

Education for the Future

Productivity, Social Mobility and Brexit

Neil Carmichael and Edward Wild



Wild Search

Search - Selection - Advisory

21 Bloomsbury Way • London WC1A 2TH

0207 233 2115 | info@wildsearch.org | wildsearch.org

About Wild Search

Wild Search was founded in 2010 and has established a strong reputation for advising education clients on leadership and non executive appointments. We have also published reports on related subjects such as education governance and the value of education as a British export.

To discuss our work and your organisation's requirements, please contact our Head of Education Practice, Edward Wild on 0207 233 2230 or ew@wildsearch.org.

About the Authors

Neil Carmichael, Senior Advisor (Education)

Neil Carmichael has been a Senior Advisor (Education) at Wild Search since 2014 and has co-authored a number of our education publications. He chaired the Education Select Committee (2015-17) and was Member of Parliament for Stroud (2010-17). He is also a Senior Advisor at PLMR.



Edward Wild, Head of Education Practice and Managing Director

Edward led the formation of Wild Search in 2010 following his earlier career working for both schools and charities.

He has advised a broad range of education clients on senior appointments for more than a decade, including businesses, independent schools, academies and multi academy trusts. He has also initiated and edited a number of publications through Wild ReSearch on themes of governance and leadership.



Education for the Future: Productivity, Social Mobility and Brexit *by Neil Carmichael*

Whatever the final outcomes from Brexit, the referendum outcome itself and the negotiation processes now underway have helped to put the spotlight on two stubborn and significant problems in the United Kingdom. The first is economic productivity – the comparative measure of the efficiency between outputs and inputs. The United Kingdom trails behind key competitors such as the United States, Germany and France by 29%, 28% and 19% respectively (OECD figures). Where open trade is dominant, poor productivity levels result in a lack of competitiveness when exporting. Productivity also has a bearing on overall gross domestic product because resources – notably people – are not performing at optimum efficiency. The consequences can be stark; the value of Germany's exports to China is some three times more than that of the United Kingdom.

The second problem is social mobility or, rather, the lack of it. Parts of the United Kingdom contain communities where families and individuals are trapped in circumstances in which life fulfilment is restricted through a lack of economic opportunity and little or no sense of ambition. These characteristics can be seen spatially, socially and culturally. In terms of education, the much-quoted OFSTED theme of the longtail of underachievement gives texture and meaning to the causes of social immobility. The damage to the economy and, crucially, society is all about the costs of warehousing much needed human resources. The Social Mobility Commission's recent report "Time For Change: An Assessment of Government Policies on Social Mobility 1997-2017" notes slow progress in narrowing achievement gaps and highlights need for further reform of the education system.

Productivity and social mobility are linked together and also integral to necessary reforms as Brexit takes effect. The key is education, and how it is reshaped and resourced to prepare the United Kingdom for the challenges and opportunities outside the European Union. The experiences of Finland and South Korea provide some clues for a way forward. Both countries emerged from terrible and

destructive conflicts; Finland was severely battered by the Second World War and South Korea was created through partition after the torturous Korean War. Furthermore, neither country enjoyed plentiful and valuable raw materials but both understood the potential of having a well-educated workforce. Today, these two countries score impressively in international comparisons, and also demonstrate some agility and modernity as they address changing economic circumstances.

No education system can be easily replicated – there are far too many powerful and sometimes indefinable influences on policy making and delivery systems to make that possible but the fundamental requirement is to put education front and centre of national policy as the Fins and South Koreans did five decades ago. This has obvious resource implications but it is also about political leadership because big rational choices have to be made as opposed to the incremental ‘step by step’ approach so often adopted by governments of all political complexions.

To begin to tackle productivity and social mobility, wellbeing in the classroom, recruitment and retention of top quality teachers, and choice across the curriculum are all areas in need of modernisation and reform.

