



Darlith Addysg Cymru
The Wales Education Lecture

2010

*We are the people we've been
waiting for: the changing role
of teaching and teachers in the
21st century*

Lord Puttnam of Queensgate, CBE



Cyngor Addysgu Cyffredinol Cymru
General Teaching Council for Wales

The General Teaching Council for Wales

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- to contribute to improving the standards of teaching and the quality of learning, and
- to maintain and improve standards of professional conduct amongst teachers, in the interests of the public.

General Teaching Council for Wales
4th Floor, Southgate House
Wood Street
Cardiff
CF10 1EW
Tel: 029 2055 0350
Fax: 029 2055 0360

The Wales Education Lecture

On 4 October 2010, the Wales Education Lecture was delivered by Lord Puttnam of Queensgate, CBE at the National Museum in Cardiff.

Lord Puttnam of Queensgate, CBE

Lord David Puttnam spent 30 years as an independent film producer. His many award winning films include *The Mission*, *The Killing Fields*, *Local Hero*, *Chariots of Fire*, *Midnight Express*, *Bugsy Malone*, and *The Memphis Belle*.

He retired from film production in 1998 to spend time and focus on education and the environment. He founded the National Teaching Awards in 1998, and he served as the first chairperson of GTC England (from 2000 to 2002). He became Chancellor of the Open University in 2006.

He was awarded the CBE in 1982, received a knighthood in 1995, and was appointed to the House of Lords in 1997.

As president of UNICEF UK (2002-09), Lord Puttnam played a key advocacy role on behalf of children's rights all over the world. He became a UNICEF UK Ambassador in June 2009.



We are the people we've been waiting for: the changing role of teaching and teachers in the 21st century

Good evening, thank you for that very kind introduction.

As I'm sure you all realise, I've now retired from feature film production, the vast majority of my work during these past dozen years having been in the fields of education and public policy. However, my personal experience of formal education was not an entirely happy one, as I hope this anecdote from my schooldays demonstrates!

My Grammar School career culminated at 16 with the then statutory meeting with the Careers Master (actually it was the Deputy Head, Dr Packer. For these meetings he didn't wear his habitual gown - which was, I think, intended to signify the 'secular' or non-educational nature of these encounters!).

Having spent thirty years as a filmmaker, I hope you'll forgive me if I resort to playing out this unforgettable scene in dialogue:

Dr Packer: Well young man, having wasted five valuable years of your own and everybody else's lives, what do you have in mind for a career?

Me: I'm not really sure, Sir.

Him: Well you've proved to the examiners' satisfaction that you're not all that bright - but you're personable enough, so I suggest you think very seriously about becoming a 'rep'.

Me: (Conscious that I'm about to reinforce his view of my intelligence!) Sorry Sir, what's a 'rep'?

Him: Well, you work for one of the big packaged goods companies, and you drive around the country collecting, or fulfilling orders.

Me: What - like a kind of van driver Sir?

Him: No boy, you could have gone to a Secondary Modern school if you'd wanted to do that.

Me: Well, thank you very much Sir, but from the way you describe it, being a 'rep' isn't quite what I had in mind.

Him: You should have thought of that when you first arrived here; frankly, given your lamentable academic record - most especially in Maths - it's the only way I can imagine you ever owning a car!

That story would be funny - if it wasn't entirely true.

For me it speaks to the fact that it's absurd to believe a young person's destiny can or should, in any serious way, be determined at 15, 16, or even at 18. Today, we've no choice but to recognise that the crucial skills required to succeed in the world of work are flexibility and adaptability – the capacity to move among a host of different roles, often in different sectors of the economy, and even in different regions and countries. My own experience is all the more striking because, once I became a film producer, I was required to engage with fairly sophisticated maths every day for the next 30 years!

In fact, at about the time I was leaving school – in the late fifties – a very interesting, and at the time quite influential piece of academic research was published in the UK. Some of you may know of it; it involved a fairly large study among young children who had been at school for only a few months.

