

Campaign for Real Education

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“Freedom to teach, freedom to learn, freedom to choose”

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Newsletter

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Editorial

The teacher union conferences over the Easter period generated a predictable volley of criticism aimed at government education policy. This has become an annual ritual that is seized on by the media and rarely portrays the teaching profession in a good light. Both Nicki Morgan, the education secretary, addressing the NASUWT, and Nick Gibb, the schools minister, addressing the ATL, were heckled. They deserve credit for turning up. The previous secretary of state to speak at a union conference, David Blunkett, was trapped in a room for half an hour and besieged by NUT militants chanting strike slogans.

At the heart of the row this year was the Government's decision to convert all schools to academy status. Currently, around 65% of secondary schools are academies but only around 15% of primary schools.

In itself, converting schools to academy status is not going to solve the problem of under-performance in our education system. The roots of school failure go deep and will not be solved by organisational change alone. On balance, though, academy status should enhance the possibility of reform and improvement. The partial independence bestowed on academies is preferable to the alternative - having schools run by sclerotic local authorities.

Few, outside of education, are aware of the power that, for decades, has been exercised over teachers by local education subject advisers. These Mr Men (and women) of education dictate so-called 'best practice' and, invariably, sit on appointment panels for new staff. Little Miss Mathematics, Mr History, Miss Modern Languages, Mr English and so on, know what is best for the 'kids'. If you do not agree,

you will not be appointed to a teaching post and if you are already teaching you are likely to receive a poor appraisal.

Local authority school subject advisers have been promoting and enforcing ineffective, but trendy, teaching methodologies for years. Consequently, they carry much responsibility for many years of pupil under-achievement. Why, thirty years ago, did we ditch the phonics method for the teaching of reading and replace it with the faddish and largely unsuccessful 'real books' approach? Only recently have we seen a restoration of phonics in the classroom. It will be some years before it will impact on the literacy level of school leavers.

Why did learning the times tables get kicked into the long grass and declared 'out-of-date'? Why did so much basic subject knowledge become redundant? In other words, why did teachers do so many daft things for so long that it eventually became 'best practice' and the norm. The responsibility lies partly with teacher training but, also, it needed 'enforcers' and that is where the local authority subject advisers came in.

These apparatchiks of the educational establishment, the 'Blob', have, for long, been the school bullies from county hall. In truth, local authority education officers are as much a part of the 'Blob', as the unions and the university teacher training departments. Spending cuts may have reduced their numbers in recent years, but their legacy has been long lasting and disastrous.

The abolition of local authority schools will not abolish addiction to the methodologies and ideologies they promoted and that have been failing our children for years. It would seem that most academies have chosen to convert from local authority control in order to stop town halls from taking a sizeable cut of their school budgets. Freedom over the curriculum and over teaching methodology seems hardly to have featured in their choice. This is a pity since it is by using these freedoms that academies will be able to make a real difference.

This Spring Newsletter includes contributions from an immigrant mum, an engineer and a primary school teacher. The Campaign for Real Education holds a neutral position with regard to the party politics that currently permeate education. We remain committed to honesty and impartiality and provide our opinions, and those of individual contributors, without fear or favour.

Why white British kids are falling behind: the view of an immigrant mum

We have respected the writer's wish to remain anonymous

Any foreign-to-the-UK parent will not be surprised at all by the recent *CentreForum* Report on white British pupils falling behind at school.

British working class parents I know simply do not do anything with their children and do not understand why they should. They just stare at us when we say that in our countries parents have to work with their children. There are several homework assignments every day and all tests have to be shown to the parents so that they can work on the mistakes on a regular basis. Here in Britain we never see anything like that, which is hugely frustrating.

Only the other day I talked to my Chinese friend who said the same and was shocked as in her part of China, as in my home country and everywhere else I know, parents have to see each test, sign that they have seen it, and work on the mistakes with their child. In addition, they have to have curriculum books. It is a must, for every subject. Poor families get them for free in Eastern Europe but others have to buy them. They are not cheap but are compulsory.

Parents' evenings are often an open forum, all at once, so parents are named and shamed if their child's homework is not done or the children are bad at school in any way. Parents come out blushing.

Here it took me 4 years to find out what worksheet books I should get as the school thought it was not good on the children to do anything other than at school.

