



YEARS OF WOMEN IN FURTHER
EDUCATION AND SKILLS

MARVELLOUS REGIMENT

ABOUT FETL

The Further Education Trust for Leadership's vision is of a further education sector that is valued and respected for:

- Innovating constantly to meet the needs of learners, communities and employers;
- Preparing for the long term as well as delivering in the short term; and
- Sharing fresh ideas generously and informing practice with knowledge.

This book collects a series of blog posts published during 2018 by the Further Education Trust for Leadership (FETL) to mark 100 years of the Representation of the People Act that extended the franchise to women over 30. The series celebrates the achievements of the women who have helped shape further education and skills over the past 100 years. The articles appear here in the order in which they were published on the FETL website.

The posts were written by Paul Stanistreet, who also edited this publication.

INTRODUCTION

Leading and shaping change: 100 years of women in FE

Ricky McMenemy

It is a huge pleasure to introduce this short book, which has been 100 years in the making. It tells the story of some of the many thousands of women whose lives have been touched by further education since the 1918 Representation of the People Act extended the franchise and who, in turn, have shaped its future direction, through their determination, their courage and their creativity. This book offers a snapshot of the achievements of 14 of the most prominent shapers and influencers of the past century, highlighting the careers and contributions of some of the women responsible for leading change in further education. A marvellous regiment, indeed.

The Representation of the People Act, which was given royal assent on 6 February 1918, gave the vote to women over 30 who met a minimum property qualification (full electoral equality for women took another 10 years). The importance of this anniversary cannot be overstated. Women have since seized the opportunity to make their mark in science, literature, music, politics, sport, the arts and education – in ways that would have been unthinkable before. Further education has played a special, though largely uncelebrated, role in this.

It is through further education that 'ordinary' women have been able to forge new pathways to freedom and independence, to create new spaces in which to learn to live different lives, whether through apprenticeships, vocational education, basic

skills or ESOL programmes, lifelong learning or access-to-HE courses. FE has also been a place in which women have been able to foster new networks and communities of mutual support and solidarity. It is little wonder, then, that they have also played a crucial part in populating the space in which we work with ideas, innovations and moral direction, agitating for a system that is fairer, more just and equitable.

As these stories demonstrate, it has not been an easy journey. There is always a cost to progress, and there is always resistance to change. Baroness Margaret Prosser, for example, would not have been able to become Deputy General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, President of the Trades Union Congress and a Labour life peer had she not been prepared to overcome entrenched chauvinism in the union movement in the early part of her career. It is doubtful too that Helena Kennedy would have achieved all she has in law and in education had she not come to see through the polished accents and air of superiority that came so naturally to her better-off counterparts at law school. These struggles are an important part of the story we are telling as, in many cases, they shaped the strong sense of fairness and justice that our protagonists brought to bear in their work, and that is also at the heart of the mission of further education.

While these stories are inspirational and each, in its own way, exceptional, they are mirrored in the lives of the many thousands of women who, in the course of the last 100 years, have challenged prejudice and discrimination to live the kind of change they wanted to see in wider society. Like the suffragists and suffragettes before them, they did not wait passively for change to come, but, instead, blazed a trail for the women coming after them who wanted to do and be something different. The battle is far from over. Women are still poorly represented in the boardroom and pay equality remains a distant prospect. Stereotyping in the workplace is still far too common and

careers advice continues to fail working-class girls and women. Meanwhile, cuts to further education spending have dramatically reduced the opportunities available to women to learn. The work of these pioneers is unfinished, both in education and in society as a whole. We now look to the pioneers of the future to further swell the ranks of this marvellous regiment, and write the next chapter of the story of further education as a major force in shaping women's lives.

Ricky McMenemy is Managing Director of Rules Restaurant, the oldest restaurant in London, and Chair of the Further Education Trust for Leadership

1

Jennie Lee



A miner's daughter and passionate socialist who overcame indifference and resistance to make the Open University a reality

'NOTHING BUT THE BEST IS GOOD ENOUGH'

Jennie Lee's story is remarkable. As a Labour MP and Minister for the Arts in the government of Harold Wilson, she was instrumental in the foundation of the Open University and, in particular, ensuring that access to this new 'University of the Air' was genuinely open and its academic standards high.

