BOOKS, £9.99

**D**ehaene embarks on a search for more effective, evidence-based learning strategies. Focusing on four key pillars: Attention, active engagement, error feedback and consolidation, Dehaene considers how people can change their practices at school, home or work to improve on our brain's greatest talent, its capacity for learning. **f**



## Being 10% Braver

BY KEZIAH FEATHERSTONE  
AND VIVIENNE PORRITT,  
SAGE PUBLICATIONS, £12.99

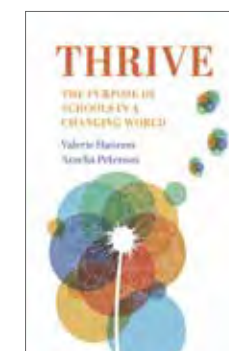
**B**eing 10% Braver features stories from women leaders in education who have overcome challenges. In the typical school textbook style, there are learning outcomes at the end of each chapter and its lessons include, how to tackle imposter syndrome, how to call out unacceptable behaviour and how to ask for what you need. **f**



## Thrive: The Purpose of Schools in a Changing World

BY AMELIA PETERSON AND VALERIE HANNON,  
CAMBRIDGE PRESS, £20.00

**T**he pandemic has raised questions about the function of schools. If so much could be done online, what is their purpose? But Peterson and Hannon say there has not been enough serious public debate about the job of schools and so this book aims to shift conversations from 'how?' to 'why?' **f**



## More

*For Faten*

You look to a spot that's taken by a star

Because there's so much more

You could be doing,

And so much more, the air above, beneath your

Wings; and more - in lists I cannot bring

To corning, polish, finishing.

You've a dark-browed hunger more

Like anger - but possessed, too

At times, of a simpler, lighter hue;

But when the missed ambition strikes

You look at me, busied in my blue

Music, and decide to mar

The day with your temper: tics,

My love, I've gotten used to.

*Omar Sabbagh*

Omar Sabbagh is a widely published poet, writer and critic. His latest books are: *Reading Fiona Sampson: A Study in Contemporary Poetry and Poetics* (Anthem Press, 2020); *To My Mind or Kinbotes: Essays on Literature* (Whisk(e)y Tit, 2021). *Morning Lit: Portals After Alia* is forthcoming in early 2022 with Cinnamon Press. Currently, he teaches at the American University in Dubai (AUD), where he is Associate Professor of English.



# Journal of a Voyage Round My Room

AS THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY CONTINUES TO CONFRONT HEADWINDS, JAMES LOHAN TELLS US ABOUT WHAT THE LIFE OF A TRAVEL EXECUTIVE IS LIKE DURING A PANDEMIC

## Monday 1st February

The overnight dreams that preface my working week are of a world where travel has made a triumphant return (flying, literally) and the pandemic is yesterday's news. Then I wake, read the actual news on my Kindle, and wish I was still asleep. Turmoil in the US, the NHS at breaking point, flooding across the UK... bleak doesn't really do it justice. I've been lucky enough to have escaped the virus and many of its direst repercussions. But for someone who spends most of his waking (and sleeping) hours either dreaming of or actually in far-off destinations, the enforced domesticity of lockdown is a perverse kind of cruelty.

After digesting much of the daily news cycle, I check the company's daily booking stats. Unfortunately, these usually confirm that I should have opened that article on Brexit - another car crash that would've made for happier reading. Then I'm up and out to walk Ziggy, our working Cocker Spaniel, to clear my mind. Or I consider filling it with yet another inspiring podcast to make me feel like I haven't achieved enough lately. Gunnersbury Park is fine but I'm starting to feel like a lion at Longleat: I want some bigger plains to roam.

After two cups of coffee, a refreshed to-do list and an inbox clean-up, it's straight into a "thrilling" ops-board meeting to discuss cancellations, amendments and furlough rotas (again). After that, it's my direct team catch-up to decide what can get done during their limited flexi furlough hours.