I have foreign parents of children just starting school come to me - parents of the kids I worked with and say — "What on earth is this? I never know what my child is doing, how he is doing, what test marks he gets or what mistakes he makes. There are no books and almost no homework...I don't know what to do. Where can I get curriculum books if there are any at all?" They are in shock. Believe me! Now I tell them what to buy in WHS. Schools never tell you.

Abroad, homework is set on a daily basis in each subject, separately. We low-paid foreign parents get into debt to buy books or pay for music lessons. Quite a few of us foreign parents have to pay for private tuition, too, as many of us speak little English ourselves. We almost never go out.

I saw a Somali working-class woman the other day. Her English is better now, but was very bad until recently. They have 4 kids. She said her head was spinning with financial difficulties. OK, she gets lots of benefits for those children but it all goes on the kids and they pay for private lessons. There are tons of books all over the house. Her eldest is in a grammar school. Others are to follow, she hopes. She says she constantly goes from child to child checking if all is done, homework from private tuition, worksheets etc. She gives the little ones ticks for what they have done. She went to the market "to try and relax" as their whole life is kids' education, for years now, every day.

Her friend, a Somali single mum of 3, I know well... the same. She works as a carer and also the kids get some private tuition and work daily at home on books she buys

for them. She knows that she has no choice. Her eldest is also in a grammar school as he wants to be a surgeon.

These mums also tell me that they encourage their children to play, outside or indoors, to be physically active, to be children but to also know that education has to be attended to at the end of most days.

I know a married couple that comes from Pakistan. They were not born here, but are new immigrants. They have two sons who were born here. Mum works in a supermarket on the till. The parents work so hard with the kids. One boy is in a grammar school for boys (hardest to get into). The other knew all the shapes, some adding up, the whole alphabet and how to read short words etc. while at preschool.

My British colleagues used to say, "But the kids are just naturally clever". I told the mother this and she just laughed. "They are clever, but they also HAVE to work at home with us." The boy also had private tuition for 11+, draining all the money the parents earned alongside attending the Islamic school where they also have to excel. They have no option".

Several working class Sri Lankan families I know well (factory workers etc.) are the same. Every penny goes on books, music instruments, private tuition. Though the kids failed to get into grammar schools, they are still very good academically.

And stories like that are all around me at my kids' school. A West Indian family of four children started from zero with nothing. The eldest is now at a prestigious medical school and two others are in top state schools. The fourth is studying for the 11+. All four play classical instruments. One is grade 8 in ballet and the youngest plays in a small classical music band with my children. The parents spend all their time after work and weekends ferrying them around - lots of sport clubs, music tuition and other activities.

They have a tiny modest house full of books, like mine. In all the rooms there are piles of books. The mum needs to spend £12 on an item for her health but she cannot afford it. Everything goes on the kids. The parents have not been out on their own or with friends alone for many, many years.

British working-class parents are just not used to something like that and do not know what we are talking about. They seem to have never been expected to have a role in their child's education and most never do, not at all.

In the world of education everything has been going well for a very long time. True?

The director of education of the OECD has been shining a light on the teaching of mathematics and science in our schools. The British curriculum, he has told the Global Education and Skills Forum in Dubai, is a “mile wide and an inch deep”.

He noted: “The typical problems that students encounter in maths in England are relatively simple mathematics, embedded in a...complex context.” In contrast, pupils’ knowledge and understanding of both maths and science in such countries as China is much deeper because “they really understand the subjects.”

There is nothing new about any of this, of course. A recent OECD report on educational attainment among developed countries placed us second from bottom in numeracy. While this was better than the bottom place we achieved in literacy, it was a clear indication that all is not well. The last set of the so-called PISA global league tables of pupil performance (2012) had us coming as ‘also-rans’ in 26th position – well behind the likes of Vietnam, Poland and Estonia.

This dose of reality about school standards is not something that most of our political leaders have been keen for us to know about. Indeed, the conclusion to be drawn from their self-congratulatory pronouncements over the years is that everything is going very well.

In response to the latest revelation about mathematics, the DfE has issued this response:

“The quality of maths teaching is improving dramatically in this country.” DfE 14th March 2016.