The children were asked to grade themselves in terms of how bright they thought they were - when compared to their classmates. Their teachers were then asked to similarly grade the children according to their judgement of their pupils' comparative ability. The teachers' and pupils' results were then compared, and found to be remarkably consistent, indicating that, in just a few months, the children had reached the same view of their and each other's abilities as those formed by their teacher. They had come to accept their place in an 'ability-based pecking order' and had, unsurprisingly, begun to behave accordingly.

Reading this study helped convince me that our expectations of ourselves are formed very early on – frequently to be reflected back in the form of 'underachievement'. I was one of those fortunate young people who, as a result of being blessed with parents who, never wavering in their support and belief, felt unprepared to accept the fate the Careers Master had consigned me to. In that, I would suggest, I may have been a comparative rarity. More commonly, it's the impact of a really good teacher that ends up lasting a lifetime.

These past dozen or so years, having visited almost five hundred schools around the world, including a number here in Wales, I'm that much more convinced that the experience I just described – that of being effectively written off – was, tragically, far from abnormal; in fact the only thing unusual about my own career was the degree of 'self-belief' generated by those few extraordinarily generous people who suggested that I might in fact have something to offer.

What's certain is that this most recent, and incredibly fulfilling period of my life, has offered me the opportunity to engage with people who, every day of their working lives, are attempting to mould the 'building blocks', the quality of which will, in every respect, determine the future of our planet. Those 'building blocks' are, for the most

part, children and young people; and the individuals I've spent a great deal of my time working with are their 'teachers'.

And if, as I certainly see it, the future looks increasingly like a 'war', then this most recent generation of teachers, and the resources we make available to them, represent the closest thing to an 'infantry' that's available to us! A generation of well-trained and confident teachers, comfortable with the implications of living in a Digital Society, but also keenly aware of the huge new challenges that's likely to bring. It is teachers, and the children and young people in their care who, for me, represent the most promising foundation upon which can be built a sustainable society, here in Wales, or for that matter, anywhere else in the world.

As an aside, that's just one of the reasons I'm delighted that, here in Wales, you still have a General Teaching Council; while the Coalition that rules in London have made the incredibly short-sighted decision to abolish the General Teaching Council of England – of which I was the founding Chairman. That observation is far more than political 'sour grapes' - surely the whole purpose of our particular system of Government is to reform and improve upon that which has gone before, not to destroy it, and leave a vacuum in its place.

Over the last three decades, I've sat on the Board of at least a dozen public bodies, the performance of which, at one time or another, could easily have been described as 'sub-optimal'. Every single one of those organisations could, at some time, have justifiably been closed down, had the responsible Minister been so minded. Instead of which the Boards, often with the support of the relevant Government Department, undertook the difficult and challenging process of reform and improvement. In every single case what emerged was a far more effective and efficient organisation, delivering improved outcomes for all of its customers and other stakeholders.

The GTC in England may not have been perfect – few organisations are! – but the very last thing Governments should be doing is destroying public bodies to little apparent purpose and absolutely no plan. Bodies which are independent of Government, but which are answerable, or even overseen by Government, have a vital and continuing role to play in delivering educational policy – and this Government's neurotic rhetoric about 'quangos', 'overheads' and 'bureaucracy' is something I very much hope will continue to be resisted here in Wales – even at a time when the public purse faces enormous challenges. In fact, in this as elsewhere, there is much that England can learn from Wales – as Professor David Hawker made clear in last year's excellent Lecture at the Institute for Education.

So, returning to my principal theme; that 'war' which I referred to earlier is a war between what I feel to be our largely failed present, and the possibility of an altogether more imaginative future. And it's not simply that I want us to enjoy a more

imaginative future – it's more the case that I can't see much of a future for any of us unless we're prepared to be a great deal more imaginative!

