

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
December 18 2017, 12:01am, the times

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/university-graduates-and-ukproductivity-x60rr952s>

University graduates and UK productivity

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Sir, Ed Conway is right to assert that simply by churning out more graduates Britain will not boost its productivity (“Churning out graduates won’t make us richer”, Comment, Dec 15). The reason for this is twofold.

First, since the advent of tuition fees, higher education has been made available to a far wider audience. Some might argue that this is a victory for social mobility yet all it has done is lower standards.

Second, many teachers have been placed under increased pressure to guarantee results for their pupils so that they are able to go on to university. This has led to many schools starting the GCSE course a year early when, in many cases, basic literacy and numeracy is not in place. While these students may achieve a place at a university, they will do so without the basic skills that our economy so desperately needs.

James Smith

Teacher of English, Liverpool

Sir, Further to Ed Conway’s article, is basic literacy and numeracy really a measure of the usefulness of higher education? While I confess that my liberal arts degree in the 1980s did nothing for my numeracy, I believe it taught me more valuable skills, such as the ability to analyse data, distinguish between rhetoric and reasoned debate, avoid unsubstantiated bias and make a coherent argument.

Unless we are proposing to teach young people to use mental arithmetic to distinguish between fake news and reality (or, for that matter, a book plug and a newspaper column), then it seems to me that a degree is the best defence.

And, rather than using “herd mentality”, that is probably the real reason why employers pay graduates 60 per cent more on average than school leavers.

Alison Casson

Ilkley, W Yorks

Sir, Ed Conway is right. If this country is going to thrive, we need to educate the future workforce in a way that fills the needs of business, commerce and manufacturing.

The apprenticeship route is much nearer to meeting this requirement. Proof was evident in the 1950s when many future engineers qualified via the higher national certificate and an on-the-job apprenticeship.

Unfortunately we have a parliamentary membership and an education profession that knows nothing of this. Tony Blair’s target of 50 per cent graduates was a mistake. Many of today’s students work hard to get nowhere.

R Bullen

Chepstow, Monmouthshire

Sir, Ed Conway deprecates the emphasis on academic degrees to the neglect of literacy, numeracy and technical education. One problem may be that the teaching profession is rooted in the academic “pathway”, which results in a skewed perspective from which to advise youngsters.

In other countries it is the practice for teachers of sciences and technology to spend only a part of their working week in school while fulfilling a role in industry for the remainder of the time.

Could there be a lesson in that?

David Cooper-Smith

Bletchley, Bucks

LIAM ALLAN TRIAL

Sir, The acknowledgment by the Director of Public Prosecutions of systemic disclosure issues across the criminal justice system must not obscure the fact that Crown Prosecution Service failures in disclosure are not only systemic but widespread and longstanding (“Criminal justice and the collapse of rape trial”, letters, Dec 16, news and leader, Dec 15).

Section three of the Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996 imposes a duty to disclose any prosecution “material . . . which might reasonably be considered capable of undermining the prosecution case ... or of assisting the case for the accused”; material being that which the prosecutor possesses or has inspected in connection with the case.

As a serving circuit judge from 1997 to 2015 I regularly saw this duty being flouted. In most cases disclosure was eventually given, usually after defence requests and judicial intervention, without ultimate prejudice to the accused. In a significant minority of cases, however, the failure could not be remedied and, where crucial (as in the case of Liam Allan), no trial took place.

In some cases this provides justice to the accused; in others it may deny justice to the accuser — both situations can be devastating.

An urgent review of disclosure policies and practices is now promised. It is long overdue. The outcome requires more than an adequate provision of resources and training: what is needed is a change of culture.

Judge Simon Tonking

Abbots Bromley, Staffs

Sir, Is there not another potential serious injustice with this rape case? People who could be important for this young man’s future may remember his name and involvement as a defendant in a rape trial long after they have forgotten the details of the false allegations against him.