But she was groundbreaking in other ways, too, illustrating how, in the course of the twentieth century, education transformed the lives of many women, while women, in turn, began to transform education itself.

Lee was born on 3 November 1904, into a mining family in Lochgelly, Fife. Her father, James Lee, and grandfather, Michael Lee, were both active in the Independent Labour Party (her grandfather founded the local branch), and Lee would often accompany her father to party meetings, which he would chair. It was here that she encountered prominent Scottish socialists such as James Maxton and David Kirkwood and her political outlook was shaped, grounded in the language of class struggle.

She attended Edinburgh University, supported by bursaries, and became active in the University Labour Club, cultivating a growing reputation as a public speaker. As a young student she was strongly influenced by Thomas Hardy's *Jude the*

Obscure and its story of one working-class man's struggle to gain an education. She graduated with an MA, a teacher's diploma and a law degree, and began work as a teacher, all the while continuing her political activism in the ILP.

In 1929 she was nominated as ILP candidate for North Lanark, comfortably winning a by-election later that year (overturning a Conservative majority). At 24, she became the youngest MP in parliament, ironically at an age when she, at the time, was not entitled to vote. The 1928 Equal Franchise Act, which came into force in the 1929 general election, gave the vote to women aged between 21 and 29 for the first time, adding five million women to the electoral roll in the 1929 general election (the Representation of the People Act 1918 enfranchised all men and all women over the age of 30 who met minimum property requirements). Her bold, irreverent style of speaking made a significant impact on the male-dominated House of Commons, while her socialist commitments brought her into conflict with senior figures in her own party.

Lee lost her seat in the Conservative landslide of 1931 (and failed to regain it in 1935) but continued to write articles in journals and newspapers and to lecture on politics. In 1934 she married Aneurin Bevan, then a rising star in the Labour Party. Increasingly, Lee put her political energies into supporting Bevan, whom she viewed as the future of the Labour left (increasingly important to her after the demise of the ILP). Having been charged with keeping aircraft factories running during the war, Lee was re-elected to the Commons as Labour MP for Cannock, Staffordshire, in 1945. She was steadfast in her support of Bevan, defending him in the in-fighting that followed Labour losing power in 1951.

Lee emerged as a national figure in her own right following Bevan's death in 1960. When Labour won the 1964 general election, Prime Minister Harold Wilson appointed her Minister for the Arts, in which capacity she was asked to lead on setting up the Open University, which Wilson regarded as the greatest achievement of his government. She showed great determination in pushing through a project in which civil servants and many Labour colleagues had little interest, and ensured that the new university was true to the dual principles of academic rigour and open access, going significantly beyond Wilson's own vision of a 'new educational trust'. Laying the foundation stone of the OU's Jennie Lee Library in 1973, she praised 'a great independent university which does not insult any man or any women whatever their background by offering them the second best. Nothing but the best is good enough.'

As arts minister, Lee strove to widen access to the arts and culture, while resisting the temptation to link government funding to political influence. Although her direct influence on further education was slight, her indirect influence in establishing the principle of open access and widening working people's access to education more generally was immense. Just as importantly, she defended the principle that open access need not mean any dilution of standards.

Lee retired from the House of Commons in 1970, becoming Baroness Lee of Asheridge. She died in 1988.

2

Margaret Thatcher



As Education Secretary and Prime Minister, she exercised profound influence on the direction of further education policy

FE AS AN INSTRUMENT OF ECONOMIC POLICY

Margaret Thatcher served in Edward Heath's government as Secretary of State for Education and Science for a little short of four years, making her one of the longest-serving incumbents in recent history.

Her tenure is remembered for her ending the policy of free milk in schools (giving rise to the soubriquet 'Margaret Thatcher, Milk Snatcher'). However, she was also responsible for raising the school leaving age and opening more comprehensive schools than any other secretary of state.

Thatcher also, importantly, signed off the final report of the Russell Committee, set up in 1969 to review non-vocational adult education in England and Wales and to recommend ways of obtaining 'the most effective and economical deployment of available resources to enable adult education to make its proper contribution to the national system of education conceived as a process continuing through life'.