As ever, it's all likely to come down to a battle between our worst and our better selves. Finding the prospect of playing to my own worst instincts deeply unattractive, I've been only too happy to throw my energy into improving the quality, the reputation and the relevance of education, which in turn has led me to the conclusion that if we truly are prepared to take on the immense challenges of the 21st century, we've no choice but to embrace the equally immense power of the most recent digital technologies. And to do so in a way that makes our present rate of adoption look exactly what it is – hesitant, and pitifully inadequate. Let's face it: in many respects life beyond the school gates and the walls of our colleges and universities has been quite literally transformed in the past twenty years or so. Digital technology – whether it's mobiles, the internet or video games – has fundamentally re-shaped the way in which young people connect with, make sense of, and engage with society.

Rightly or wrongly, these same young people expect an entirely new form of relationship with the world around them, one that doesn't simply rely on accessing information, but on creating new knowledge, new products and even new resources. Learning is no longer something that needs to happen within particular hours, in a particular place, or with a particular group of people. The immense power of the worldwide web offers a fantastic 'knowledge resource' that's just a click away, in schools, colleges, homes and on the move – to the extent that anyone with an internet connection has the power to access an extraordinary 'treasure trove' of knowledge within, quite literally, seconds.

As the proud owner of an Apple iPad – which has quickly established itself as one of the most valuable tools in my professional armoury – I'm keenly aware the world's digital library is now always open, wherever we may be. Yet it's equally true that the existence of this extraordinary cornucopia of knowledge makes the need for teachers and mentors – in essence, 'trusted learning guides' – more crucial than ever. Young people in particular may be very smart about using the technology – a good deal smarter than most of us, I suspect.

But there are considerable challenges around helping them to sort the 'wheat' from the 'chaff', the good from the bad, the valuable from the useless; helping them understand the ways in which digital images can distort, at the same time as appearing to shape, the world around them. And, as I suggested earlier, the crucial factor in creating this responsible learning environment is a successful and confident educational system; comprising outstanding teachers and a world-class infrastructure. This 'new' infrastructure, and the ICT which sits at the heart of it, needs to reflect the realities, and even more importantly, the opportunities, that have been presented by a fully digital world.

As uncomfortable as it may sound, there are only two real choices here. Either schools, in particular, find a way of engaging with, and using, the type of digital media that young people are familiar with, or the kids themselves will come to the conclusion that school has little or nothing to do with them and their world – and increasingly, at least emotionally, opt out. Should this happen, the only loser will be 'education' as we know it.

As I see it, it's absolutely incumbent on those of us who have the ability to influence the future direction of education, to find the means of using, as 'tools', the creativity, the technologies, in fact the whole world of rich media towards which young people, for any number of entirely understandable reasons, increasingly find themselves gravitating. But again, it will be the teachers, every bit as much as the technology, who will account for the crucial difference between raising the bar - and it remaining in exactly the same, depressing place it has always been. To be strictly accurate, it will be the skilled teacher, adept at handling the most recent technology, who will increasingly become society's greatest asset.

In essence, this means putting learning - that's to say the acquisition of understanding - right back where it belongs, at the very centre of our concerns. And once learning finds itself at the heart of the new digital world, it surely follows that the type of teachers I'm describing, will be its lifeblood.

In truth, it doesn't take a lot of thought to acknowledge that, in reality, teachers are the key to all of our futures. In a world increasingly dominated by Google, Apple, Facebook, and the rest, it pays to constantly remind ourselves that no education system can ever be better than the quality of its average teacher. Every piece of social research I've read in the past dozen years (and I've read a lot) affirms and re-affirms that fact; so I don't think that the importance of good teaching will change one little bit. However, our definition of what makes a good teacher is likely to change, and change quite a lot.

Of course, such attributes as leadership, knowledge and the ability to inspire and arouse curiosity will always be fundamental. Teachers will still need to be coaches, colleagues and friends, but in addition to that, the daily substance of their professional skill-base will alter, if for no other reason than to reflect the rapidly changing expectations of their students - all of which has significant implications for classroom and school management.