Is it not time to think again about the unfairness of allowing the publicity of this innocent man’s name — and of perhaps hundreds like him — while the name of his false accuser is denied publicity by the anonymity rule?

Since this one-sided rule exists to encourage genuine victims of rape to come forward, would not the fairest solution be to deny also publicity of a defendant’s name in a rape trial until there has been a conviction?

Sir Ivan Lawrence, QC
London EC4

Sir, The case against Liam Allan, the student wrongly accused of rape, raises issues beyond the failings of the police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

The police should charge the complainant with wasting police time, which would put her name in the public domain. This would discourage others who are bent on unfounded and malicious accusations of rape.

Mr Allan and others wrongly accused might be given legal aid to sue his complainant for defamation and take action against the police and CPS for neglect of duty.

Robin Laurance
Oxford

PLAN TO BOOST TOURISM IN BRITAIN

Sir, Tourism is one of our most valuable industries: it is worth £130 billion annually; it supports more than three million jobs across the UK and is one of our most successful exports.

In a plan presented to the government we have shown that tourism could be worth £268 billion by 2025. We want to create “tourism zones” in areas where local leadership will improve transport, extend the tourism season, drive productivity and create jobs. We want to continue to compete globally as a world-class destination for visitors, boosting economic growth across the whole of Britain. We want tourism to be a key part of the industrial strategy and call on the government to back our plan.

Stephen Ridgway, tourism sector deal leader; *John Holland-Kaye*, chief executive, Heathrow airport; *Andrew Cowan*, group chief executive, Manchester Airport Group (Manchester, Stansted, East Midlands and Bournemouth airports); *Brian Ambrose*, chief executive, Belfast City airport; *Tim Clarke*, chairman, Birmingham airport; *Peter Kerkar*, global chief executive, Cox & Kings; *Dr David Fleming*, director, Liverpool Museums; *Sir Michael Dixon*, director, Natural History Museum, *James McClure*, general manager, Airbnb UK; *Shaun Hinds*, chief executive, Manchester Central Convention; *Adrian Ellis*, chairman, Manchester Hoteliers’ Association and general manager, Lowry Hotel; *Sir Gary Verity*, chief executive, Welcome to Yorkshire; *Jonathan Neame*, chief executive, Shepherd Neame; *Patrick Dardis*, chief executive, Young & Co; *Simon Emeny*, chief executive, Fuller, Smith & Turner Plc; *Gordon Clark*, MD, Global Blue, UK & I; *Simon Townsend*, chief executive, Ei Group Plc; *Kathryn James*, MD, NEC and ICC; *Justin Baird-Murray*, MD, Metropole Hotel; *John Barnes*, chief executive, Historic Royal Palaces; *Helen Brocklebank*, chief executive, Walpole; *Craig Kreeger*, chief executive, Virgin Atlantic; *Michele Fitzpatrick*, chief executive, Eviivo; *Nick de Bois*, chairman, Events Industry Board; *Gary Topp*, director, Culture Central; *Helen Peters*, chief executive, Shakespeare’s England; *Neil Rami*, chief executive, The West Midlands Growth Company; *Andrew Lovett*, chief executive, The Black Country Living Museum; *Professor Sir David Eastwood*, vice-chancellor, University of Birmingham; *Richard Parry*, chief executive, Canal & River Trust; *Ralph Findlay*, chief executive, Marstons plc; *John Wales*, chief executive, Encore Tickets; *David Morgan-Hewitt*, MD, the Goring, *Dr Tristram Hunt*, director, Victoria and Albert Museum; *Michael Ward*, MD, Harrods; *Sorcha Carey*, chairwoman, Edinburgh’s Festivals; *Brian Bickell*, chief executive, UKCVA and Shaftesbury; *Richard Calvert*, chief executive, Shearings Leisure Group; *Tom Stables*, MD, National Express UK; *Ian Edwards*, chief executive, Celtic Manor Resort; *Rita Beckwith*, chief executive, CityCruises; *Terence Brannigan*, chairman, Tourism Northern Ireland; *Neil Snowball*, chief executive, Warwickshire County Cricket Club & Edgbaston Stadium; *Nick Blofeld*, divisional director, Warwick Castle

CHAUCER'S ENGLISH

Sir, The Rev Peter Ridley states that William Tyndale was the “virtual creator” of the English language (letter, Dec 15). Where would he put Geoffrey Chaucer?

