

Philosophy, politics and economics (PPE)

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The UK's political leaders who have nervously addressed the nation from the Downing Street podium over the past weeks took degrees as follows: Johnson (classics), Raab (law), Patel (economics), Sharma (physics), Hancock (PPE – *sic*), Jenrick (history). Rishi Sunak (PPE) has been singularly confident.

The government front bench would struggle to explain how Einstein amended Newton. They may have their bevy of medical advisers and Dominic Cummings (ancient & modern history) – and may be adept with social and financial matters - but the nuances of science have largely escaped their Oxbridge education. Never again will a Health and Social Care Secretary be appointed who is not a medical doctor.

For the record, the Opposition's front bench reads: Starmer (law), Dodds (PPE), Nandy (politics), Ashworth (politics and philosophy), Thomas-Symonds (PPE), Rachel Reeves (PPE) – a similarly science-free diaspora.

Perhaps it is our political leaders' partial education which begins to explain why they have been reluctant to set a path to reopening the country, its economy and its schools. Step outside their favoured PPE and they are marooned. Contrast Angela Merkel, a doctor of chemistry.

As we plot possible ways forward from kitchen tables and sofas – with NHS practitioners and keyworkers modelling great leadership - we see brought into sharp focus the good which makes up any society: its physical and mental health, its social fabric, its economic underpinning.

This is a vicious, unpredictable pandemic. Politicians globally are hesitating over unenviable decisions. Open up too quickly and deadly consequences may arise. Wait too long and social and economic fabrics start to fray.

To inform these decisions at home, different sectors of British society need to step forward. Banking leaders should publish their recommendations for a virus exit strategy. The third sector and county council leaders should do the same. The nation's small, medium and big businesses must offer their perspective.

And what might the vital education sector say as the summer term begins?

Higher Education has more or less declared this academic year is over as far as students' attendance on campuses is concerned. Online Learning is the mantra and for this age group it is probably sustainable. Further Education may argue similarly.

Many nurseries around the country have stayed open throughout the national lockdown without reported problems. There is no reason why these cannot continue to operate.

What of primary and secondary schools? Professional association and union leaders, together with headteachers in different parts of the country, should now map out something along these lines, with optimism yet open to medical revision:

- April and May to see a continuation and refinement of Online Learning, Joe Wicks setting the tone. And prepare for....
- June 1st to see a phased opening of primary and secondary schools, led on a local basis by headteachers and staff working with their communities.

Primaries in Sweden were never closed. Norway's kindergartens and primaries open this week, and Germany plans to open its schools in May. Denmark is currently pioneering the reopening of primary schools, with the head of its leading organisation for primary parents saying: 'We have to balance good sense and feelings all the time. We all have rational and irrational thoughts.'

The UK is not New Zealand or Sweden, nor are we the USA where over half the states have closed down schools until September. Much of the Middle East has also closed its schools for this academic year. We must be guarded about assuming that what is working or not working in one context will suit us.

Polls of public trust in professionals frequently highlight that headteachers are highly respected. In my experience of working with policy makers across the globe, practice shapes policy. Never has the time been more ripe for practitioners in their different arenas to lead this country's political class.

Children have been painting rainbows across the nation. Courageous leadership paints a vivid picture of a better tomorrow.
