

ISSUE 58 | SPRING 2021

ASSOCIATES NEWS



ASCL Association
of School and
College Leaders

Serpentine challenge

The bracing joys of open-water swimming p14

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'Why I chose physics over banking' p19

Associates News, the magazine for associate members of the Association of School and College Leaders, is published three times a year and is also available online: www.ascl.org.uk/associatesnews

Publisher:
Association of School and College Leaders, 130 Regent Road, Leicester LE1 7PG
T: 0116 299 1122

Contact us

Editorial correspondence: associatesnews@ascl.org.uk

Copy deadline for the next issue is: **Monday 26 April 2021**

Membership queries: membership@ascl.org.uk

Twitter: [@ASCL_UK](https://twitter.com/ASCL_UK)

If you would like to sign up to receive the ASCL e-newsletter then please contact membership@ascl.org.uk stating your preferred email address, full name and membership number. You will receive the email every Tuesday during term time. To view previous issues please go to the ASCL website, News and Views, Newsletters. If you need login details for the website please email website@ascl.org.uk

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GREAT EXPECTATIONS

The resilience of our school leaders to react to policy changes and the enthusiasm of pupils to be back in familiar surroundings will stand us in good stead when this pandemic is over, says ASCL General Secretary Geoff Barton



'Remember your humanity and forget the rest,' said 20th Century philosopher Bertrand Russell.

If ever there were a time for remembering our collective humanity, it's now. I'm writing this in late January amid the winter's first sprinkling of snow and with endless, swirling speculation about when – and even whether – schools and colleges may open again.

There's the backdrop of an overburdened NHS, people apparently flouting the lockdown rules, a nation riven by weary anxiety and public trust in politicians withering further.

At ASCL, we are in an extraordinarily privileged position; we represent the people who lead our schools and colleges, and, through them, we hear the voices of the children and young people who are most affected by these extraordinary times.

Here we are with a term behind us when many pupils and students were back in their bubbled, masked, socially-distanced places called schools and colleges, and now - since Christmas - with so many of our young people expected to learn at home.

For all the frustration and uncertainty, what strikes me most about our leaders is the sheer resilience they display. Through days and weeks and months of changing policy and shifting expectations of what they should be doing, they've adapted, stepped up and done all they can to keep some sense of normality among their staff, among their pupils.

The stories they've fed back about their pupils' response have been the most fascinating and heartening. 'Remember your humanity and forget the rest' said Bertrand Russell and what our members report of their children and young people is a deep sense of our common humanity.

Most striking were their reports that as more and more young people came back into schools and

colleges last term, what they enjoyed most was the sound of laughter, of hubbub, of childish noise.

Suddenly institutions came alive again, re-energised by their purpose of doing what our education system is designed to do – with schools and colleges as the places where the older generation prepares the younger generation to take their place as the next generation of citizens.

And suddenly these places, whether old or new, traditional or modern, were filled with the sounds of children's voices. Just as they should be.

And our members reported something else. It wasn't just that they heard the noise of young people; they heard their praise, their thanks, their gratitude at being back in familiar places with familiar people.

All of which, I hope, reminds us of what education is about. It's more than the mechanistic metrics of too many officials. It's not just about results and grades and numbers.

That's not why you and I came into education at the start of our careers. We wanted to shape the lives of children and young people.

And I think that once we emerge from this wretched pandemic, we'll see that values and humanity - the belief in things not easily measured but which are important because they are not easily measured - may prevail.

As always, as an associate member, we appreciate your support and encouragement. Our members in schools and colleges across the UK are leading through extraordinarily challenging times.

But knowing you are here too – with your experience, insights and compassion, cheering us and them on - means a great deal.

So, yes, let's remember our humanity and forget the rest.

Associates website goes live

The new Associates website is now live.

It features information about all the benefits of becoming an associate member of ASCL plus details of regular events, reunions and opportunities to attend ASCL webinars.

The site also highlights Associates' work and support for members, including the ASCL Benevolent Fund, Associates Committee and Associates Voluntary Service.

Go to www.ascl.org.uk/Associates

"Work continues to develop the site and the web team are keen to hear feedback from associate members, as well as suggestions for content and contributions," says Annette Wade, ASCL's Director of Marketing and Membership.

Send your ideas, suggestions and comments to website@ascl.org.uk

Regeneration theme for conference online

The ASCL Annual Conference is online for 2021 and offers a wide variety of sessions across two weeks (12–26 March) and focusing on the theme of regeneration.

