

# Recruiting and retaining teachers

Last week I attended a reception with Head teachers and Deputies at Westminster.

One of their issues was difficulty in recruiting and retaining the teaching staff they need for their schools. When I asked why they thought it was sometimes difficult, they gave me a complex answer.

They volunteered that it was not just or even mainly a question of money. They suggested that they wanted teaching to be better thought of, for it to be accepted as a profession.

I explained that all the MPs I listened to on the subject did treat teaching as a profession, and most of us say it is an important and worthwhile occupation. So who exactly is not treating teaching seriously? Why do some teachers feel they are not sufficiently appreciated? Part of the answer according to the teachers seemed to be a new (but I assume limited) cadre of aggressive parents who intervene regularly and challenge the judgements of teachers. For some it is a feeling about social attitudes to school and discipline more widely. All those of us who wish schools well and understand the importance of a good education need to rally behind the many good teachers who seek to uphold good values. There are limits to how much teachers can do to remedy problems at home or to tackle things like obesity. Successful education requires consent and support from parents.

It leads us to ask what is a profession? I think the world has moved on from the rather narrow past when some said there were only two professions, law and medicine. If you look at what set them a bit apart, it was a combination of self regulation, examinations to control entry into the profession and to ensure basic competence and knowledge, sometimes allied to special clothes and positions that generally commanded respect and were different from others. The lawyer in court wears a gown to show his or her academic and legal status. The doctor in hospital may wear a white coat to distinguish himself or herself from others.

There has long been an issue of what distinguishes a profession from a trade or mystery. Many trades also impose requirements to gain knowledge, pass exams, maintain standards and belong to a professional or trade body. Gas heating engineers need substantial knowledge, have substantial safety responsibilities, have to maintain their knowledge as systems and products change and belong to an accreditation body. They are no less professional than lawyers.

Teaching and the clergy are closer to the lawyers in the conventional understanding of professional status. Teachers like lawyers have to attain academic qualifications as well as practical teaching qualifications. They may wear gowns in more traditional schools or on special occasions. They have to maintain standards. The Catholic and Anglican clergy make extensive use of special clothes to single themselves out, and also normally have academic

qualifications.

I would be interested in your thoughts on what more can be done to make people realise teaching is a worthwhile and rewarding career.

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## Village Maids cheese

Last night at the Trafalgar evening I was introduced to a local cheese called Waterloo. Made in Riseley it is a tasty product, and reminds us what scope there is to add value to farm products. They use milk from nearby Henley. This local business complements Barkham blue, another cheese which has done well in recent years.

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## Mrs May's Conservative Manifesto says only sign a Withdrawal Agreement if there is a good Future Partnership Agreement as well

The Conservative Manifesto for the 2017 election made pledges on the matter of the EU, and has never officially been renounced or amended by the Leader. I and many others stood for election on it and supported the Brexit pledges in it. I did not support the elderly care proposals in the same Manifesto as I made clear before the election. The PM subsequently dumped these.

It might be helpful to remind the PM and others of what the Manifesto said:

“We continue to believe no deal is better than a bad deal”. The Manifesto proposed a Future Partnership Agreement but accepted it was only worth signing if it was a good one. This remains the PM's stated view.

It also said

“As we leave the EU we will no longer be members of the single market or customs union” This too remains her view, though there is now unwelcome discussion of staying in the Customs Union for longer.

The Manifesto also saw the need for linkage between the EU wish for us to sign a Withdrawal Agreement and the PM's wish to have a Future Partnership Agreement. “We believe it is necessary to agree the terms of our future partnership alongside the withdrawal, reaching agreement on both within the two years allowed by Article 50”. Here the PM has proceeded to negotiate

mainly on the Withdrawal Agreement, making it impossible to agree a Future Partnership Agreement before we leave in March 2019. This surely means we cannot sign the Withdrawal Agreement they propose.

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## There will be no economic blockade of the UK when we leave the EU

Those who most want us to stay in the EU think the EU is a dreadful organisation. They wrongly say the continent will mount an economic blockade of the UK, stopping us importing medicines and food, to starve us back into membership.

There are many reasons why they cannot do this. It would mean breaking international contracts to supply. It would mean overturning World Trade rules. It would mean contradicting the EU Treaties which require the EU to have friendly relations with neighbouring states and to promote free trade with them. It would mean the EU acquiring new powers to prevent private companies and individuals doing business with UK customers and suppliers.

Let's take the case of food imports. Food coming through a UK port will be checked and charged customs by UK authorities. They can do so away from the border, and can ensure smooth passage through our ports. Why would they want to suddenly hold up goods that we are importing just fine today through those same ports the day after we leave? Why wouldn't they levy customs as they levy VAT and Excise today, electronically.

Or let's take the case of medicines. A continental drug supplier will have the same contract to supply the same drugs on March 30 2019 as on March 29th 2019. The NHS has tested and approved the drugs for us. The company has factory based test facilities with inspection systems that satisfy the NHS today. They will still satisfy the NHS on March 30th 2019.

So why would the supplying company wish to withhold supplies and face a legal challenge from the NHS? Why would a continental port wish to hold up the export of goods for further checks, when these goods have all been produced to EU standards and checked in situ?

Some say the port of Calais will delay our exports going to the continent, demanding more checks at the frontier. If they do then the ports of Rotterdam, Antwerp, Zeebrugge, Ostend and Amsterdam would love to take the business and will not wish to hold them up. Many of the lorries going back to Calais are continental lorries running empty and wanting to pick up a new revenue earning load as soon as possible. Why would the continental port wish to get in their way?

The EU has many powers, but it does not have the power to impose an economic

blockade on a friendly European state that happens not to be a member of the EU. The private companies involved all want to keep the business.

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## Stamp Duty revenues fall with higher rates

I see others are now writing that Stamp Duty revenues have been adversely hit by the imposition of much higher rates, as predicted here. Official figures show Q2 2018 housing Stamp duty revenues down on a year ago, with sharp falls in transaction volumes for dearer homes following the higher tax rates. So why doesn't the Treasury set rates that increase the revenues instead of hitting them?