Four years ago it was much the same:

“The fact that we are attracting more, high-quality maths specialists into the classroom is excellent news and will help to raise attainment in maths in our schools.” DfE 14th August 2012, quoting “Lin Hinnigan, chief executive of the Teaching Agency.

A year earlier (2011) we had this from the chief executive of the Training and Development Agency for Schools: *“It is thrilling to see maths teaching enjoying such a renaissance. We are determined to capitalise on the increasing interest ... to ensure future economic prosperity.”*

And back in 2008 Jim Knight, the schools’ minister, announced:

“I want to congratulate schools and pupils for all their hard work. Over the last decade there has been sustained improvement at Key Stage 2. Compared to 1997, 101,000 more 11-year-olds are now achieving the target level for their age in English and 93,000 more in maths.”

Nor should we forget Prime Minister Blair's crowing, even further back in time (2005):
"The best ever GCSE and "A" level results and record numbers going on to apprenticeships and on to higher education...This is the difference the Labour Government makes."

Joseph Goebbels believed that, *"If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it."* He, also, understood that *"a lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the... consequences of the lie."*

As employers struggle to recruit 'home grown' school leavers with the basic skills to meet the needs of our economy we are beginning to see the consequences of living in denial of the school attainment problem for so many years.

Our education system fails engineering

Derek Newport

Derek Newport is a Chartered Engineer and worked in manufacturing industry for over thirty years.

He was a member of a working party within the USA-based Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers (SMPTE) alongside engineers from USA, Germany, France, Japan and Canada, tasked with drafting the first global standard for digital television.

He has taught for periods on a part-time basis at two FE colleges and at two universities and for the last 15 years has visited secondary schools regularly under the Young Enterprise Initiative and latterly as a STEM Ambassador.

This experience led him to write a book about mathematics "Savour the Fruits of Mathematics...not just HOW mathematics works, but WHY is it important, especially in Engineering?"

The book was published in printed form in August 2014 and in eBook form in December 2014.

The Chancellor has announced yet further measures aimed at improving our under-performing school system. His organisational reforms, however, will do little for engineering — an area vital for our economic prosperity.

As a chartered engineer who has spent the past seven years visiting secondary schools under the STEM (*Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics*) scheme, and nine years previously under the Young Enterprise Initiative, I offer the following observations.

Report after report has highlighted a problem, but it was the speech that Michael Gove gave to *The Royal Society* in 2011 that finally forced the public to take our educational under-performance seriously. We can argue until the cows come home as to whether all of his contributions have been right or wrong, but successive OECD international PISA results are hard to challenge. The standards of education in the UK are well behind those of many of our trading competitors.

Readers may believe we are alone in being concerned about the education of our children. I can tell you from communicating with a member of PLTW (*Project Lead The Way*), however, that the US is also not winning the battle to raise standards in either maths or in the sciences. PLTW is the equivalent of STEM in the US.

STEM was a Government-backed initiative introduced twenty years ago, because there was public concern that the Government should take action to encourage more pupils to aspire to careers in engineering. It was believed that to achieve this aim a larger proportion of GCSE pupils would need to attain higher standards in maths and in science, particularly physics.

STEM UK points to increasing numbers of schools participating in STEM events year on year and I have witnessed many pupils being enthused by technology, while D&T teachers are clearly working very hard.

However, if the STEM movement is having the results desired, then why have major reports in 2013, 2014, 2015 forecast huge shortfalls in new graduate engineers and technicians, while the 2016 report just published has increased the anticipated annual shortfalls? The forecast shortfall for graduate engineers and technicians now stands at 69,000 for each and every year up to at least 2022.

Had STEM been successful, we should expect the shortfalls to be shrinking by now.

The reports ("*Survey of engineering skills*" by Professor John Perkins – 2013", and three reports "*Engineering UK* – 2014, 2015 and 2016") can be found online.

Close observation and sifting of reports from many sources, including the recruitment pages in the *TES* – the large teaching journal – which I have subscribed to for the last 12 months, reveals that many schools have chosen to select projects such as "nail varnishes", "food ingredients" and "resistive materials" as D&T projects. There is, it seems, a desire to avoid the need for mathematics.