As the pandemic continues to force great change on education and wider society, the conference provides the opportunity to reconnect and explore different ways to regenerate leadership – as an individual or across a team and the education community.

It will explore how leaders can take forward the agile and innovative leadership approaches that they have developed during these challenging times and consider how their roles as leaders are changing.

Input comes from leading educationalists, policymakers, and serving school, college, and trust leaders, together with inspiring and informative leaders from sectors outside education.

To find out more visit www.ascl.org.uk/annualconference

Cast your vote for Associates Committee

Four seats on the Associates Committee are coming up for election as members come to the end of their three-year terms.

Ann Mullins (chair), Alex Green, Maureen Cruickshank and Tony Richardson, have served on the committee since 2018.

Serving committee members are eligible for re-election. ASCL will deal with elections by a single transferable vote.

The 12-strong committee represents ASCL associate members and meets three times a year.

Nominations (note that you can nominate yourself) should be accompanied by a brief statement, maximum 90 words, typed if possible.

To make a nomination, use the form here or go online at www.ascl.org.uk/associates-committee

Nomination form: Associate Committee - term September 2021-24

Name of nominee: _____ Your name: _____

Address: _____ Postcode: _____

Email: _____ Former school/college: _____

Any national or branch offices, responsibilities held: _____

Please return completed nomination forms by **Friday 16 April 2021** for the attention of Corporate Administration, ASCL 130 Regent Road, Leicester LE1 7PG or email to corporateadmin@ascl.org.uk

Committee report: Benevolent Fund, events online and how ASCL is rising to the challenges

The Associates Committee were online again for the latest committee meeting and were joined by members of the ASCL team for a round-up of the Association's key areas of work in difficult and challenging times.

Geoff Barton, ASCL General Secretary provided the group with an overview including ASCL relations with government and other associations and communications with members.

It was clear that the presidential trio, the senior and specialist staff at HQ and ASCL as a whole are making the sector's voice heard at the highest levels. Their views are sought and respected and the feedback from the membership backs the direction the team are taking, in particular the support being provided to schools.

As a serving head, Pepe Di'lasio, Vice-President, is at the 'coalface' of the day-to-day challenges facing schools, leaders and staff. He shared examples of the stress and anxiety among staff and pupils and operational issues, such as how GCSEs and A levels will be handled.

New pensions specialist Jacques Szemalikowski presented the latest changes in legislation following the McCloud judgment (The Court of Appeal ruling that 2015 public sector pension reforms were unlawful in key aspects related to age). There are some far-reaching consequences for members, current and associate – including some for people who have LGPS pensions – but Jacques' message was to wait for the implications of the ruling to become clearer. He will keep members updated.

Benevolent Fund update

The Fund has distributed around £86,000 in support for about 40 members. Some have been COVID-19 related but the needs relate to many of the same issues which can arise at any time.

Boosting membership numbers

Ways of reaching out to potential new members as they retire from their posts within school were discussed, including how to capitalise on the communication channels offered by new technology. Suggestions are welcome on this front via the contact details on page 2. Ann Mullins is to talk to Kcarrie Valentine, Director of Professional Development Services, about raising the Associates' profile and engaging with members more effectively.

Conference online

Geoff outlined the challenges facing the delivery of this year's conference virtually but spoke very positively about the opportunity to reach out to a broader spectrum of membership, a variety of methods of delivering content and embracing technology to get information out to all out members.

A virtual tour

The Associates first virtual tour goes ahead on Wednesday 5 May with a journey along Regent's Canal: Haggerston to Limehouse (11am). As a traditional part of the normal tours is the stop for lunch and a drink, the plan is for people to 'take' their own prepared lunch plus glass of wine. For details of how to join see p12.

Thanks were given to the Ann Mullins for chairing the meeting.

Meeting report by Jill Belcher

Tune in to Team ASCL webinars



Recorded webinars offering insight into the issues raised for schools, colleges and trusts by the pandemic are now available for associates to view.

They began in April 2020 to help members deal with the fast-moving changes triggered by the pandemic and drew on member feedback plus questions raised in calls to the ASCL hotline. Ones on key issues such as wellbeing and mental health were repeated due to high demand.

Now branded Team ASCL webinars, they are continuing with monthly updates from the ASCL Specialist Team as well as ad hoc sessions focusing on specific issues such as lateral flow testing and the consultation on qualifications.