James Lohan

Furlough has been a great financial help but it's hard to run the business when your team is so part-time. Funny how we've come to view the scheme: it used to be a dirty word, some colleagues interpreting it like they'd been benched. Others have loved it, seeing it as time to rest and contemplate their futures. By now, though, everyone understands how important it is to help us survive the next few months.

## Tuesday 2nd February

Tuesday mornings it's yoga, 8am, to keep my ageing joints moving in the right direction - even if right now the business isn't.

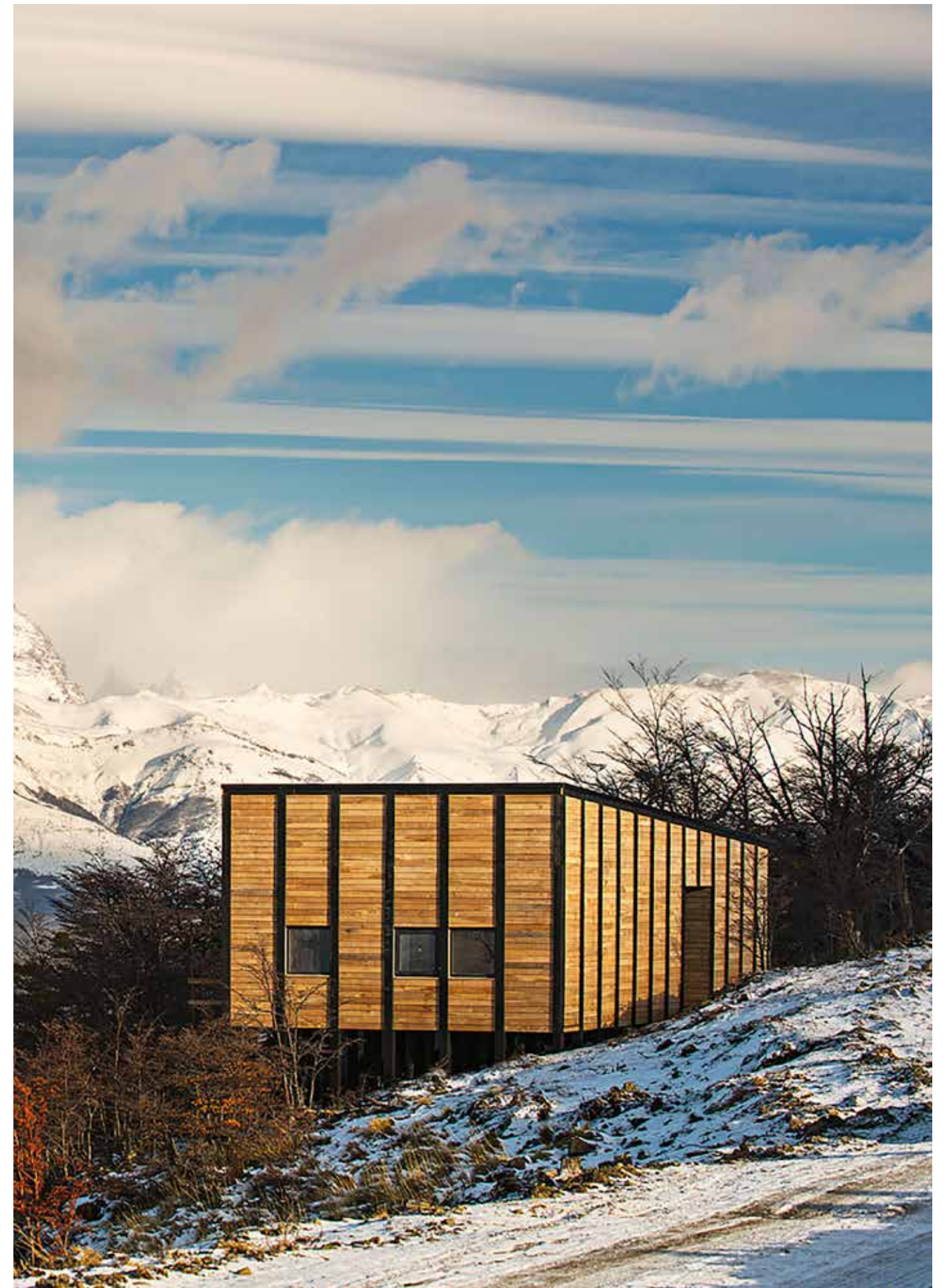
On this particular Tuesday we're bracing ourselves for another surprise announcement from No.10 Sesame Street, before which we hold our breath and wonder what Big Bird Boris and Kermit Hancock are going to spring on us next. I have no problem with lockdown - an absolute necessity in