Should this be the case I do not blame schools. Severe shortages of maths and science teachers have forced schools to allocate non-specialist teachers to these subjects, coupled with the fact that many teachers do not understand the difference between a graduate engineer and a craft technician.

Reports of a recent surge of student interest in studying A-Level maths seemed to be encouraging news for engineers. Sadly, such optimism was misplaced.

It was soon brought to my attention that a cohort of 200 A-Level students had not opted for the subject out of an interest in becoming engineers. A key contributor to the “Engineering UK” reports, Dr. Rhys Morgan, informed me that his own research revealed that students are seeing A Level maths not as a pathway into engineering but simply as a general indicator of their academic ability that will allow them access to other careers:

“The issue with Maths is deeply important to the Academy. You are right to highlight that the recent upsurge in maths is not because students want to study engineering or related subjects. What is happening is that students are seeing maths A level as a useful ‘market indicator’ of their level of academic ability. They choose maths along with a range of other A levels and then go on to do history, English or all sorts of other subjects at degree level.”

If the OECD PISA rankings are soundly based, how can our poor teaching of science deliver 85,000 'straight A's' who want to enter the medical profession, whilst not delivering enough physics and maths A-Level students to fill the gap of 69,000 graduate engineers?

One answer to this conundrum is that many of the 84,000 applicants to medical schools have achieved A Levels in Biology, but not in maths or physics.

So, what can be done to shrink what has become known as the ‘Skills Gap’?

To this end the Government has put further pressure on schools by calling for them to deliver the EBacc subjects to at least 90% of pupils in England.

Although this initiative may help to increase the supply of new graduates to reduce the anticipated shortfalls in the professions, including engineers, I personally believe the aim of reaching 90% is unrealistic.

In a utopian world it would be marvellous to think that all pupils can look forward to their dream jobs as evoked by television and film programmes without taking into account the country’s need to remain solvent. The emphasis being placed by many sixth form and FE colleges on the performing arts, sports and fashion is, to a growing extent, at the expense of other important parts of the curriculum, including engineering — an area key to the economic prosperity of the country.

I am by no means against sport or the ‘arts’. They have an important part to play in our national life and, indeed, the economy. The Arts Council England estimate a turnover of £12.6 billion for the ‘arts’ and half of that is income generation. The UK arts and culture sector employs over 110,000 full time equivalent employees.

Our economic future, however, cannot be sustained without engineers, and not least because the UK is believed to be on the threshold of a revival of manufacturing industry. Our education system needs to be the servant of our economy, not its master. It is time some reality crept into educational planning.

Personal View Point from Khalid Saud – primary school teacher

Top-down bullying: Why is it happening & how can we stop it?

“We will not tolerate failure!” – harsh words from David Cameron in his 2014 speech on giving school commissioners the power to instantly ‘fire’ headteachers from struggling and failing schools.

Although this was two years ago, it still makes my blood boil and I feel confident when I say that every teacher in the land probably wanted to throw their cereal at the TV screen that morning. And quite rightly so! What has happened to this profession? Any business leader will tell you this is not an effective way to get the best out of people. Our education system has a fundamental problem and it begins at the top.

This negative, bullying mentality begins the cascading top-down bullying that exists in schools nationwide. Teacher bullying is a grey area but one we are all familiar with, one we brush under the carpet, with many victims choosing to suffer alone due to feelings of shamefulness and fear of reprimand if they speak out.

Research into this area is still in its infancy, but it is a real problem; more commonplace than is realised or recognised. Having experienced it first-hand myself, I became interested in the subject and decided to explore this phenomenon further at university¹. My findings showed that education was one of the worst affected professions for workplace bullying, with teachers forming the largest occupational group to suffer from it.

71% of teachers who took part in the study had either experienced, witnessed or were aware that teacher bullying from senior management was taking place. Yes, 71%. That’s almost three quarters of teachers! 19% experienced one type of bullying, and a huge 52% experienced more than one type of bullying. This is a real problem, happening in a large number of schools across the country.

So what does this bullying look like?