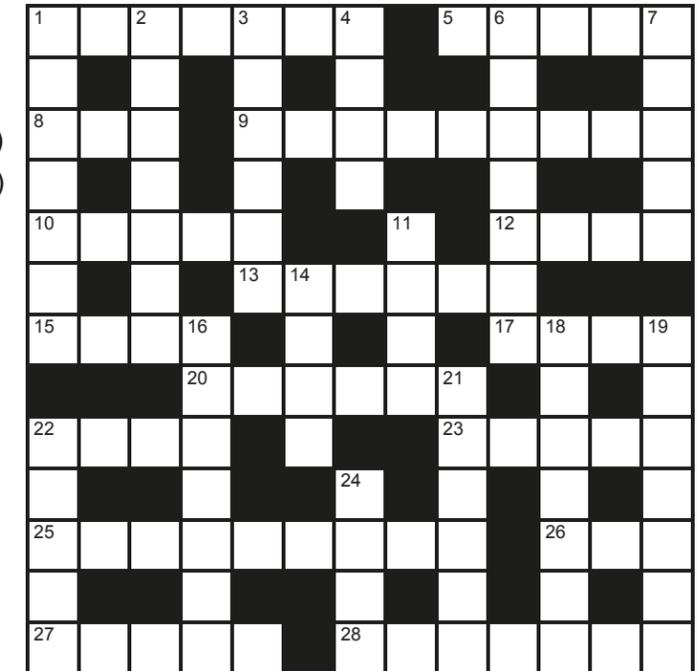
Associate members can access the recorded Team ASCL webinars, via the website by visiting www.ascl.org.uk/teamascl. (Log in with username and password.) The page contains links to all the past webinars. Associate members can also sign up to view any Team ASCL sessions live as advertised in the weekly newsletter.

Across

- 1 Egocentric (7)
- 5 Long sharp-pointed implement (5)
- 8 Went faster (3)
- 9 Blue-green colour (9)
- 10 Illusion (5)
- 12 Cobbler's stand (4)
- 13 Break free (6)
- 15 Immense (4)
- 17 Bulk (4)
- 20 Conventional (6)
- 22 Head honcho (4)
- 23 Final Greek letter (5)
- 25 Restless or short of temper (9)
- 26 Be in debt (3)
- 27 Imposed a levy (5)
- 28 Indicate by signs, predict (7)

Down

- 1 Relieve an itch (7)
- 2 Setting down (7)
- 3 Consumption (6)
- 4 Injury, hurt (4)
- 6 Difficulty (7)
- 7 Discharge, throw out (5)
- 11 Daddy (4)
- 14 Hindu woman's garment (4)
- 16 Bring into servitude (7)
- 18 Woodland flower (7)
- 19 Marine plant (7)
- 21 Hang about (6)
- 22 Constructed (5)
- 24 Secret look (4)



S Place a number (from 1 to 9 inclusive) into each square in such a way that every digit appears once in each horizontal row, each vertical column and each box of nine squares.

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| | 9 | | | 8 | | | 5 | |
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Puzzles supplied by Puzzle Press Ltd (www.puzzlepress.co.uk)

‘WE ARE ALL ENABLERS’

Robert Godber shares an online meeting with incoming President of ASCL, Pepe Di’lasio, and asks him about his career so far and his hopes for the next year

I ‘Zoomed’ into my meeting with Pepe Di’lasio on the second day of term back in January. His school was closed to all but a handful of students and this year’s A level and GCSE examinations had been cancelled but his mood was positive.

The son of an Italian waiter who settled in England, Pepe attended Priory Grammar School in Shrewsbury as one of the first intake of boys into what had been a girls’ school.

He was keen on sports and had ambitions to be a professional footballer. Studying A levels at Shrewsbury Sixth Form College, he planned to study politics but after a friend reminded him of the value he placed on sport education, he applied to study Physical Education at Leeds Carnegie (Leeds Beckett University).

Love of education

He made the most of his opportunities, including playing volleyball for Great Britain Students. His school, college and university had given him a love of education which carried him naturally into teaching.

Teaching in Nottinghamshire and Doncaster schools brought useful middle management experience, first as a head of PE then as a head of year, before a move to Sheffield as deputy head of King Ecgbert’s School. He enjoyed each appointment, and says, almost wistfully: “I never wanted to leave any of my schools.”

As a member of the cricket team, I always wanted to be captain

Since 2012, Pepe has been headteacher of Wales High School, a large 11-18 comprehensive in Rotherham; it is successful, popular and well-regarded by the community it serves. He identifies closely



with an area once dominated by coal mining, and including Orgreave, a flashpoint during the miners’ strike in 1984.