response to the crisis. What's so difficult for us is the lastminute.com nature of the decision-making that's causing chaos for agents like ourselves who have to pull rabbits out of hats as we yet again cancel or amend our members' holiday plans - with less than 24 hours' notice. It's a nightmare, too, for hoteliers who might be ruing that enormous food order and wondering, for instance, what they're going to do with 200 turkeys. But while it's soul-sapping for our team, I'm proud of the way we're doing our very best as a business to keep our members and hoteliers happy.

## Wednesday 3rd February

The thing I do like about working from home is the commute: very convenient indeed. That said, it's an odd sensation when the day's big 'outing' is a shopping trip to the local greengrocer and butcher in Chiswick - in a mask and at a safe two-metre distance. But cherished time away from my desk it has most certainly become. Wednesday also means a meeting with my main team to discuss sustainability and what we're doing to integrate such practices throughout the business.

We'll shortly be announcing our efforts in supporting the Blue Marine Foundation and the World Land Trust, two vital conservation charities with goals to protect the earth's precious assets on land and sea. And we're adding a more dedicated sustainability section on each page of our 1,400-strong collection to help our members find and book the planet's most forward-thinking hotels. I'm certain that an important by-product of the pandemic will be people's greater awareness of the climate crisis and how our travel choices impact it.



Awasi Patagonia



#### Thursday 4th February

Yoga day two, where I try to pretend I'm on a beach in Bali doing my downward-facing dog, but the rumbling of the E3 bus keeps breaking my shavasana in our front living room where I'm practising. It's nearly the weekend, which as a concept begins to mean less and less - just with fewer meetings and emails. What to do with the kids to keep them off their computers is the weekend challenge, and explaining that we can't see Grandma and no you can't have a play-date and yes we will be walking the dog again and yes it will be in the same location as yesterday... it's tough for them. Home-schooling and even just making three meals a day for us all is not an easy gig. I never thought I'd miss my Pret a Manger lunchtime sandwich so much, which was just a few minutes' walk from our office in Shepherd's Bush.

I sit next to my wife (our CEO) in our home office and it's a constant juggle to agree on who's speaking or who's muting during the various online

meetings so we don't create feedback for the other poor Zoomers on our call. We're both going slightly mad as we're also forced by proximity to hear each other's individual calls, and the 'how's-Covid-working-out-for-you?' chat that precursors every conversation nowadays. That said, a couple of very nice new partnership meets means the day has been a success, and all wins - however big or small - are gratefully received right now.

#### Friday 5th February

Thank God: the day of wine. I don't drink during the week, so Friday has become a celebration of, well, my midweek abstinence. And as I'm drinking a little less, I'm spending a little more on each bottle - and I can't wait for Friday to come around to pop open my next treat. Work slows on a Friday, too, as so many of the team is on furlough, so it's a good time to tidy up loose ends so Monday feels a little less daunting. Our flight has just been cancelled for February half-term to what

would have been our first curation trip /holiday (always mix business with pleasure) in nearly a year. Gutted. It gets to midday and I'm already thinking about cracking open the wine but I still have a couple of meetings left so better hold off.