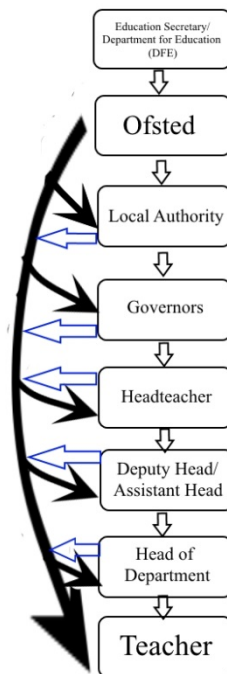


Figure 1: Model of downward bullying culture within education

The hierarchical and authoritative organisational style of leadership we have within schools in England, which focuses less on interpersonal relations and more on delegation of duties and meeting targets, is largely to blame.

Constant new initiatives mean headteachers are unable to keep up and are forced to run the school in a way contrary to their own beliefs, causing stress, disillusionment and reduction in job satisfaction. The knock-on effect for middle management is that more work continues to come their way and they are constantly required to modify their leadership skills in order to meet the requirements of new policies and procedures, whilst also maintaining 'good' or 'outstanding' teacher status. Add this to the increasing pressures from Ofsted and central government and an already unrealistic workload and it is no surprise that so many teachers are suffering from stress. Pressures from the top are filtering all the way down and causing havoc on the way.

Lack of management support is a huge problem, too. From heads, senior leaders, department heads, teachers, right the way through to NQTs and teacher trainees, we are all fire-fighting to complete our box-ticking that no-one has the time to support, guide or help anyone else.

Instead of having a more horizontal, transformational organisational culture where we all learn from and support one another, we have a hierarchical transactional approach that breeds authoritative leaders, high levels of competition, bullying and unrest amongst staff.

Unions don't and won't touch this with a bargepole, leaving hardworking and dedicated, but increasingly disheartened and downtrodden teachers with no choice but

to throw in the towel early, knowing there is a better life for them elsewhere. In fact, let's be honest, many teachers think of changing profession today, this week, this year. Whether you put that down to bullying or not, I expect some of these findings ring very true with each and every one of us in the profession today.

So, what's the answer? How can we make this stop?

Top-down bullying of teachers at every stage of their career is a truly destructive phenomenon. It should be looked on as seriously as other acts, which are already protected by legislation. Procedures and processes need to be implemented to change the culture that exists within our profession. It needs to start from the very top and filter its way down.

So, Mr Cameron, rather than 'not tolerating failure', why not work with schools and headteachers in a more supportive manner, to overcome challenges rather than threatening to fire people on the spot? Surely schools with high levels of staff morale will have a better impact on children's learning? You will not tolerate failure. But we will not tolerate working in a system where we are undervalued, over-worked and over-pressured, where we are all so scared to fail that we are bullying our staff in a desperate bid to make them perform, and where we are accepting being bullied from above as par for the course.

It's time to make the change. Let's all work together to make this happen.

ⁱ Article based on findings from MA dissertation 'Teacher Bullying: Exploring the Impact from Senior Management' by Khalid Saud.

'Jack the Ripper' as National Curriculum History

The Campaign for Real Education (CRE) has completed an interesting analysis of the *Times Educational Supplement* (TES) Resources website for teachers – the world's largest bank of model lessons. In the light of current concerns about an erosion of national identity, the focus of this particular analysis was on which 19th century history topics are most popular with teachers.

It should be understood that what really matters in school history lessons these days is something described as 'skills'. As part of a bogus 'skills' teaching process, pupils are taught to construct the past for themselves through the use of 'evidence'. The consequence of this approach is that teachers choose content that best lends itself to teaching the 'skills'.

Since pupils are supposed to be 'detectives' it may not come as a total surprise that

the CRE analysis showed that Jack the Ripper is one of the most popular 19th century history topics. The *TES* site lists 143 model lessons on the mass murderer compared to only 23 for Lord Palmerston, 27 for Cecil Rhodes, 35 for Nelson, 37 for Pitt the Younger, 56 for Lord Shaftesbury, 72 for the Duke of Wellington, 92 for Disraeli, 94 for Gladstone, 96 for William Wilberforce, 100 for Elizabeth Fry and 139 for Mary Seacole.

The content of some of these Jack the Ripper lessons is likely to shock and disturb many parents as well as pupils. Typical of the 'evidence' being presented to children as young as 11 is graphic description such as:

"The body was on its back, the head turned to left shoulder. The abdomen was exposed. The throat cut across. The intestines were drawn out to a large extent and placed over the right shoulder. A piece of about two feet was quite detached from the body and placed between the body and the left arm, apparently by design."