The school is now the district’s main employer and has been important in its recovery and re-invention.

“We are all enablers and, to that end, we will find out what each individual on roll is good at,” he says. “This is a massive responsibility.”

During the pandemic, his school has been, more than ever, a centre for the community, readily intervening to make sure that students were safe and that those in pressured families had a meal on the table.

‘Civic responsibility’

What he calls the ‘civic responsibility of school leaders’ is important to him. At a time when many talented school managers do not want headship, Pepe is fascinated by the



opportunity afforded by leadership.

“As a member of a cricket team I always wanted to be captain. I always want to help shape things, to influence decisions.”

He leads a school which is part of an academy trust, where the head has, he says, “more freedom to make decisions than ever before.”

He also undertook, a three-year part-time secondment as assistant director of education in Rotherham which enabled him to reflect on the learning experience, (not least Early Years

and Nurseries, a policy area totally new to him), and a better understanding of educational governance beyond the school.

Heads’ meetings had to be memorable not merely functional; professional development beyond a laborious agenda. Policymakers should seek to make a ‘generational impact.’

Perhaps this is why he has become deeply involved in ASCL. Since joining as a deputy via Council membership and a committee chair, he was elected Vice-President in 2020. Like many before him, he knows ASCL’s value to professional development, and in its influence over national policy development, but adds pragmatically, “You may be consulted, but not always heard.”

When he asks himself what makes a good school, the position of SEND is key: “Is it at the centre or round the back, proudly displayed or half-hidden?”

And also: “Is it good enough for my own daughter?”

How does he feel Covid will affect the future of schools? “I hope they will emerge stronger,” he says. “There are things we have done in response to Covid which we would not have done without it, and there are many we will keep.”

He is, by nature, hopeful and readily subscribes to the dictum of Sir Tim Brighouse, former chief commissioner for schools, that ‘the head’s duty is to exude optimism, especially when there is no reason for it.’

Robert Godber was Hon Sec Secondary Heads Association (ASCL’s predecessor) 1999- 2002 and was formerly head of Wath upon Dearne Comprehensive School, Rotherham



CULTURE ON SCREEN

An array of exhibitions, talks and events online has been making art accessible to all while museums and galleries have been closed

A rare pandemic positive has been the chance to see some of our greatest artworks in very fine detail online.

Many museums and galleries, denied the chance to share their exhibitions and collections with visitors during successive lockdowns, have turned to the internet to provide virtual viewings.

And there are some impressive 'added extras' such as curator-led talks and tours which all add up to some lovely gallery 'visits' for which you don't have to queue and during which you can take your time to study artwork in detail.

Raphael in London

The biggest art event of 2021 should have been the re-opening of the gallery featuring the famous Raphael Cartoons at the V&A in London.

When the lockdown is lifted, the newly spruced-up Raphael Court will provide a suitably stylish new home for the seven 500-year-old artworks which were the artist's full-scale sketches for a series of tapestries illustrating the lives of Saints Peter and Paul he was commissioned to make for the Sistine Chapel.

Last year, the cartoons were captured in ultra-high-definition photography and 3D scans in a process captured in a recent BBC4 documentary.

That remarkable imagery is now the centrepiece of an online extravaganza dedicated to one of the Renaissance's greatest treasures which were brought to Britain by Charles I and are on loan to the V&A from the Royal Collection.

Using the infrared imagery showing the charcoal drawings underneath the paint and 3D scans of the paper surface, viewers can see incredible detail such as the tiny pinholes that were made to translate the Cartoons into tapestries.

Have a look at vam.ac.uk/raphael-cartoons

Bedford at the Barber

Meanwhile, breathtaking images of pyramids, temples and shrines captured by pioneering Victorian photographer Francis Bedford feature in the first

exclusively web-based exhibition produced by the Barber Institute of Fine Art in Birmingham.

Bedford originally was the travel partner of the Prince of Wales (future King Edward VII) who was dispatched by his mother, Queen Victoria, to learn about historic civilisations in readiness to becoming head of the British Empire.

His photos, however, were something of a sensation and the online show features them alongside an extract from the prince's own handwritten journal and contemporary commentary from illustrated newspapers and

This exhibition can be accessed online via the Barber's website [<https://sightsof wonder.barber.org.uk/>] from June 12.

Ceramics at Nature in Art

If you were a hepcat in the coffee bars of the 1950s, as well as the jukeboxes and glass cups and saucers, you might also remember your favourite hang-out being decorated with bizarre ceramic sculptures.