Chaucer was writing more than 100 years before Tyndale in a language that was recognisably English. Most people today can make out much of Chaucer, who was using the language developed by the population over the few hundred years that Saxon was used only by the underclass. You cannot even say that Chaucer created the English language — the people of England created it well before Tyndale was born in 1494.

Pauline Toop
Chorley, Lancs

A PENNY WELL SPENT

Sir, I refer to your article about public toilet provision (“Spending a penny earns Network Rail millions of pounds”, News, Dec 14). The phrase “spend a penny” was coined after the introduction of pay-for-use toilets in the 1850s near the Royal Exchange in the City of London.

Spending 1p in 1850 would be the equivalent of about £1.27 today. Across Europe paid-for-use public toilets provide hygienic, accessible and safe washroom facilities. The entry price typically ranges from €0.50 to €2. Network Rail facilities are either free, 20p, 30p or 50p, but are unacceptable. We should be encouraging commercial operators and councils to provide good, clean facilities.

Paul Foster
Harpenden, Herts

PLASTIC-FREE ZONES

Sir, Further to your reports on plastic waste (“Campaign to cut plastic in seas backed by 200 countries”, News, Dec 14), Aberystwyth and Aberporth in west Wales have declared themselves plastic-free zones. Communities are doing something constructive to control this creeping, invasive nightmare that is killing marine life and filling our land with indestructible plastic.

In spite of this, the Bank of England has still seen fit to issue plastic notes.

B W Rogers
Cardigan

BLACK MARKS

Sir, If Cecil Rhodes were buried in Highgate cemetery, would the charity be sprucing up his grave with slabs of black granite (“Grave of Karl Marx gets a new lease of life”, News, Dec 15)? I think not. Yet the victims of Rhodes’s activities number in the tens of thousands; the victims of Marxism’s brutal march through history are in the tens of millions. Black is certainly the right colour for the marble.

Will Wyatt
Middle Barton, Oxon

MASTERFUL FICTION

Sir, Another underrated literary figure (letter, Dec 16) is CP Snow, especially his 1951 novel *The Masters*. After the first two volumes of what was to become the “Strangers and Brothers” sequence appeared, Harold Macmillan moved swiftly to secure *The Masters* and subsequent volumes for his publishing house.

Anthony Powell's "A Dance to the Music of Time" series was contemporaneous to Snow's, and after one highly praised Powell volume appeared Kenneth Rose noted in his *Journal*: "It is not as good as *The Masters*, but then what is?"

D R Thorpe

Banbury, Oxon

POWER OF THE PAUSE

Sir, With reference to your leader and the oratorical virtues of the pause ("Still life", Dec 13, and letter, Dec 15), when I was a young barrister I was once accompanied to court by a pupil barrister. She expressed admiration for the way I paused between questions while cross-examining a witness because she could see how uncomfortable that made the witness.

It was years before I confessed to the pupil (now a circuit judge) that I was trying to think of the next question.

Patrick Routley

London EC4

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Eric Warriss Dec 18, 2017

The old HND Sandwich courses produced a well qualified AND experienced workforce. Interfering "no nowt" politicians deemed that a university degree was superior to experience.

Flag

4RecommendReply

Arthur Rolfe Dec 23, 2017

I agree. My Higher National Certificate put me on course for an extremely good and high earning career that made me enough money to pay for the education of all my children and retire with enough to keep me in beer for the rest of my life.