The model of 20 or 30 students in neat rows facing a single teacher is, or ought rapidly to become, an anachronism in an era of touch-screen smart phones, tablet computers and whiteboard technology. In a world of Skype, webcams and video conferencing, why should Welsh children in Welsh schools not be helped to learn

French by French children in French schools; or physics by a Nobel prize-winner? Both are things I've been privileged to witness in innovative schools here in the UK! I'd go further; why should teachers still be responsible for supervising their students' lunch hour, or making sure the PCs work, when armies of volunteers and specialists could so easily support them in exactly these areas?

At this point I should pause in order to make myself crystal clear about something very important: none, and I mean none, of the technological developments I've touched upon in any way negates the fundamental need to focus on those reading, writing and mathematical skills which remain at the heart of being able to present oneself as a functioning and informed citizen, in an increasingly competitive globalised society.

But at the same time, as I've already indicated, the educational establishment has to take on board a whole set of fundamental truths about the way in which the expectations of young people have changed – certainly if we're to have any possibility of delivering learning that, in their eyes, engages them, and remains 'fit for purpose' over the coming decades. The choice is not between the 3Rs on the one hand, and an education in which 'screens' replace 'books' on the other.

Surely it's about harnessing the power of technology to enable children and young people to acquire understanding and knowledge about the world in the manner which they have become most familiar and comfortable, so that our education systems continue to develop informed, responsible citizens, and outstandingly creative people – just as, at its best, it has always done. Much of what I'm proposing inevitably challenges *what we teach*; as well as *how it's taught* – and even, in some cases, *why it's taught*!

This in turn underlines the fact that consistent investment in continuing professional development is absolutely critical in enabling teachers to develop, and remain confident, in a rapidly changing ICT environment. And I do mean investment - CPD isn't something that can be farmed out to some vague concept of the 'Big Society'; or to an army of third sector suppliers. No, this time it requires meaningful, ring-fenced, commitment by Government – here in Wales as in London.

In my judgement, it would be utter folly, and entirely counter-productive, for any administration in the UK to seek to scrimp and save on investment in our teaching workforce over the coming crucial decade; and I'd like to think that's something the entire sector remains committed to whatever one's underlying political affiliation. In a recent book entitled 'Re-inventing Schools', that looks back on the educational successes and failures of the past twenty years, the former Conservative Education Secretary, Gillian Shephard, is quoted as saying:

"I arrived ingrained with the view, which I retain, that Ministers ... can say what they like about what teachers should do, but in the end teachers are on their

own in the classroom and, therefore, they are the most important component in education”.

And here's another eminent educationalist, Pauline Perry, in the same book, making the same point:

“You can fiddle about with examinations; you can introduce targets and all the rest of it, but they're not at the real heart of the thing. When, as a teacher, you get into the classroom and shut the door, it's between you and the kids”.

And knowing that the Coalition Government in London lays great store by the views of 'captains of industry', here is an important contribution from the private sector.

No less a person than John Pepper, the former chairman and CEO of Procter and Gamble, had this to say in a speech just a few months ago. He believes that: “our single most realistic opportunity for progress is through significantly improving the preparation and continued professional development of teachers ... we must give them the quality education and continuing development we would expect in any profession”.

So here are three experienced and respected voices coming to exactly the same conclusion; or, as Bill Clinton might have said, “It's the teachers, stupid”.

Why am I so convinced that the quality of the education we deliver to all of our children and young people matters so deeply to every one of us? Well, clearly, living in a globalised society in which economic competition is more intense than at any time since the heyday of the Industrial Revolution, it's absolutely imperative that we develop a workforce which is as skilled, as flexible and as brilliantly equipped as possible to deal with the complex – mostly digital technologies – upon which our economy increasingly depends.

Lest anyone is under any illusion about the nature of the opportunities for our economy that have resulted from these new technologies (something I've been 'banging on' about for almost twenty years) here's an example of a 'start up' with which I've been fortunate enough to have a close involvement.