Friday is also when WhatsApp group texts with mates seem to explode into life, gaining more momentum throughout the day as people clock off one-by-one and begin mixing their G&Ts. How strange that socialising has been reduced to this, although the novelty has very much worn off by now. Tentatively, we all discuss getting together for a group holiday in a villa when lockdown ends and I'm quizzed on predictions for travel opening up again and where best to go. There's no doubt in my mind that 2021 will eventually end up being a good year; I just wish we could get on with it sooner. Patience has never been the trait of an entrepreneur - so I'll just have another glass and remind myself: we'll get there. Cheers! f



Soneva Fushi



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# Sir Rocco Forte: “I’ve never worked so hard in my life”

ROBERT GOLDING SPEAKS TO THE FAMOUS HOTELIER ABOUT HIS OPPOSITION TO LOCKDOWN AND WHAT GRADUATES NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

**F**or many, it will be outdated to think of Covid-19 as being a Biblical reckoning of sorts, where the last shall be first, and the first last, but there have been some tremendous reversals of fortune.

Hoteliers are up there with airline owners and restaurateurs among those who have most had to duck and weave. And there’s no hotelier more famous than Sir Rocco Forte. To talk to him is to suspect that he is the sort of man in whom stress takes the form of indignation, but we should be open-minded about that: Forte has seen his business upended by the pandemic.

Forte is a lockdown sceptic of the Toby Young and Laurence Fox school, but with the crucial difference that with business interests to protect – and employees to look after – he has attracted less opprobrium. That’s partly because he is talking from a position of commercial pragmatism rather than whimsical philosophical pushback. This is the voice of business and it’s a powerful thing to hear.

He begins our interview by recalling the strains of the first lockdown: “Our German hotels stayed open with greatly reduced staffing levels, as we had long-term customers and under law we couldn’t take advantage of their furlough scheme, if we closed. In Russia the hotels remained open as there was no furlough, and therefore there wasn’t much difference in cost between staying open and closed.”

He sighs pre-emptively at the thought of the ensuing recollections: “The reality is most of my hotels depend principally on international business. The Italian city centre hotels [such as the Hotel Savoy in Florence, and the Hotel de Russie in Rome] have six per cent local business; Brown’s of London has nine per cent UK business. With restrictions on international level, they can’t function on a profitable basis.”

But Forte is in the league of the hugely successful and one can sense beneath the extraordinary difficulty of the situation his resilience. He will not take reversal lightly – and 2020 did see a few successes. “Most of these hotels will continue to limp along. The two exceptions in August, September and October were our 40-bedroom hotel Masseria Torre Maizza in Puglia, and the Verdura Resort in Sicily which had a reasonable August. But it’s a gloomy scenario.”

To put it mildly, Forte is no fan of the Johnson administration, but reserves special ire for government scientists. “The government needs to change its attitude to the pandemic,” he continues. “The very few people who are endangered are old and have underlying health problems. It’s not nice to talk about people dying and it’s sad, but it’s not a disease that affects young people. Scientists you’ve never seen before are now enjoying the limelight: they didn’t have authority before, but can now tell people what to do. Really, we should get back as quickly as possible to a position where we’re all allowed to make up our

own minds about the risks we want to take.”

Forte was talking before the second wave, and the deaths which followed. When I catch up with him again in late April however he questions the government’s narrative about the spike in deaths: ‘I am also upset about the exaggeration of deaths. The reality is that people under the age of 60, 10,000 have died, they’re running the economy. 80,000 of the so-called Covid deaths have been in people over 80 and another 30,000 of people between 70 and 80. It’s not a reason to close the economy. The whole thing is to terrify people into submission. I never knew how totalitarian states cowed people into submission. Now I know how they did it.’

Perhaps it will always be salutary to have someone like Forte arguing during a time like this against the status quo since that asks those in power to check whether the balance is right. “We closed our whole economy and it’s just nonsense, we’ve got to move away from being ultra-cautious and ultra-careful.”

In the event of it, the Johnson administration did listen to some extent and in hindsight we all know, after the Winter of Variants, that so far, there has always been cost attached to the decision to open up. Yet we also know that we can’t go on like this indefinitely, and Forte is among the most compelling voices pointing to the cost to business of not opening up.