They were the work of a small group of potters who made site-specific ceramics for coffee bars eager to stand out from the competition. The Gloucester-based gallery Nature in Art has a collection of fascinating ceramics of the period and hosts an online talk about them on April 28 at 7.30pm.

For further details, visit <https://nature-in-art.arttickets.org.uk/nature-in-art/2021-04-28-ceramics-as-show-an-illustrated-talk-by-dr-matthew-partington?t=1612790032118>

Matthew Partington has brought together photographic, documentary and oral history evidence to paint a picture of a group of artists producing this work.

Rubens and landscape

In May, the Wallace Collection in London hosts an online conference featuring eminent conservators and scholars talking about Rubens as a landscape painter in general and his two masterpieces, *A View of Het Steen in the Early Morning* and *The Rainbow Landscape* in particular.

The conference will also address the wider impact and legacy of Rubens's compositions on the development

of landscape painting, particularly in the northern provinces of the Netherlands, while also tracing the trajectory of *Het Steen* and *The Rainbow Landscape* from Rubens's lifetime to the foundation years of the National Gallery and the Wallace Collection.

For further information, see www.wallacecollection.org/art/exhibitions-displays/rubens-reuniting-great-landscapes/

One for nature lovers

Nature lovers should also check out *Unearthed at Home*: an evening of art and nature from the Dulwich Picture Gallery on April 16.

The digital event is a spin-off from the gallery's exhibition *Unearthed: Photography's Root* and features contributions from leading contemporary artists, musicians and journalists.

Go to www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk/



JOIN US FOR A VIRTUAL CANAL WALK



The virtual tour will last for about an hour and then there will be further time for questions to the guide.

Cost is £6 per person. Prior to the date of the tour, you will receive full contact details with the reference code and numbers for this specific ASCL Zoom video-conferencing event.

Anyone new to Zoom and in need of support or advice should contact Alan Wilson or Kutesh on 0116 299 1122 in advance of the event date.

Associate members, their partners and friends are invited to join a virtual walking tour along the Regent's Canal in May.

The walk – which will take place via Zoom, the video-conferencing platform, on Wednesday 5 May at 11am – will be led by Jen Pedler, a qualified guide from Footprints of London.

Jen's journey will follow the canal from Haggerston to its junction with the Thames at Limehouse and will travel under bridges and through locks to discover remnants of its industrial past and look at the changes that are taking place as the canal side is regenerated. Along the way, the route will pass two award-winning parks and go under one of the oldest railway viaducts in the world.



MEETING VITAL NEEDS

Tony Richardson, chair of the ASCL Benevolent Fund, explains how it has evolved in recent years

The Benevolent Fund is a long-standing and cherished part of ASCL's services, as members know.

One of the things that I and my fellow trustees are keen to ensure is that it evolves to meet people's changing needs and stays up to date with good practice, as all effective charities must.

Over the past few years, we have taken steps to ensure that this is the case.

We have rewritten our aims to reflect current needs and language and have incorporated those aims into our legal framework, on the basis of legal advice and with the agreement of the Charity Commission.

We have revolutionised the extent to which we are able to reach out to members who find themselves in difficulties. The value of grants made to members has increased from some £8,000 to £80,000 a year.

We have achieved that by raising awareness through much-improved publicity - stories, articles and so on - and by linking more closely with regional officers and field officers.

As a result and by intention, the balance of beneficiaries has changed significantly.

The current balance is overwhelmingly on members who face problems in mid-career, reflecting the changing professional lives of ASCL members and the more precarious world of education generally.

As trustees, we believe that we are now a modern, efficient and effective charity, working in the interests of ASCL members, former members, employees and former employees. Each request for help is considered in confidence and on its merits and we are generally able to respond within a week.

Reform and renewal is a continuing process and we are currently looking at plans for improving the way in which we appoint trustees, so as to widen our scope and potentially increase our diversity.

Watch this space!

For more information on the ASCL Benevolent Fund, go to www.ascl.org.uk/abf



Booking form: ASCL Associates Virtual Walking Tour - 5 May 2021 at 11am

Title: _____ First name: _____ Surname: _____

Address: _____ Postcode: _____

Contact telephone number: _____

I will be joined for the tour by: _____

I enclose a cheque for £6 per person (payable to 'ASCL') total amount: £ _____

Associates wishing to pay by BACS, please process payment to: Association of School and College Leaders, Sort code: 60-60-06, Account number: 46216383. For BACS please use reference 'Associates - your name'.