This concerns an inter-active education company based in Blackburn, called Promethean, that I came across in 2003, at which time it had an annual turnover of £38.5 million. Last year its turnover had reached £205 million. In 2003 it had a total staff of 200; last year it was 800 – of whom over half were still based in Blackburn. The total salary bill in 2003 was a little over £5 million; last year it was over £33 million. And here is the most interesting fact:

In 2003 the average salary of each of our staff was £25,000; last year, in Blackburn, it had doubled. So, twice as many people, earning twice as much money – and 40% of

them working on the research and development of new products. All we need are another 5,000 businesses like that and the UK will really be moving again! In fact, 500 of them here in Wales would be nothing less than 'transformatory'.

Surely our task is to make sure that it is not just the Asian economies, or the US which 'host' this kind of company; but that the seed capital, the bank finance and the skilled workforce is available in this country - to allow us to build upon our established strengths in manufacturing, invention and creativity. But it remains the case that without a highly educated workforce, businesses will have little or no chance of competing effectively in the teeth of increasingly smart and aggressive competition from Asia and elsewhere.

And I think I can claim at least a little authority for that assertion. One of the most interesting hats I wear is that of International Adviser to the Singapore Government's Media Development Authority. There, I work with a group of remarkably bright and dedicated young people who have a very clear vision of where they want their country to be 15 or 20 years from now, and are making the investment decisions, and developing the infrastructure and the type of highly educated workforce that will get them there.

There's no magic to any of this; this is an intelligent single-minded group who are making, sometimes risky decisions, but are being backed to the hilt by a Government that believes in them. We are forced to ask ourselves whether any comparable situation has been seriously encouraged in this country during the past 50 years. And if not, why not?

Hold that thought for a moment if you will; and then consider the crisis that very clearly exists in those so-called STEM subjects that befuddled me as a youth, and which has led to our suffering a very serious under-supply of Engineering graduates, too few Chemistry graduates and far too few Physics graduates. You quickly develop a picture of a future economy, which, if these trends are not corrected, is in deep, deep trouble. And if you add to that the generally accepted premise that successful educational outputs will become the key differentiator between the ambitious and successful nations of the 21st century, and those that get left behind, then all of a sudden you begin to have the basis of a very powerful argument.

In simple terms it goes something like this: high-quality, subject-specific, continuous professional development; married to better, or more compelling, technology-enabled STEM teaching, must surely lead to more qualified graduates in our most badly needed professions. We're in need of a new generation of technology which, if well used and combined with imaginative software, could help deliver a generation of brilliantly accomplished teachers who have the skills to vividly bring these difficult subjects to life, and in ways that we've never previously imagined. If successful, that in

turn could help deliver a UK economy with at least a fighting chance of competing in the 21st century.

But my own obsessive commitment to the value of education goes well beyond the world of work. This is not just an argument about our ability to optimise 'shareholder value'; or even the sustainability of those SMEs which are already driving the economic value of UK plc. Quite simply, my argument goes to the heart of asking "what kind of society do we really want to be?" And it's here that any 'one-way bet' on the future of Singapore, China or even the US begins to be called into question. After all, we are far more than androids, being fed into a system that solely judges us by our economic output.

Let me offer a couple of examples of what I mean: is there anyone here tonight, no matter how comfortably off, who genuinely wants to find themselves living in a 'gated community' – simply because the level of crime in their neighbourhood has become unacceptably high? 'Hands up' anyone who wants to see the cost of state benefits go up because the number young people not in education, employment or training continues to rise, as their skills levels fail to reach even the most basic needs of local employers?

In just about every respect, the quality of state education on offer to our children and young people has a profound knock-on effect on each and every one of us; irrespective of whether our own children are educated within the state system or not. As I see it, the consequences of living in an inter-dependent society are far greater than simply an economic race with the so-called 'BRIC' countries; it also means accepting that the motivations and actions of others have an increasing ability to impact on the quality of our own lives.