The Russell Report was published in 1973 and called for 'a great development of non-technical studies ... vital to provide the fullest opportunities for personal development and for the realization of a true conception of citizenship.' Too great an emphasis, it argued, 'had been laid on material consideration and too little regard paid to other aspects of life', recognising that the value of education was to

be measured not only by increases in earning power or productive capacity, but also by the quality of life it inspired. The report put special emphasis on targeting provision for 'disadvantaged' adults.

The report was received coolly by Thatcher and, while its recommendations called for only a 'very modest' increase in expenditure, the climate of cuts precipitated by the oil crisis of 1973–74 meant there would be no endorsement of the report's vision of 'a comprehensive and flexible service of adult education'. Thatcher's lack of enthusiasm for the Russell Report helped ensure adult education remained marginal to government policy for years to come, really until 1997, when David Blunkett's *Learning Age* Green Paper set out a broader vision for further education and lifelong learning.

The emphasis on the economic benefits of education was also in evidence after Thatcher became Prime Minister, complemented and reinforced by a tendency to see education in instrumental terms, with an increased central role for the state in pulling the levers. Her government could be seen as taking up the Russell Report's call for more attention on the unemployed and vocational training, but this precipitated a narrowing in the curriculum, particularly in further education, with education for purposes other than employment increasingly marginalised in a climate of reduced education spending and recession.

Spending on training activities nevertheless increased threefold between 1979 and 1991, with numerous initiatives introduced to promote vocational training and increase employers' involvement in further education. At

the same time, provision in the arts and social science, and academic subjects generally, fell into sharp decline. This trend reached its apogee with the publication, in 1991, of the White Paper which heralded the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act. It proposed the formation of a new quango, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), with a role to plan and fund national priorities for the improvement of skills and qualifications.

The FEFC would have a statutory responsibility to fund only further education courses which led to a vocational or academic qualification – what the White Paper characterised as ‘useful’ learning – effectively painting publicly supported education for personal, community and social purposes out the picture. It was only after a vigorous campaign of protest, galvanising, among others, the National Federation of Women’s Institutes, that a statutory duty on local authorities to ensure ‘adequate’ provision of adult education outside the FEFC remit was retained. The failure of the Act to specify what was meant by ‘adequate’ precipitated an abrupt decline in non-vocational local authority provision.

The Act cemented the gap between vocational courses of further education and courses for personal and community interest, satisfaction and growth. It removed further education colleges from local authority control (colleges became freestanding corporations in receipt of central government funding through the FEFC) and created a newly defined further education sector responsible for securing adequate provision of certain categories of education, listed in Schedule 2 of the Act, including vocational and qualification courses, higher education access courses, adult

literacy and numeracy, ESOL and skills acquisition for people with learning difficulties.

Thatcher's time as Prime Minister saw political interest in further education as an instrument of economic and social reform increase. Central government established unprecedented levels of control over schools, colleges, universities and local authority adult learning, and demonstrated increasing levels of intolerance for teachers who had an agenda different to the government. One positive outcome was the increased attention on vocational training and the needs of the economically excluded. The price paid for this, however, was a narrowing of the curriculum and an increased tendency towards micro-management of the sector among ministers. Whatever your opinion of this divisive figure, her influence has been immense.

3

Margaret Prosser



A pioneer of equality who led the influential Women and Work Commission that championed women's opportunities to access further education

A FAIRER FUTURE WITH EDUCATION AT ITS HEART

Margaret Prosser was born in 1937 into a working class family in Tooting, London. Her father was a builder and her mother a housewife. Like many working class children of the time, she left education aged 15, and married young.

It was as a working mum that she became engaged in politics and equality issues, becoming active in local campaigning when her husband became paralysed through illness in 1966, at the age of 29. It led to her involvement in the trades union movement and national politics. What happened to her husband opened her eyes to the ways in which politics affects people's lives, and much of her early campaigning was about disability rights.

In 1971, Prosser joined the Labour Party. She began studying as a mature student at North East London Polytechnic in the 1970s, emerging in 1977 with a Postgraduate Diploma in Advice and Information Studies and a strong sense of the value of further education and training for women, at every stage of their lives.