Tick here if paying by BACS Date of payment transfer: _____

Please return you completed booking form by post and payment by **Friday 23 April 2012** to

ASCL - Virtual Walk, 130 Regent Road, Leicester LE1 7PG.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

THE HARDINESS OF THE LONG DISTANCE SWIMMER

Sean O'Reilly learned to doggy-paddle in a tiny farmland stream and started cycling as a child on wet and windy country lanes. Having completed a two-mile open-water swim, a marathon and 100-mile bike ride, he's now in the London Classics Hall of Fame

Taking part - at the age of 73 - in a two-mile open water swim in London's Serpentine Lake was never part of my life's ambitions.

Throughout my life, I was always up for a physical challenge and enjoyed playing football, squash and tennis at a very amateur level. In the early 1980s I caught the running bug and completed my first London

Marathon in 1984; after 65 marathons worldwide. I again completed the hottest ever London race in 2018.

I found running to be the easiest way to get fit to participate in sport. As the mantra goes, 'you do not play squash to get fit, you get fit to play squash'. Over the years in the teaching profession, I took the opportunity to raise funds for a long list of school-nominated charities and this was an incentive to 'keep on running'.

Biking provided another exercise option; in my early years I cycled more from necessity than for leisure on those long wet and windy roads to my school as a kid in Ireland.

In the 1980s, I remember cycling the 10 miles to the secondary school I taught at in Hertfordshire during a snowstorm to find I was one of only a few staff present to look after hundreds of pupils.

The rest were snowbound in their cars on the local main roads or still stranded on their driveways.

I was always conscious of bike safety and wore a helmet of sorts when cycling to work. I remember Boris Johnson giving a talk at The City of London Girls' School when I taught there on the delights of cycling and other activities. If memory

serves me right, he took a rather cavalier attitude to obeying rules and to the need for wearing bicycle helmets, preferring, I suppose, his blond hair or bubble cap.

I progressed to participating in cycling events encouraged by my youngest son, who had raised money for charity riding from London to Paris or to Brighton or to Brussels. My defining bike ride was the Olympic Legacy 100-mile London - Surrey Hills in 2015 in aid of Cystic Fibrosis.

Swimming was always a leisure activity for me and never competitive. I learned to swim by creating a small dam in my local farm stream to give enough depth for doggy-paddle style swimming.

On moving to London, I had the joy of swimming indoors, but the joy was curtailed when a polio outbreak closed the local pool. I also progressed to lake and sea swimming when on holiday and, on occasions, having a few scary moments with large waves and misjudgement of tidal flows.

I always struggled with freestyle swimming and preferred breaststroke - which was an improvement on my dog paddle beginnings.

Complete the treble

In 2017, the London Marathon Organisation inaugurated the London Classics Hall of Fame. To be considered, you had to complete a two-mile open water Serpentine swim as well as the marathon and the 100 Mile Olympic Bike Legacy ride.

Although not a long-distance swimmer, I could not resist the temptation to complete the treble. I had recovered well from a heart bypass in 2012 but swimming would be a little more problematic for me than biking or running. At least there would be safety measures in place and hopefully someone on hand to fish me out if I got into trouble.

In 2019, I got a charity entry to the event from Macmillan Cancer Care and committed to raising £1,500 for their worthy charity work. I had only four months to get myself ready.

At 73 years of age, I would not be able to train to swim the distance freestyle, which would have been more efficient using a wetsuit. It was going to be breaststroke all the way



with the advantage that at least I would be able to see where I was swimming and keep an eye out for the swans and rescue boats.

I bought my first ever wetsuit and found great difficulty putting it on and even more so taking it off. I felt like a trussed-up chicken when I first entered the cold water. I managed a few evening swims in a local lake before it was closed because of algae

build up. I was lucky to have a lido nearby to build up my stamina to make the distance but I still needed to get some serious open water swimming done in my wetsuit.

To my amazement, the solution to my predicament came upon me while cycling home from the lido along the River Lea navigation towpath. Bobbing in the water were two orange safety floats attached to two women swimming in the canal.

I had the perfect venue for open water swimming practice virtually in my own back garden. I promptly added an orange safety float to my shopping list and took to the (slightly murky) water.

In early September, I participated in the local Mudlark charity swim in the River Lea. It was a surprisingly cool six degrees Celsius but, fortunately, the water temperature was around 14 degrees. Throughout the 1.2 km swim, my feet were uncomfortably cold, but I survived by relying on a steady breaststroke all the way. Wet shoes were the next item added to my shopping list.