Recent years have seen significant steps forward in promoting wellbeing in the classroom but also in investing in early years. This has been further boosted through the increased focus on young people’s mental health and the evidence pointing to the need for more integration between healthcare and education. Campaigns for Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) have been high profile and increasingly successful in placing wellbeing near the top of the Department of Education’s agenda. This progress is aligned with the interest in ‘life skills’ – particularly from the business community – as the ‘employability’ of young people has increasingly become a concern.

The ultimate aim must be to ensure all young people are equipped with the life skills necessary to be able to fulfil their lives. The next stage in policy development is to embed wellbeing across the education system by creating the space for it and, crucially, demonstrating its value by measuring destinations during a young person's journey through the education system and beyond. This, in turn, means less emphasis on league tables derived from testing and qualifications.

Teacher recruitment and retention remain contested issues. As the Education Select Committee recently noted, a number of subjects, including maths, physics, and design and technology, fall short of recruitment targets and retention trends of newly qualified teachers are not encouraging. Some Multi-Academy Trusts are leading the way in deploying the best teachers most effectively and there is evidence of formalised subject leadership having a positive impact on teacher satisfaction. The case for a College of Teaching is strong and is part of a wider theme to boost the teaching profession in terms of recognition and autonomy. Developing policies to further underpin the profession's sense of value remains important.

Finally, with such focus on skills and training, there must be a more easily navigable set of choices for young people as they progress from primary school. Obviously, such choices must be informed through work experience and effective career guidance but, like the system in Finland, there should be 'no dead end' meaning a properly calibrated balance between academic and technical skills can be achieved. Bold thinking in education is required as the world of work becomes even more complex but the twin prizes of dramatically increasing productivity and social mobility will not be grasped if radical and rational action is eschewed.

Afterword *by Edward Wild*

Attracting the best teachers into the profession, whether at graduate or mid or later career, has been an established commitment of successive governments. There remain deep seated challenges in both specific parts of the country and in a number of individuals subjects. Pay and conditions and the wider context of teaching are also factors which stand in the way of providing a plentiful supply of high quality educators.

The task of those advising individuals schools and academies and the MATs and federations which govern them is similarly challenging. The overall assessment of the contributors to our earlier Wild Search report on MATs is that there are significant benefits to pupils and parents in having a great structure, attracting and securing the best teachers, and providing them with a career. The success of effective and evolving MATs and individual schools will make the use of expensive advertising campaigns and headhunting less frequent since progression within an individual school or a region will be possible for those who are effective subject or pastoral leaders.

There is a virtuous circle here in that those institutions which build strong reputations for career development and progression will attract new recruits who are attracted by investment in developing high quality leadership. Effective management is important, but clear and articulate leaders will embed both a vision and values which will attract not only the best members of their team but pupils and students who are drawn to them. I have been privileged to work for many such leaders: developing future generations will be critical to the driving of standards across all areas of our education system.

Further Reading

Carmichael, N, G.Kelly, L.Nicholas and E.Wild (2015) *Building Better Boards: an Opportunity for Education*, Wild ReSearch

Carmichael, N. and E.Wild (2011) *Who Governs the Governors? School Governance in the Twenty First Century*, Wild ReSearch

Carmichael, N. and E. Wild (2012) *Stronger Boards, Better Education*, Wild ReSearch

House of Commons, Education Select Committee, *Recruitment and Retention of Teachers*, Fifth Report of Session 2016–17, HC 199

Wild, E. (ed.) (2013) *Standards, Freedom, Choice: Essays to Commemorate the 25th Anniversary of the 1988 Education Reform Act*, Wild ReSearch

Social Mobility Commission (June 2017) *Time For Change: An Assessment of Government Policies on Social Mobility 1997-2017*

Wild, E. (ed.) (2017) *Sharing Resources, Securing Success: Making Sure MATs & Education Groups Work*, Wild ReSearch



Wild Search
Search - Selection - Advisory

21 Bloomsbury Way | London | WC1A 2TH

+44 (0)207 233 2115

 @wildsearch1