Prosser's interest in politics continued to grow as she rose through the ranks of the male-dominated Transport and General Workers' Union, taking a number of prominent

roles before becoming Deputy General Secretary in 1998. Her experience of sexism and inequality at the front line of trade union activism and as a national organiser shaped her professional commitment to tackling inequality. A prominent advocate of equal pay at a time when the issue was considered, at best, peripheral (many were openly hostile to it), she was a member of the Equal Opportunities Commission between 1985 and 1992 and served on the Low Pay Commission between 2000 and 2005. She was President of the Trades Union Congress in 1996 and from 1996 to 2001 was Treasurer of the Labour Party.

In 2002, Prosser was appointed Chair of the Women's National Commission and in 2004 was approached by Prime Minister Tony Blair to chair the Women and Work Commission. The commission's aim was 'to examine the causes of the gender pay and opportunities gap and to find practical ideas to close it within a generation'. Its report, *Shaping a Fairer Future*, was published in 2006. It called for action on a number of fronts to enable women to achieve their full potential and maximise their contribution to the economy and society.

It put particular emphasis on education and the need for more and different further education provision for women. More opportunities were needed to open up male-dominated industries to girls and women, it said, with careers advice and guidance available throughout life and more education and training options for mature women wanting to change direction. The report recommended the development of comprehensive plans to tackle segregation in the workplace in different industries, careers advice that challenged gender stereotypes, a more local approach to

matching skills and jobs, a more balanced approach to education with a greater emphasis on practical routes, and increased investment in training and pilot measures designed 'to enable women to change direction, and progress in their jobs and careers, through raising their skills levels'.

The report is still acutely relevant, largely because most of the issues it raised have still to be adequately addressed. More than a decade after the report was published, men still, typically, earn eight per cent more per hour than women in the UK, education funding remains skewed in favour of academic provision, and opportunities for men and women to learn throughout life have collapsed, in both FE and HE. Successive governments have failed to live up to Prosser's injunction to oversee the implementation of the recommendations and 'actively monitor and chase progress in closing the gender pay gap in partnership with other players'.

In June 2004, Margaret Prosser from Tooting became Baroness Prosser of Battersea in the London Borough of Wandsworth. When her tenure as Chair of the Women's Commission ended in 2006, she became Deputy Chair of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights, a position she held until 2012. She continues to campaign for the rights of women, in the UK and internationally.

4

Henrietta Barnett



Social reformer and leader of the settlement movement who believed education could overcome class division and create a more cohesive society

LEARNING, PLACE AND SOCIAL PURPOSE

Henrietta Barnett (*née* Rowland) was born on 4 May 1851 in Clapham, London. Her mother died soon after her birth and she and her seven siblings were raised by her father, a wealthy businessman, in Kent. When her father died, she moved to Bayswater with two of her sisters.

It was there she encountered the housing reformer Octavia Hill and began to dedicate time to support her efforts to develop social housing for London's poor families. It was through Hill that Barnett was introduced to the ideas of John Ruskin and to her future husband Samuel Augustus Barnett, a curate who shared her passion for social action. Together, they moved to the poor and overcrowded Whitechapel parish of St Jude's, intent on improving social conditions, particularly among women and children.

This work led Barnett and her husband to found the world's first 'university settlement', Toynbee Hall (named after Arnold Toynbee, an historian and early advocate of adult education), in the East End of London in 1884. The aim of the settlement was to bring together people of different classes to live and learn in the same community. Barnett believed that if students from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge lived among the poor and gained an insight into their lives it would help reduce inequality, while enabling

those with the privilege of education to share what they knew. The work began with 16 settlers and soon developed into a substantial programme of social welfare and adult education. Toynbee Hall became an early home to the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and attracted some notable settlers, including economist William Beveridge, future Labour Prime Minister Clement Atlee, and R.H. Tawney, the economic historian and social critic who played a major part in the development of the WEA. Stanton Coit, who established the first American settlement, in New York, in 1886, and Jane Addams, who established America's best-known and most influential settlement house, Hull House, in Chicago, a few years later, also visited the settlement. Within a few decades, there were more than 400 university settlements across the United States.