With about three weeks to go before the Serpentine swim, the Lido had already closed for the season, so my only option was to continue to train in the somewhat muddy and cold River Lea. I did a couple of 2.8 km-plus swims and a few faster 1.8 km practices before my big day. These longer swims, like long runs before a marathon, were vital and boosted my confidence.

Strong wind

There were still, however, a lot of known unknowns to cope with. Would I be able to do a two-mile swim that would be my longest-ever distance? What would happen if my goggles steamed up or were kicked off by



► the faster freestyle swimmers? What if I got cramp with no stopping points on the two-lap course? Would I be able to cope in a strong wind?

Race day, Saturday 21 September 2019, was warm and sunny. I was up at 6.15am in time to get down to London for my 9.30am start, the first two-mile red swimming cap wave of the day. On the train, my wife and I met a group of women led by a PE teacher who were entered for the 9am one-mile all-female race. They were very cheerful and managed to convince me that drowning was not an option.

After a lovely walk through Hyde Park, we arrived at the Serpentine start area, registered and then had time for a very strong coffee that might be useful in staving off cramp. My wife helped me to put on my wetsuit – never easy – and upon entering the lake I learned that the water temperature was around 16 degrees; at least hyperthermia could be crossed off my list of worries.



The start gun went and the top swimmers went off like bats out of hell. I deliberately held back and was soon almost blinded by the low sun and churned-up water. I managed to swim on the outside of the two-lap course and let the Speedy Gonzales take the inside, more direct, route.

All was well until I had to change lanes for the second lap and was struck and sunk by a wayward arm swinging from a head-down swimmer oblivious to all around them.

I surfaced after a few gulps of the finest duck-flavoured Serpentine water and got going again. I now had the sun behind me and could see

the London tourists watching from the shore. My wife told me later that she saw some of the tourists taking photos of a permanent sign stating 'No Swimming in Serpentine' with a stream of swimmers in different colour swimming caps flailing along in the background. One can only guess what they thought of this mass breaking of the park regulations.

After just over two hours, my ordeal was over and as I approached the finish, I felt surprisingly strong and cramp free.

Sean O'Reilly was physics master at St Paul's Girls' School, London and deputy head of Ashlyns Upper School, Berkhamsted, Herts



SEIZE THE DAY

Other national emergencies have triggered massive change in education. One positive from the pandemic could be to transform again how children are taught, thinks Maureen Cruickshank

Our children and young people are in danger of being burdened with persecution/inferiority complexes due to the media constantly banging on about how awful things are for them.

Wouldn't it be better if we encouraged them to get involved in all the maths, science, economics, sociology and history that is taking place around them while debating with them what changes for the better can be achieved? Above all, let's encourage their resilience.

Think back to the changes which seemed to come from our last national emergency during and after the Second World War: the 1944 Education Act and the setting up of the NHS in 1948.

During the war, city children were evacuated to the country with some living for years with rural families who fostered them. Boarding schools were evacuated and 'doubled-up' so that one school gave lessons in the mornings, the other in the afternoons.

Some adaptations schools have made during the pandemic are already bedding down; some heads say that zoning has had a calming effect and they want to retain it post-pandemic.

Queueing to see teachers at parents' evenings could soon be a thing of the past with consultations taking place in a more civilised fashion over Zoom.

Staggered starts and ends to the school day seem to work well. We are told early morning is not the optimum time for older teenagers to learn so let them stay in bed a while longer and arrive in school when their brains are fully functioning.

Changed parental attitudes

It is interesting to note how parental attitudes can change. In August 2020, many parents were dubious

about allowing children return to school even though the children were desperate to be back with their friends.

In January 2021, however, heads had to ration places for those children whose parents were key workers. The number of children attending primary schools increased from four per cent to 21 per cent and, in secondary schools, from one per cent to five per cent.

In late January, there were rumblings of support for a more major change: doing away with GCSE exams. We are the only country in Europe to examine at 16-plus with exam fees a huge detriment to our school budgets.

As a serving head, the financial hit of GCSE always grieved me, not to mention the narrowness of our post-16 curriculum upon which AS levels made little impact.

When, as Prime Minister, Tony Blair did a session at the NCSL (National College for School Leadership) in 2002, I asked him why we were out of kilter with other countries in clinging to 16-plus exams. His rather vague reply mentioned that he thought France was considering the introduction of such a system.