Like it or not, we live in a globalised world, which resembles the one imagined by one of your great poets, Henry Vaughan:

"Man hath still either toys or care:
But hath no root, nor to one place is tied, but ever restless and irregular, about
this earth doth run and ride.
He knows he hath a home, but scarce knows where;
He says it is so far that he has quite forgot how to go there."

This lack of roots, this sense of not belonging, is surely something that a properly-resourced education system, firmly grounded in a sense of collective responsibility and a belief in our obligations to others - near and far - can help address.

A well-led, well-funded, non-ideological state education system at every level, from early years, through primary, secondary, university or FE, and out into 'lifelong learning', can only offer colossal benefits to every single person in this audience

tonight – and well beyond. And if anyone here has a better idea for laying down the foundations of the society we would wish to live and work in - I'd be genuinely grateful to hear it – at the very least, it would save me a great deal of work and heartache!

But if I'm right, and we are to develop a genuinely sustainable economy over the coming decades, then I think we need to do some very honest soul-searching about the real cause the financial mess we find ourselves in. Not least in order to prevent, as Klaus Schwab, founder of the World Economic Forum recently put it, "this financial and economic crisis from developing into a social crisis."

I think it's obvious to most of us that we're ultimately going to have to get out of this recession in a very old-fashioned way, by digging deep inside ourselves and re-addressing the basics, by seeking ways to improve our creativity along with our productivity, by saving more, by studying harder, by doing all the things that we always knew we had to do but were either too ill-informed, too complacent, or in some cases simply too stupid, to remember. Every one of you understands this. At a time when the economic situation is extremely challenging right across the public sector, we all face difficult choices.

It's clear that we will need to make better use of limited resources. But at the same time, we need to protect quality, and improve access. To put it mildly, that's a difficult balancing act to pull off. And it's also a time for serious innovation; a time to rethink the nature of higher education; if necessary it's a time to take some very bold steps.

In London, the last Labour Government's strategy document, Higher Ambitions, called for greater diversity and choice in undergraduate provision. It wanted to see more part-time programmes, more foundation courses and fast-track degrees. In essence, it wanted to see real change. With public sector budgets under pressure, it's critical that we focus investment where it can have the greatest impact.

This year is the 40th anniversary of the Open University – arguably the last serious innovation in the delivery of graduate-level education. The OU finds itself enjoying record admissions – well over 200,000 students from the UK alone. But we have to concede that the higher education sector is not one that responds well to the type of challenges we face around technology. If you doubt what I am saying, read, I beg you, the debates that surrounded the introduction of the OU 40 years ago, when it was called the 'University of the Air'. It was not just elements of the Higher Education sector that took against the OU; very few politicians on all sides come out particularly well.

A significant percentage of this year's cohort of 18 year-olds in Wales, and England, did not find a place at university, irrespective of their exam results. That is a tragedy, and the type of crisis that no administration – be it the Assembly here in Cardiff or the

Coalition in London – can possibly ignore. That will require a great deal more than simply resorting to 'business as usual'.

In my judgement, this is the time for a very fundamental rethink of exactly what we want our higher education service to deliver, which ties in directly to that earlier question I posed - what kind of future do we want for ourselves as a nation?

In England, the outcome of Lord Browne's review of higher education funding will clearly set the tone of the debate, and the direction of travel, for the next few years. If the leaks in yesterday's *Observer* are to be believed, then there's plenty of reason to be concerned about the impact of greatly increased fees, particularly upon students from poor or disadvantaged backgrounds.

But whilst I'm happy to lay down a 'marker', it would be foolish to start condemning Lord Brown's work 'sight unseen' – I personally know him to be a thoughtful and considered man – and I'm certainly not prepared to rush to judgement. I'm also not sufficiently versed in the detail of policy here in Wales. But let me offer my own top-line analysis of some of the things I watched go wrong in Westminster, in the hope that they might prove instructive when thinking about the future in what we all recognise to be challenging times.