New opening, Villa Igica



The Verdura Resort in Sicily enjoyed a profitable summer in 2020



Sir Rocco Forte (Shutterstock)



Forte, like Goldman Sachs CEO David Solomon, wants his staff back in the office. “I started getting people back in the office in July 2020. Staff were anxious to get back to work. Employers have got to get harder with people. People who have underlying health issues – that’s understandable. It’s the same with the schools: children are not at all at risk of the disease.”

The counter-argument would run that this misses the point and that nobody is particularly arguing that they are: what the government is saying is that they can carry the disease and transmit it to someone who is at risk. Forte pushes back on this: “The government said there would be a spike when the children went back to school in March and there wasn’t.”

Forte is illuminating on the commercial reality: “The economy is talked about in the abstract. It’s about people’s livelihoods and their families. We’re still not open and free to work.” This is plainly true, but there again one might say that it’s precisely in recognition of this fact that we have the furlough scheme.

The suspicion remains that confronted with the pressures of SAGE’s advice, and the public health, Forte might have done the same thing as Johnson and Sunak, although perhaps with even greater reluctance. He rejects this: “I keep thinking, What would Mrs. Thatcher have done? For one thing, she’d have known the science herself. And she would have taken a much more pragmatic approach.

And why is the government talking about an early election? Because the government is popular and people are at home, being paid and not having to work. We’re not seeing the eventual effect of all this, which will come two years down the road. Their propaganda has made them popular and they don’t want to see adverse effects. There’s a lot of talk internally within the Party about a new election.”

Forte then is a man at bay, and at odds with the government. If you take the long view, you might say that the brand is strong, and that given his own immense savvy, he will find a way back. But there must be days when it doesn’t feel like that. ‘It’s cost the company around £100 million,’ he tells me in April.

It’s no surprise to hear his opposition to home-working going forwards. Recalling the first lockdown he says: “For the first six weeks, I’ve never worked harder in my life, but after a while the whole thing pales. Being in an office creates discipline. And if not being in an office is demotivating for me, what’s it doing to the rest of my staff?”

**“Once things normalise, a lot of businesses won’t be around anymore”**

And what about the position on tax going forwards? Forte is clear about mooted tax rises: “We want to get the economy moving, and we’re not going to do that by raising taxes. Servicing the debt will cost half a billion a year which is not significant. Why do we need to start repaying the debt now? We finished off paying our war debt three years ago. We don’t need to rush.”

As a Conservative Party donor, has he spoken to the prime minister about all this? “I’m afraid I’m not in a position to pick up the phone to him to tell him what I think. The best way to influence those in government is to make your views known very publicly. I have appeared on television which is not something I normally do – desperation.”

So will he be looking to hire this year? “Once things normalise, a lot of businesses won’t be around anymore. Ones like mine who can borrow more

money will be more indebted with the constraints that puts on business. But we’ll still be looking to hire people.”

So what does he look for in potential employees? “We look for an element of enthusiasm for the industry. I would never advise anyone to come into this industry who didn’t enjoy working in it: you should try and do a holiday job for a few months, and see if you like the feel of working in a hotel and what it entails.” What should they be prepared for? “It’s quite hard work,” he says. “It involves unsociable hours a lot of the time and people in the business enjoy that. You need to have camaraderie and a sense of belonging. Upwards mobility can be very quick. You can start as a waiter and end up in a management position if you have the right attitude and the abilities to do so and these are recognised. If you’re a shrinking violet it’s not the place for you.”

So, once the pandemic’s over with, what are his plans? “Well, I have big concentration in Italy as we already have a strong position. But I’m not in Milan. Venice is somewhere we should be. I want to do more in the UK. It’s very difficult outside of London to look at smaller hotels in important tourist destinations where a larger hotel won’t work. Where a fifty or sixty bedroom hotel would be quite successful. As a UK-based company it’s a shame we’re not doing more here.”

You get the impression that this is how he’s used to thinking – dynamically and rapidly about future plans. It’s a window into the mindset the pandemic has deprived him of. “Then I’m not in Paris, not in Madrid and Barcelona. I’m in St. Petersburg not Moscow. Then I’d like to be in the States – a big proportion of our business comes from there, so New York and Miami...”

