

The response of the EU to the letter

It is curious that some in the EU seem to think there needs to be a long negotiation over the UK's exit. The UK has announced its intention to leave, and can do so after two years or before by mutual agreement. It is difficult to see why these democratic friendly nations would want to keep us in the EU for a whole two years if we just want to leave and if they do not want to talk about the future relationship. Of course the UK will pay its regular bills up to the point of departure. There is no legal requirement to pay anything else.

The UK is making a very friendly and generous offer – full tariff free access to our market, full rights for all EU citizens currently here, continuing defence and security collaboration and much else. All we ask is the same courtesies in return. I always defend the other member states and EU from allegations that they want to damage themselves and us during this process. I now look forward to them living up to the fine ideals of democracy, co-operation and free trade which they say are part of the EU scheme. I would expect them to see that free access to our market is an important advantage for their farmers and others who would face higher tariffs under WTO rules.

Restoring order to the classroom

Ensuring that teachers have the authority to maintain order in the classroom has been one of the areas where the Government has been making progress since 2010. One of the [changes](#) Michael Gove brought in was to reduce the pages of guidance that teachers were expected to follow from 600 to 50. It was also clarified that a teacher could use “reasonable force” – for instance to remove a pupil who was disrupting a lesson. Teachers can now give detentions without notice.

There will certainly be some teachers who will never be up to what is a very difficult job – and it is much better for everyone that they should pursue alternative careers. But there are very many others who can or could maintain good order with the necessary support. Tom Bennett has already produced proposals to make teacher training more practical in this regard. (He offers his top ten tips for behaviour management [here](#).)

Bennett has now offered some more recommendations for the Government – in the form of an [independent review](#) of behaviour in schools. He says that even if individual teachers are capable and well trained they will still struggle to maintain order in a badly run school. The head needs to provide the right culture in the school.

Naturally the permanent exclusion of a pupil is regarded as rather drastic

and only happens to a small number. Bennett proposes “internal inclusion units to offer targeted early specialist intervention with the primary aim of reintegrating students back into the mainstream school community” – in other words the pupil is removed from the class and therefore the disruption ceases, but this is as a temporary measure.

More visits should be made to those schools that have succeeded with regards to school discipline – often despite challenging circumstances, says Bennett. He also suggests that Ofsted could do a better job at gathering the views of teachers and pupils on behaviour management. Research has confirmed that many teachers ignore “low level disruption” and just try to carry on as best they can.

Ebbsfleet Academy in a deprived area of north Kent is offered as a case study. It was previously the Swan Valley Community School and began in its present incarnation under new management in 2012:

“All staff had their classes monitored and performance management put in place. This resulted in many teachers resigning of their own accord and some being dismissed. The former leadership team was made redundant.”

The school has “a leadership team with a clear culture, standards and vision for the school”; there is “attention to detail – strict rules, weekly equipment checks, detentions for such things as rubber or pen missing, uniform infractions, colour of hair”. While “any child caught with a mobile phone has it confiscated until the next school holiday”.

Bennett quotes plenty of other heartening examples of schools doing well. He looks at the importance of assemblies and wall displays, of involving governors and catering staff as well as teachers in upholding the school ethos. There was recognition of the need for teachers to maintain punctuality.

In Passmores Academy in Harlow the school charter which pupils sign up to includes the behaviour expected of pupils on their way to or from school and when in uniform as well. There is a centralised detention system. This helps ensure the rules are consistent and that the teachers handing out the detention do not have to take up their own time to supervise it.

Bennett also argues that where exclusions are needed the school make the tough choice to proceed with them:

“When they are required, they should be used. Inspections must not unfairly deter schools from meaningfully using exclusions by treating their existence as an exclusively negative strategy. It is important to examine the patterns of exclusion carefully, and to consider the context of exclusions in order to understand how appropriate they are. In some schools, a temporary, high exclusion rate may be a sign of effective leadership, not weak or over punitive.”

In the past, the reluctance to exclude has come from a concern that sending a child to a Pupil Referral Unit will set them on to a downward spiral. But the

answer to that is to drive up the standards at these Units.

The [Government's response](#) to Bennett's report says:

"It is our ambition to give schools control of Alternative Provision budgets to enable them to commission AP for pupils who require it (including those who have been permanently excluded) as well as accountability for pupils' educational outcomes whilst they are in AP. Giving schools responsibility for commissioning AP and accountability for pupils' educational outcomes will incentivise them to take preventative approaches and to achieve value for money when identifying the best and most suitable alternative provision for any child that needs it."

There is plenty of good progress being made. On the other hand, attempts to evaluate the scale of disorder in classrooms have probably resulted in underestimates – due to many teachers and their heads being reluctant to acknowledge such difficulties. Bennett's report is positive and constructive but also honest about the scale of the challenge – and robust in identifying how it can be met.