Barnett's belief in the power of working-class education grew from her lifelong commitment to reducing inequality and closing the gap between social classes. She continued to advocate settlements, proposing the creation of a women's university settlement in Southwark. Her writings challenged misconceptions about the poor, highlighting the dignity with which many of those in poverty lived their lives. In her later life, Barnett focused most of her energies on creating Hampstead Garden Suburb. Her aim was to create a community in which people of all social classes could live a 'neighbourly' life and where decent housing and social amenities could be enjoyed by all. At the heart of this community, she built an educational and social centre, a place of learning modelled on Toynbee Hall to which all were welcome. The centre offered lecture programmes and gave people a local space in which to think and discuss.

Barnett's work, seen through a modern lens, can appear to embody the somewhat patronizing and naïve form of altruism typical of many philanthropic Victorians. However, unlike many of her peers, she was prepared to exemplify the change she wanted in wider society, living among those whose lot she sought to improve, while actively championing the kinds of reforms, in housing and education, that would enable them to act with greater agency in their own lives. She recognized the importance of closing the inequality gap, and the role of education, especially adult education, in doing this. She also saw the relevance of place in education and the need for communal spaces in which people could come together and learn. The settlement movement, which stemmed from the creation of Toynbee Hall, became a kind of hothouse for innovative social policy and reform, particularly in the field of education.

Barnett continued her campaigning work throughout her life, focusing on the role of housing and education in social reform, her work informed by her belief that such action could achieve significant social change. She died in her Hampstead home in 1936.

5

Margaret Sharp



A fierce advocate of sector autonomy, she set out a vision of colleges as key players in their local communities

COLLEGES IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

A tireless champion of further education and for many years the Liberal Democrat spokesperson for further and higher education in the Lords, Baroness Margaret Sharp has been a longstanding advocate of colleges' capacity to offer leadership and shape the educational offer in their communities.

Until her retirement from the Lords in 2016, she was widely acknowledged as one of the few peers to understand the sector well. Her ideas remain influential and she continues to lobby for strong, stable and adequately funded FE colleges able to take a leading role in their towns, cities and regions.

Before her political career began in the 1980s, Baroness Sharp was an economist and civil servant. After graduating from Newnham College, Cambridge, she worked in the (then) Board of Trade before becoming a lecturer at London School of Economics in 1964, specialising in public policy issues. From 1973 to 1976, she lived in Washington DC where her husband was Commercial Counsellor at the British Embassy and she had a guest Fellowship at the Brookings Institution. On returning to the UK, she took up a post at the National Economic Development Office and became interested in the areas of skills and innovation.

She pursued these interests as a research fellow at the Science Policy Research Unit (SPRU), at Sussex University, between 1981 and 1999, and from 1992 to 1999 as Co-Director of the Economic and Social Research Council Centre at SPRU, leading a series of projects on technology and innovation.

She became active in politics in the 1980s, first with the Social Democratic Party and then with the Liberal Democrats. She worked closely with leader Paddy Ashdown in the 1990s on policy development, including in employment and education. Joining the Lords in 1998 as Baroness Sharp of Guildford, one of her first challenges was working on the bill that created the Learning and Skills Council, which oversaw and supported colleges in the period from 2000 to 2010. As her knowledge of the sector grew, she established important contacts with organisations such as the Association of Colleges and the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE). She became Liberal Democrat education spokesperson in the Lords in 2000, masterminding, among other things, the party's rejection at that stage (2000–2010) of top-up fees for university tuition and arguing strongly against their shift of policy in 2010.

Increasingly concerned at the drift to increased central control of the sector under Labour, after 2010 she began to work closely with John Hayes MP, skills minister in the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government. Hayes was committed to reversing the trend towards increased government intervention in colleges and to introducing new 'freedoms and flexibilities' to the sector. In 2011, Baroness Sharp was asked by NIACE to lead an Independent Commission on Colleges in their Communities. The

Commission, under her sharp-minded, critical leadership, strove to show how colleges could become more proactive in their communities, taking a leadership role in close collaboration with employers, local authorities and other key organizations, such as job centres and third-sector providers.

The Commission's final report set out a vision of colleges as a 'dynamic nucleus' at the heart of their communities, promoting a 'shared agenda of activities which both fulfil their central role of providing learning and skills training to young people and adults, but also reach out into their communities, catalysing a whole range of further activities'. It saw colleges as 'the central player in a network of partnerships, dynamic in the sense of developing and engaging with other partners'. Achieving this vision required the formation of partnerships based on mutual trust, joined-up local government, a new generation of entrepreneurial college leaders, more flexible funding so colleges had more discretion in allocating resources and a new approach to governance and accountability with a focus on community engagement.