At which his voice trails off, seemingly with the realisation that none of this is possible at the moment. But everything about the man makes you realise it will be. **f**



The Balmoral in Edinburgh is another option for the domestic traveller



Sir Rocco Forte outside Brown's as part of its Luxury is Local push. Brown's footfall pre-pandemic was only 9 per cent domestic



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## Costeau

MEET ORR BARRY, THE ISRAELI CHEF WHO IS BRINGING THE WORLD WE CAN'T VISIT BACK INTO OUR HOMES



**You may not have heard of the late Jim Haynes, but he was a pioneer in the world of hospitality. His insight was simple: we should get to meet as many people as possible. Haynes died in January 2021 and was known in his obituaries as 'the man who invited the world over to dinner'.**

He did just that. Haynes lived in Paris in the 14th arrondissement, and on Sunday evenings would have an open-door policy. Anyone could come. His death during the pandemic, saddening though it was, also made a kind of sense - as if a man who all along craved human interaction, should exit the world when that interaction was no longer possible.

And what of those of us left behind who might want to honour his spirit? As the Deliveroos mount, and as - to quote the restaurateur Jeremy King - we remain 'entombed in our homes' that seems harder and harder.

But Costeau would like to present the solution in the shape of a remarkable Israeli chef, Orr Barry, who has become a phenomenon in south-east London during the pandemic.

Like all the best things from *The Queen's Gambit* to the furlough scheme, Barry has operated by word of mouth. In Dulwich, if you bump into someone friendly at school pick-up or in the park, the conversation might turn to Safta Cook, the name of Barry's highly personal delivery venture. "Did you try Orr on Friday night?" It was a safe topic of conversation. You could be reasonably sure your interlocutor had.

I meet Barry outside his Saturday stall on Lordship Lane, and ask him why food matters so much to him. "For me, it's something that takes you into memories and nice moments, certain feelings like you're trying to kind of recreate something very social". That's what makes Barry's food special - the sense that he is trying to communicate to his customers something almost intangible.

Another way to put it is to say he's cooking with love. That has to do partly with his past. Barry grew up in the centre of Israel about equidistant between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, but his heritage mixes central European, northern African and the Middle East. That comes across in his food.

But Safta Cook was also borne out of necessity. Having been furloughed from his job as a new product development chef at Gail's, Barry realised he had to keep cooking. Moreover, he could still access interesting ingredients: "I realised there was no limitation of supply. I wanted to be open and to tell people who I am through food - it was a way of practising my heritage."

What distinguishes a Barry meal is the eclectic playfulness of his cooking, as well as the care - the handmade menu, the personal delivery - with which it's presented. This is also healthy food at a time when the temptation - yielded to all too often by Costeau - has been to fall back on pizzas and burgers.

"You don't want to go through an entire pandemic on pizzas," Barry commiserates. But really Barry has demonstrated the

possibilities of food when it comes to community. "Now when we're walking down my street, I know all the neighbours," he says, proudly. His is a very pandemic story - it is an example of how we might still reach one another while separated from one another.

There's another aspect to this. Stuck in our locality, Barry invites the world into your home, just as in his different way Jim Haynes used to do. "I love to take the menu sometimes into the Jewish tradition - but sometimes you'll find a twist of Asian food, whatever interests me at the time. I try not to repeat myself, because people want the unknown."

We've learned that freedom and hope are deeply intertwined: in ordinary times, we feel optimistic about the time ahead, because it's in our gift to make of it what we will. That's what the pandemic has robbed us of: instead of the ramifications of freedom, we see only limits. Barry is in opposition to that.

But Barry - who used to run the no.1 Trip Advisor-rated restaurant in Tel Aviv - doesn't want to turn Safta Cook into a restaurant once the restrictions are lifted: "A restaurant is like a military regime," he says.