Flag

RecommendReply

kenneth williams Dec 18, 2017

Surely there is a requirement for industry to be much more involved with Universities; sponsoring candidates through University in exchange for a guaranteed number of years working for them; experts from business teaching at University (my daughter, a MICE water engineer, does this); one year on, one year at work courses; two days a week release courses. Maybe the Times could sponsor arts graduates, as an example. Then business gets what they want, and the student knows what he is working towards with some industrial experience.

Flag

3RecommendReply

Tom Bloomfield Dec 18, 2017

PLASTIC-FREE ZONES

I note the writer's address. I doubt that many Cardies will be throwing banknotes away.

Flag

3RecommendReply

Brian Vallance (Corfu) Dec 18, 2017

LIAM ALLAN TRIAL - Robin Laurance :-

"Wasting Police Time" is a rather minor offence with which the false complainant should be charged. Alternatively, how abouts "Attempting to Pervert the Course of Justice". This seems to be far more appropriate.

Does the offence of CRIMINAL Libel still exist?

Flag

7RecommendReply

Tom Bloomfield Dec 18, 2017

A PENNY WELL SPENT

Europe for a comparison, how about Japan?

Flag

RecommendReply

Peter Cressall Dec 18, 2017

A PENNY WELL SPENT. It reminds me (as I am sure it does others) of the Scotsman found dead in a lavatory cubicle, with a note held in his hand. "Here I die, broken-hearted: I paid a penny, and only farted."

Flag

2RecommendReply

Richard James Dec 18, 2017

Most of the top British Universities give their places to foreign students; indeed they have a complete bias in favour in that direction. Even the most talented British applicants even fail to get an interview at Oxford, Cambridge and the LSE (for example) to the best courses. No wonder we are falling behind if we don't encourage our young people to believe in themselves.

Flag

4RecommendReply

M'lomhair Dec 18, 2017

I don't really understand where this belief that a degree is a waste of time and money comes from. There are no statistics to back this myth. Most graduates with a decent degree (2.2 and above) are employed in good jobs. Their degrees have taught them not just 'facts' but reason, analysis, critical thinking, teamwork, stamina, time management, self-reliance etc.

People with poor degrees or who dropped out, or who have personal problems excepted, the majority of graduates, while perhaps not "living the dream" (who is?) are doing fine.

Employers who whine forget that in the past they used to provide training for graduates and professional development opportunities, and didn't expect the university to get students "job ready" since each firm does have its own needs.

Flag

7RecommendReply

Whiskybreath Dec 18, 2017

LIAM ALLAN TRIAL

Mr Laurance says that: "*The police should charge the complainant with wasting police time*". Surely that should be least of the charges put to the complainant, and to those others who received the messages from her mobile phone. They were willing to allow a serious miscarriage of justice, and the complainant was bent on seeing Allan serve time.

Flag

15RecommendReply

Tim Reay Dec 18, 2017

"Spending 1p in 1850 would be the equivalent of about £1.27 today."

Not sure how you worked that out, but if prices have gone up by a factor of 127 since 1850, then the one old penny (1/240th of a pound) that users of the facilities were spending in 1850 would be equivalent to about 50p today.

Your argument still stands, though.

Flag

1RecommendReply

R Morse Dec 18, 2017

@Tim Reay

I suspect that Mr Foster may have failed to control for the effects of decimalisation. The inflation 'multiplier' for 1850 to 2017 is 116 (<http://inflation.stephenmorley.org/>) so one old penny spent in 1850 would be worth 116d (9s 8d) today, the equivalent of around 48p in today's money.

Flag

2RecommendReply

Stanley Cohen Dec 18, 2017

CHAUCER'S ENGLISH

Pauline Toop fails to appreciate that William Tyndale's English was effectively the birthplace of today's English unlike that of Chaucer and his predecessors whose English requires constant clarification for complete understanding and the English of the natives prior to this was a highly localised dialect.

