

Devolution Ahead

Roy Blatchford

August 2026

I wrote in my [March 2025](#) column that mayors could run the education service.

Might the new PM's devolution agenda stretch that far? Burnham has in the past asserted that one of the problems in education is the leadership of the Department for Education.

The Rt. Hon. Lucy Powell is the *eleventh* Secretary of State since Michael Gove left office in July 2014. It is worth listing the others, with their length of stay:

Nicky Morgan - 1 year, 11 months, 28 days
Justine Greening - 1 year, 5 months, 25 days
Damian Hinds - 1 year, 6 months, 16 days
Gavin Williamson - 2 years, 1 month, 22 days
Nadhim Zahawi - 9 months, 20 days
Michelle Donelan - 35 hours
James Cleverly - 1 month, 30 days
Kit Malthouse - 1 month, 19 days
Gillian Keegan - 1 year, 8 months, 10 days
Bridget Phillipson - 2 years, 22 days

Is this catalogue of short-stayers a reflection of what political leaders think of education as a core, publicly funded national service? Or is it a reminder that the greatest enemy of long-term planning in the public estate is the electoral cycle?

Reflecting on the Morgan-to-Phillipson list in a half-full spirit, I am pushed to articulate what any of them actually stood for; or at least we never had time to find out. Albeit in times of political and social churn, they were in office yet not in power.

Having worked up close with David Blunkett and Michael Gove (both served just over 4 years in office), I knew what each stood for. In their different times and styles they had a vision-into-practice mentality focused on school improvement and raising academic standards. Indeed, the academy movement is their joint

prize - and is probably the most significant symbol of devolution since the 1944 Education Act.

Led by the PM's recently declared technical and vocational priorities, could our new Secretary of State make an impact in just *one* domain during the likely less than three years she'll be in post?

'The forgotten third' does not go away and the linked NEETs figures are a scar on the education landscape. The introduction of a suite of vocational GCSEs, including for English and Maths, could be Lucy Powell's legacy. At last, a meaningful curriculum pathway for so many 14-16 year olds currently denied it.

Or will the PM, impatient with the DfE, ensure that the next Mayor of Manchester is delivering the education service in that city by 2029?

Roy Blatchford is editor of ['The A – Z Series'](#).