The following Saturday, Costeau showed up at Barry's Saturday morning stand, and purchased some oysters, a shucker knife, and a mix of salads and vegetables, then back home ate the best meal of his pandemic. As I imagine the food must have tasted at Haynes' house in Paris, Barry's tastes of that rare thing nowadays: liberty. **f**



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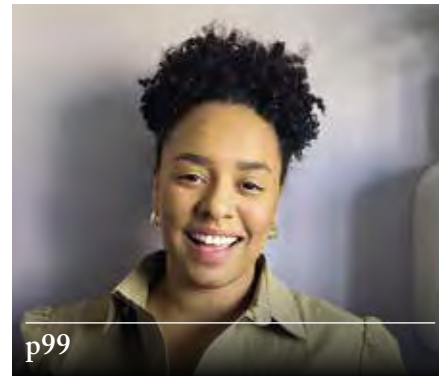
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# CLASS DISMISSED

## Wasfi Kani CBE

THE FOUNDER AND CEO OF GRANGE PARK OPERA ON DCMS,  
IVAN THE TERRIBLE AND HER DESERT ISLAND DISCS

**Can you tell us about your reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic at Grange Park opera?**

When I'd finished faffing around doing refunds, it immediately struck me that people were allowed to go to work, if they couldn't work from home and why shouldn't we create new performances... but film them. Thus, we created the *Found Season* involving 108 artists in 15 new events, eight filmed from the stage of the Theatre in the Woods.

**How many people do you employ at Grange Park?**

During the season we employ 350-400. The core team is only 14. Well, it was 14 until all this happened.

**Did you benefit at all from the DCMS' funds for charities?**

No, we didn't apply for it! This was because I thought smaller charities with less access to London wealth should get the money. Little did I realise that it was a free for all. Some classical music agents applied for money and got it! Yet a singer who has earned £55k pa has no access to any money.

**Overall, do you feel the Government response was satisfactory?**

If you mean the Government response to the pandemic overall, I would say it was catastrophic. Questions must be asked why so many people have died in the UK. And it isn't over.

**Tell us about your work with the Romanoff Foundation.**

This is a new collaboration. Normally there would have been fascinating talks about the two Russian operas in this year's season (*Ivan the Terrible*, *The Life and Death of Alexander Litvinenko*) but uncertainty is limiting what we can do.

**Just how terrible was Ivan the Terrible?**

Well, he loved his son. And he was probably damaged by his own lack of a father figure -his father died when Ivan was three. I've been studying a long history of Russia and it seems that what happened before Ivan was there were bunches of gangs going round Russia proclaiming ownership of territories. Ivan tried to unify the country but at a cost to its people and long-term economy.

**Has your audience become more global during the pandemic?**

Our extensive filmed output has had 120k views. Some are in far-flung corners. However, when will they be able to get on a plane and visit the Theatre in the Woods... who knows??

**What do you think we most miss about the live experience?**

Feelings. Having a collective emotional experience.

**Is there anything about the online music experience that is superior that you'll want to keep once we're all fully vaccinated?**

I've been listening to a lot of the oldies playing the piano -Michelangeli, Lipatti and so on. But people are fed up of looking at screens. They are flat. That says it all.

**It's fascinating to see that you worked in the City designing computer systems - did you miss music during that time? Is there tension between the businesswoman and the artist in you?**

While I was in the City, I continued to have an active music life, playing the violin in orchestras and chamber music. I used to practice in the lunch break.



I know some of my computer colleagues thought I was a bit nuts.

**What would be your Desert Island Discs?**

Michelangeli playing something, Brahms' string sextet - either of them. Rimsky Korsakov's *Scheherazade*. Verdi's *Don Carlo*. Wagner's *Tristan*. It's a secret. I'm waiting for the phone call.

**Is there a listening experience that really changed you?**

I love music -it gives my life another dimension. And I have a bond with people who feel similarly. Those that don't . . . I want to open that door. The greatest gift of my life is being able to play a Mozart string quartet.

**What character traits do you particularly look for in young employees?**

Hard work. I don't want to see them waiting for 5.30 and rushing out the door. <sup>F</sup>



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