[Beijing outlines its urban overall plan for 2016 to 2030](#)

President Xi Jinping visits the construction site of Beijing's new airport in southern Beijing on Feb. 24. [Photo/Xinhua]

The draft of the urban overall plan of Beijing for 2016 to 2030 has been completed under the guidance of Beijing authorities.

The plan is expected to treat and heal the megacity ailments of Beijing. It aims to limit the population at 23 million in 2020 and keep it at that level for the long term. Besides the restriction on population growth, the city also plans to shrink the land area for rural and urban construction to 2,760 square kilometers by 2030 while expanding its ecological control area.

More trees will be planted around Beijing. According to the draft, the forest coverage rate in Beijing will reach over 45 percent by 2030 and the "green space" of the city's parks will be remarkably increased, with the area of "green space" for each citizen standing at 16.8 square meters in 2030.

The plan will stipulate an 80-percent green travel rate by 2030, with a minimum rate of 12.6 percent on bicycles. In 2020, the total length of the metro system in Beijing will reach 1,000 kilometers according to the plan.

It also requires the hospital bed-to-municipal population ratio to rise to 7-to-1,000 and has set a bottom number of 180,000 beds in nursing homes across the city by 2030.

The plan aims to cut the concentration of hazardous fine particle matter PM2.5 to 56 micrograms per cubic meter in 2020 and 35 micrograms per cubic meter in 2030, which means their quality can meet the national standard by 2030.

People can make a reservation online on the Beijing Municipal Planning and Land Resources Management Committee website using an ID card or passport, and to pay a visit to the planning exhibition. It will be available from March 29 to April 27.

Compulsory Tai Chi for top Chinese university



Students play Tai Chi Chuan at school. [File Photo]

The ancient Chinese martial art of Tai Chi Chuan has been a must-take class in Xi'an Jiaotong University, one of the most prestigious universities in China, for almost 20 years. Students there have been required to take the class before receiving their degree since 1998.

The news of Tsinghua University linking swimming ability with bachelor's degrees has made waves on Chinese social media recently. But Tsinghua is not the first or the only university in China that sets up special compulsory courses.

Apart from Tsinghua, several other Chinese universities, including Peking University, Xiamen University and Sun Yat-sen University, have at least once made swimming a prerequisite for graduation.

However, some of them have changed it to optional due to an increased number of students and the shortage of swimming space.

While listing swimming as a required course may lead to campus swimming pool overload, Tai Chi Chuan class is convenient to promote, because it requires limited teacher and special resources.

Prof. Wang Yunbing, director of Xi'an Jiaotong University's sports center, said, "Tai Chi Chuan is not only a sports exercise to help keep fit, but also a tradition embodying ancient philosophical ideas. Moreover, students can practice it with little space".

"The once-a-week class teaches the basics of Tai Chi Chuan, namely, the simplified 24 forms. Most of the students are interested in learning them. When the test approaches, we practice the movements all around the campus," said a senior student surnamed Tang from the university's foreign language school.

Located in northwest China's Shaanxi Province, Xi'an Jiaotong University is a comprehensive university which traces back to 1896.

[Next big scientific discovery could be made in China](#)



James D. Watson, Nobel laureate for physiology or medicine, talks with China.org.cn. [Photo/China.org.cn]

The next big scientific discovery could be made in China if the country could create a more pro-science environment, according to a visiting American Nobel laureate.

China has many outstanding scientists doing very good work, however, real breakthroughs will only be made if the country can strengthen its universities and research institutes and allow more space for regions to compete with each other, James D. Watson told China.org.cn in an exclusive interview in Beijing on March 29.

“Given the wealth and all the devotion from society, China could be the No.1 or No.2 science nation in the world within the next 50 years if it can spend money wisely, create good institutions and encourage individual science projects.”

The 88-year-old Nobel Prize-winning biologist, credited with the co-discovery of the double-helix structure of DNA, is visiting China on a 10-day trip during which he will talk with the country’s scientists and college students, visit science institutions and attend an international meeting on precision medicine in Shenzhen.

The greatest strength for the world’s most populous nation on which it can draw is its people, said Dr. Watson who is also the principal science consultant with the CheerLand Investment Group.

He also stressed the importance of building a stable structure that puts the best people in the top position.

Scientific strength in the United States comes from competition among states, because central planning is not always the best way to make good decisions. He said that suggesting money expenditure in R&D should be decentralized so that individual regions could have some real power to engage in competition which is the key to driving innovation.

The most important purpose for Watson's China trip is to promote the launch of "The Watson Bioscience Center", with an emphasis on cancer treatment.

By launching a world-class center on precision medicine, China now has an opportunity to make strides in the field and make cancer treatment widely available and affordable, he stressed.