The report remains highly influential, perhaps more so now than ever given the renewed interest in the relevance of place and community to the mission of further education and skills. However, subsequent ministers have not shared Hayes's commitment to colleges' autonomy and their role in the community and the focus of his successors has shifted to increasing the role and control of employers. Baroness Sharp however remains a thorn in the side of politicians who fail to recognize the value of the sector or underestimate its potential in supporting economic growth

and tackling issues such as social mobility. Typically, she used her farewell parliamentary speech in 2016 to warn of the chaos being created by rushed apprenticeship reforms. She remains a friend to the sector, including to FETL, and continues to be intellectually engaged in discussions of its future, attending, for example, FETL's 2018 lecture on the highly topical subject of whistleblowing. Her resolve in promoting further education as a means of addressing social inequalities and the economic and social challenges of the near future is, happily, undiminished.

6

Pauline Perry



A champion of further education, she demanded parity of esteem between technical and vocational education and academic study

A PASSION FOR OPPORTUNITY

Baroness Pauline Perry's first teaching job in the UK was at a girls' secondary modern school in a 'slum area' of Wolverhampton. The height of her pupils' ambition, she recalled years later in her valedictory speech in the House of Lords, was to work in the 'dirty room' – the 'acid room' – of the local Eveready factory because 'although they knew that they would lose the ends of their fingers after a few years, it paid better than any other available job'.

Even though they were 'bright, often clever girls', they were 'given no challenge in the curriculum on offer in the school, and no hope for a more ambitious future', she said. 'I vowed to do what I could to see an offering of different education for young people like them – one which would raise their aspirations and their life chances.'

The experience of working with these warm, funny, intelligent girls, sparked Baroness Perry's lifelong passion for education, and helped make her one of the shrewdest, best-informed and most knowledgeable modern political voices on the subject, her insights spanning primary, secondary, further education and higher education. As a Conservative peer, she demonstrated a meticulous eye for

detail and a willingness to work across parties, notably with Baroness Sharp, Liberal Democrat education spokesperson in the Lords, in ensuring that education bills 'were better when they left this house than when they arrived'. Her contribution to public life is substantial.

Baroness Perry's political life was the culmination of decades of active involvement in education. Born Pauline Welch in 1931, she was educated at Wolverhampton Girls' School and Girton College, Cambridge. She married Oxford University lecturer George Perry in 1952, just a few weeks after graduating from Cambridge. His work as a university professor took the couple to Canada and the United States, where Baroness Perry began her career as a teacher and lecturer, work she combined with early motherhood. The couple had four children during this time, three sons and a daughter. She continued teaching when they returned to England, while also sharpening her skills as a writer and broadcaster.

In 1970, Baroness Perry joined HM Inspectorate in the Department of Education and Science, accumulating wide experience of inspection in schools and further education colleges. She was appointed Chief Inspector of Schools in 1981, a post she held for five years. In January 1987, she was made vice-chancellor of South Bank Polytechnic, and oversaw its conversion into a university in 1992, when she became the first woman in history to lead a British university. She went on to hold a number of other key roles in higher education, including President of Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge, which aims to give women an opportunity to study in later life. She set up the Lucy

Cavendish College Centre for Women Leaders in 1996. Other roles included the post of pro-chancellor of the University of Surrey.

Baroness Perry became a life peer in 1991 (the same year she was awarded the Freedom of the City of London). Her first recorded contribution, from the Conservative benches, was on the Further and Higher Education Bill, which introduced substantial changes to the funding and administration of further education and higher education in England and Wales, including allowing 35 polytechnics, her own included, to become 'new' universities and removing colleges from local authority control. She welcomed the move to greater independence for colleges, noting that 'There is an organic dynamic within institutions which enables and encourages them to service the needs of their community and the nation far better than any external planning can hope to do'. She also welcomed the conversion of polytechnics to universities as a crucial step forward in achieving 'parity of esteem' between academic and vocational education.