My own party, when in Government, consistently made at least four mistakes in relation to educational policy: the first was to confuse initiatives with progress, and interpret each and every swallow as heralding summer. The second was that, although we talked a great deal on arrival in Government about 'evidence-based policy making', such evidence as there was quickly became subsumed, or sometimes even distorted, in favour of promoting more politically convenient, sometimes even ideologically driven solutions. The third was to pretend to 'consult' when in reality far-reaching decisions had already been arrived at. Experience tells me that few things infuriate intelligent people more than being cynically dragged through the motions of consultation. It is demeaning to the point of condescension, and it infantilises the very people with whom you are pretending to consult. It is also, frankly, dishonest.

Last, and to my mind most inexcusable, was the failure fully to grasp and implement what just about every piece of education research had been telling us for the past Lord knows how many years, and which I hope I've sufficiently emphasised throughout this Lecture tonight. It is the quality of classroom teaching, not changes in structure or administration, that will finally determine the outcome of just about every attempt at sustained educational improvement.

Here again, I think England has a great deal to learn from Wales. For as Professor Hawker put it in that Lecture I referred to earlier: in Wales, "there is a more marked historical sense of community; where collaboration rather than competition is the

watchword for public services; and where co-operative instincts are deeply ingrained in local communities.” As I see it, those are real strengths, and they are strengths that are not much in display among the politicians who form the Coalition Government in London.

To conclude, let me try to draw these various threads together. Thinking about what to say this evening, I sat down over the weekend and tried to synthesise for myself a sort of ‘Credo’ - something I’ve been meaning to do for some while – and tonight I’m going to give it a first public airing!

Here’s what I wrote:

“As I approach 70 I’ve come to realize that, in the time left to me, there are very few things on which I can really focus. So the question is, what am I prepared to ‘die in a ditch’ for?”

In a sense it becomes fairly self-evident: firstly, the type of ‘informed participatory democracy’ that my Father’s generation were prepared to give their lives to protect and extend. Secondly, a sustainable environment. That’s to say, clean air and water; a sufficiency of nourishing food, and the space and peace in which to enjoy fulfilling lives. Thirdly, and perhaps above all, an educational system which is capable of inspiring people with the imagination to lead and deliver on the first two parts of my credo.

I say ‘above all’, because only a world-class education system can, over time, deliver that informed democracy and that sustainable environment – the reverse can never be possible. If we fail to leave at least these things to those who follow us, then my generation will be rightly judged to have been an all-but complete failure.

For the past dozen years and more I’ve lived and worked, if not actually in Government, then at least very close to it. As a result, it’s clear to me that my own Labour Party, under its new leader; this present Welsh Assembly Government, in fact pretty well all forms of Government, along with most politicians, need to be doing much, much more if we’re to avoid the type of future those words of mine implicitly warn against.

As I see it, the practice of politics needs to change. It needs to change radically - and it needs to change fast. Too many politicians in administrations across the UK content themselves in the belief that their responsibilities involve looking no more than five or ten years ahead; unsurprisingly it’s among these people you tend to find the principal ‘climate deniers’, and they in turn tend to be those who would scrimp and save on long-term investment in education. But if you are serious about the power of politics to change the future; if you’ve an interest in bringing about real change in the world; then you’ve an obligation to be thinking now about 2025 - and even well beyond that.

To be fair, most politicians – and probably most human beings – are brilliantly attuned to dealing with emergencies, but influencing long-term trends is an altogether different proposition! Getting people to raise their eyes beyond the immediate concerns of family life; paying your bills and keeping your job, especially in the increasingly difficult times we're living through, is, to put it mildly, very hard.

It's not going to be easy to navigate our way through the very many issues that lie ahead - some known, but many unknown; and any 'sunlit uplands' certainly won't be achieved overnight. But with a new found sense of personal responsibility; and a far deeper level of commitment to one another and our community; I sincerely believe that there remains enough good in this world to allow us to achieve at least some kind of a 'sustainable' future - at the heart of which will be an education system we can all be proud of.