Flag

4RecommendReply

Stanley Cohen Dec 18, 2017

POWER OF THE PAUSE

As persuasive as Patrick Routley's letter may be I was told by an eminent QC that a barrister will never ask a question to which he/she doesn't already know the answer.

Flag

4RecommendReply

Otto Leipzig Dec 18, 2017

Dear Alison Casson.

"While I confess that my liberal arts degree in the 1980s did nothing for my numeracy, I believe it taught me more valuable skills, such as the ability to analyse data, distinguish between rhetoric and reasoned debate, avoid unsubstantiated bias and make a coherent argument."

In the arts all opinions are valid, that's why there is constant argument over trifles.

Please let me know when I might fly in an airplane you, Alison, had a hand in designing, testing and operating. Nothing personal you understand.

Flag

13RecommendReply

M'Iomhair Dec 18, 2017

"In the arts all opinions are valid"

No they're not.

All claims must be evidenced and argued, and positions must be defended.

Flag

5RecommendReply

Otto Leipzig Dec 18, 2017

@M'lomhair

"In the arts all opinions are valid
No they're not.

All claims must be evidenced and argued, and positions must be defended."

Argued here meaning: Seldom reaching a definitive conclusion that stands the test of time?

Flag

2RecommendReply

AdamD Dec 18, 2017

Marx's victims in the tens of millions? China alone, or Russia alone achieve that.

Only Malaria and the Black Death have had such a devastating effect on the lives of working people as has Socialism. It has all the best tunes, but has been a disaster. Yet capitalism is failing. Where are the decent economists when you need them?

Flag

15RecommendReply

Tim Price Dec 18, 2017

@AdamD Capitalism isn't failing - where it can be practised. You are confusing it with crony capitalism and protectionism, which have been rampant since long before the Global Financial Crisis and we are living with them still.

Flag

22RecommendReply

Caleb Boone Dec 18, 2017

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen:

No student should be allowed to attend college until his English is perfect: vocabulary, grammar, syntax, punctuation, sentence structure, paragraph structure, thematic construction, composition, literature, history, old and middle English.

Further, Latin, Greek and the Classics in full.

All the poetry, plays and other works in all the mentioned languages.

Also, Mathematics, Calculus, Geometry, Logic, Chemistry, Anatomy, Biology, Physics, History, Geography Government and Sociology. Rhetoric, Debate and Public Speaking.

Then and only then should a student proceed to college.

Have a Dovely.

Sincerely yours,

Caleb Boone.

Flag

1RecommendReply

Mr Stephen Riley Dec 18, 2017

@Caleb Boone Yes, I can see what that lot does for us when I look at the government front bench.

Flag

2RecommendReply

Charles Atkinson Dec 18, 2017

@Caleb Boone Having got that lot under your belt then the only reason to go to university will be to study science, engineering or medicine.

Flag

3RecommendReply

Dave Hill Dec 18, 2017

@Caleb Boone First paragraph rules me out.

Flag

RecommendReply

Yersinia Pestis Dec 18, 2017

Sir,

... Aberystwyth and Aberporth in west Wales have declared themselves plastic-free zones. Communities are doing something constructive to control this creeping, invasive nightmare that is killing marine life and filling our land with indestructible plastic.

In spite of this, the Bank of England has still seen fit to issue plastic notes.

B W Rogers

Cardigan

Yes, I dread to think of all the millions of fish being killed by fivers and tenners.

Flag

14RecommendReply

David Shipley Dec 18, 2017

How do people pay for things there if they can't use cards and they can't use notes?

Flag

3RecommendReply

Horatio Dec 18, 2017

@Yersinia Pestis Dear Mr Rogers. If you are concerned about the environmental impact of polymer bank notes, then please feel free to send them to me. I have, after years of arduous research, developed a process whereby such notes can be converted into a variety of tasty, stimulating and nutritious liquids. These liquids can then be processed via an entirely organic process into harmless water. I, and my co workers, await the first delivery with eager anticipation. Yours etc etc

Flag

13RecommendReply

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