"The abdomen had been entirely laid open: the intestines, had been lifted out of the body and placed on the shoulder of the corpse; whilst from the pelvis, the uterus and the posterior two thirds of the bladder."

"The body was lying naked in the middle of the bed, the shoulders flat but the axis of the body inclined to the left side of the bed. The head was turned on the left cheek. The left arm was close to the body with the forearm flexed at a right angle and lying across the abdomen. The whole of the surface of the abdomen and thighs was removed and the abdominal cavity emptied of its viscera. The breasts were cut off, the arms mutilated by several jagged wounds and the face hacked beyond recognition of the features. The tissues of the neck were severed all round down to the bone. The neck was cut through the skin."

Even more shocking is an original police photograph of a mutilated victim. 11 to 14 year-olds are asked: "What 3 questions would you like to know [sic] about this picture?"

Teacher reviews of such material is enthusiastic:

"...that's really a valuable resource. Thanks a lot for sharing..."

"Thanks for all your hard work. This really engaged the students and saved me so much time."

"Excellent resource! It worked really well! The students engaged and enjoyed it. "

"Students really enjoyed it and engaged with it"

"Exsellent [sic] resource, my pupils were motivated and intrigued."

Certainly authors of this material seem very pleased with themselves:

"Here is a fully structured and resourced scheme of work for Jack the Ripper. I am an outstanding teacher and this is reflected through the scheme with literacy, numeracy and challenge activities. Progress is evident throughout. The scheme is easy to follow

and can be delivered by a non-specialist.”

Being fully ‘a la mode’, digital devices are part of the teaching package:

“Progress Review: Write a tweet to your followers to inform them of the horrific murder of Polly Nicholls.”

And even baseline assessment is linked in:

“Jack The Ripper – Baseline Assessment

This is a resource that is ready to use as a baseline assessment for humanities– it’s part of a Humanities curriculum that is taught to Year 7 pupils, so covers Geography, History and Literacy skills.”

“Students reconstruct the way that the Whitechapel murderer killed the victims by story boarding or creating a film or photostory with their mobile devices. They also have to evaluate the accuracy of a display of one of the victims in the London Dungeon.”

Needless to say the exam boards are cashing in, too, on the popularity with teachers of the aforesaid Jack. GCSE “Sample assessment materials for first teaching September 2016” from the Edexcel board specifically cover Jack the Ripper.

Alarming, the *TES*, largely a mouthpiece for the teaching profession, has been promoting Jack the Ripper for some time:

“19th- Century serial killer Jack the Ripper – infamous for murdering women and removing their vital organs...Who was Jack the Ripper? Find out in Miss R’s introductory lesson.

(Times Educational Supplement, History Resources for 11 to 18 Year olds, 28.6.2013)

Since knowledge of the landmark events and personalities of the past define national identity, classroom history really matters; never more so than now. Ditching much of this knowledge to find sensationalistic content that serves the requirements of bogus exercises in so-called historical ‘skills’ is a betrayal of the country as much as it is a betrayal of education. Heaven only knows what damage it is causing to vulnerable children. The degradation and degeneration of school history is growing.

No Comment

“... belonging to certain minority ethnic groups is a protective factor associated with greater resilience against low achievement at all levels of deprivation than is observed for white British pupils.” CentreForum: “Education in England Annual Report 2016”

“The inherent cultural supremacism in that term [fundamental British values] is both unnecessary and unacceptable.”

Christopher Denson, an NUT representative from Coventry, speaking at the NUT 2016 Easter conference

It is understood that ministers have been inspired to rebalance the curriculum by the independent Summerhill School. They have taken to describing the radical Suffolk-based experiment in “democratic schooling” as “the original free school”.

Times Educational Supplement 1.4.2016 :)

“My dad was one of those kids in the 1930s who would have failed any test designed by a liberal thinktank. He left school at 15. A lifetime of trade unionism, workplace discussion and self-education meant he could sight-read music, grapple with serious novels and sit through five hours of [Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg](#).”

Paul Mason (Economics Editor, Channel 4 News), “The Guardian” 4.4.2016