It appears that Kenneth Baker, former Secretary of State for Education who devised the National Curriculum, is in favour of abolition of GCSEs.

Amen to that. Let's devise something like the International Baccalaureate for our 16- to 18-year-olds so they would all study their language, a foreign language, maths, science, a humanities subject and, very important, carry out some form of community service.

Maureen Cruickshank was head of Beauchamp College, Leicester, from 1981 to 2003 and is a member of the Associates committee

CROSSWORD

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We're also keen to receive contributions for our Time of My Life slot (see page 19), highlighting memorable career or life moments for members.

Associates News is published three times a year in March, July and November but contributions are welcome at any time.

Send your contributions, with images if available, to associatesnews@ascl.org.uk

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TIME OF MY LIFE

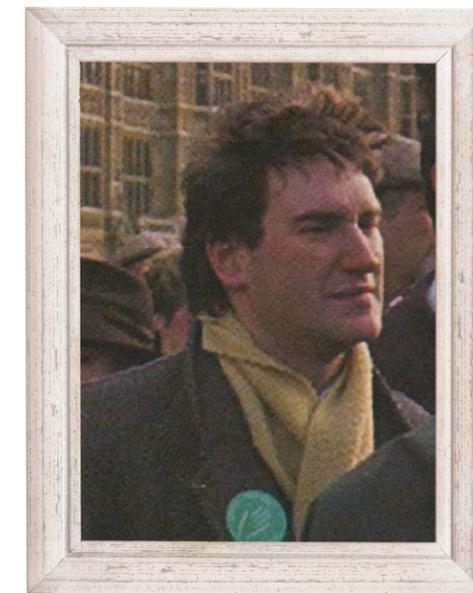
Jacques Szemalikowski remembers how a Heath-Robinson style balloon experiment with Year 9 convinced him teaching would be more fun than banking, with or without a mullet

The first picture (below) is from the front cover of the National Union of Teachers magazine from 1990. I was probably teaching in Brent at the time and this was taken during a lobby at the Houses of Parliament. I can't, however, remember what the cause was. And I will always deny I was sporting a mullet.

There are things I do remember quite clearly; I was, for example, just shy of 30 and had friends who were doing quite well in commerce and the city.

I also recall a class – Y9 – from that time when we were studying aerodynamics. I encouraged students to design polystyrene wings which were stuck to rocket-shaped balloons alongside a straw to be threaded on a very long piece of string.

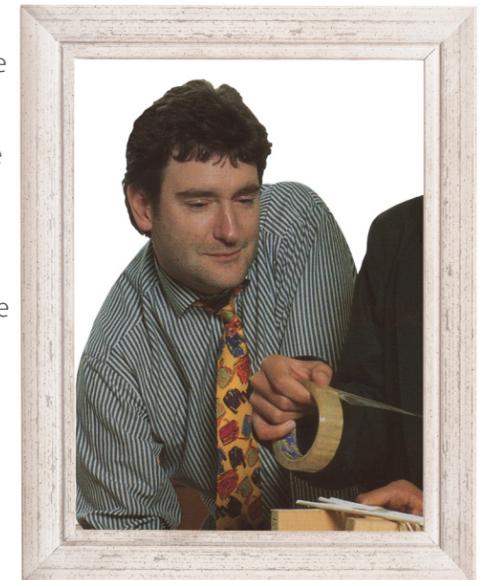
I stood on the table at the front with one end of the string in my teeth while students took it in turns to see if their balloons had enough thrust and lift along the string to hit me on the nose from the back of the class.



It was a key moment where I wondered: Who else does that for a living? I could have ended up working in a bank!

The second (top right) is from the school in Ealing where I was head of science. It was, I believe 1995.

I started teaching in 1982. I did an astrophysics degree (Leeds, 1978-81) but I couldn't help feeling that science was not people-centred enough for me so I taught physics at Boston Spa Comprehensive School in Leeds for a couple of years before returning to London.



I became a head in 2003, moving to Hampstead School in Camden three years later.

I retired last summer and started working for ASCL the next day. I knew ASCL well from my 10 years on the Council and being a local representative, so it was wonderful to continue seeing life 'from the other side'.

Obviously, I do miss the buzz of school, the energy and excitement, colleagues, big events and the raucousness. I don't, however, miss the dinner queue nor the crowding on three successive Tube journeys to work every day.

Jacques Szemalikowski is ASCL Conditions of Employment Specialist, Pensions



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