This was to be a theme of Baroness Perry's many contributions in the Lords. Debating the 2002 Education Bill, she urged:

We need parity of esteem between vocational and academic education. We need it for the sake of the country; we need it for the sake of the economy; and we need it for the sake of the kids themselves. However, we are saying to the less motivated kids, to the less bright kids, and to the ones who are failing, that they can become the vocational stream and that the brightest kids can go into the other stream.

While unafraid to call out bad teaching, she also believed in giving teachers the freedom to teach, and recognised the challenges posed by the frequency of new legislation (11 education bills in seven years under Labour, she noted). She also believed in allowing students the opportunity to pursue their own passions in learning and not have subjects imposed on them, arguing that they would 'find breadth within their own studies if they are well taught'. She became increasingly concerned at the drift towards greater centralisation in the later years of New Labour. 'Decisions get progressively worse the further they are away from the people who actually have to implement them,' she said. 'The people who are implementing the decisions are the ones who should take them and make them'.

In 2016, after 25 years in Parliament, including 13 years as Chair of the All-Party Universities Group, she retired from the House of Lords to make room for younger voices. In her final speech, on 23 May, she spoke of education as the

foundation of everything which establishes this country's place in the world order. Education changes lives and changes societies... Good education gives to our young people the freedom of our culture as a nation: an open mind, strong values and character, the richness of science, language, art history, and so much more. But poor education, whether in the failing schools of our own country or in areas of extreme poverty in the wider world, indeed deprives the young of the freedom of their culture.

She reminded her fellow peers of the 'transforming power of education', that economic growth and productivity depend on it, as does the advancement of technology and our ability to deal with it. Her commitment to giving all young people the opportunity to benefit from a decent education, fostered in her early years as a teacher, drove both her political career and her leadership in education, and few have made a more impressive or concerted contribution to delivering it.

7

Helena Kennedy



Author of the hugely important Learning Works report who put social inclusion and second chances at the heart of her vision for further education

LEARNING WORKS

The Further Education Funding Council, established by the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act that removed colleges from local authority control, was given a brief to promote access to further education ‘for people who do not participate in education and training, but who could benefit from it’.

In 1994, the council appointed Helena Kennedy QC to chair a committee to advise it on this aim. The report she produced has proved enormously influential, most notably on FE policy devised under Labour Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett, and remains a key reference point for those who recognise the potential of further education to improve social mobility and reduce exclusion.

Kennedy’s own background is testament to the transformative power of education. She was born on the south side of Glasgow in 1950 to working-class parents whose Catholic faith and commitment to social justice shaped her political outlook and fostered in her a sense of responsibility to others. Both were active members of the Labour Party and her father, who was a printer at the *Daily Record*, was a trade unionist. Unlike her three older sisters, Kennedy stayed on at school before moving to London to study law. She had to curb her Glasgow accent to make

herself understood among the highly confident, polished ex-public school boys who were now her peers. She soon came to think of their 'superiority' as merely 'cosmetic'; a 'veneer' with no real substance.

Human rights became her legal specialism, as well as her passion. It shaped her career, not only as a barrister but also as a broadcaster, author and campaigner, as well as in a series of high-profile public roles. The desire to see a fairer, more equal and socially just society was a driver in all her work, and because she had experienced first-hand how education can transform lives, making those opportunities available to people from non-privileged backgrounds became a keen and growing concern.

The invitation to chair the Further Education Funding Council committee on widening participation in FE came at a time when, she felt, colleges were overly preoccupied with competing with each other and were, thus, going 'in pursuit of the students who are most likely to succeed'. 'Second-chance' education had fallen out of view. Her committee's final report, *Learning Works*, published in June 1997, set out to challenge this neglect of what Kennedy saw as a core part of the mission of FE colleges. It argued that education was the common foundation for economic prosperity and social cohesion and condemned the inadequacy of the policies that had achieved significant growth in post-16 learning in the 1990s on the grounds that they had failed to include socially and economically disadvantaged adults. 'Education must be at the heart of any inspired project for regeneration in Britain,' it said.

The report called on government to take the lead by creating a national strategy for post-16 learning to support the aspiration that all should achieve at Level 3 (A-level or vocational equivalent) and to reinforce this by creating a 'lifetime entitlement' to education up to Level 3, establishing new national learning targets and offering financial incentives to enable colleges to expand their missions. Widening participation should be at the heart of the priorities set for the education world, with particular attention paid to people outside the workforce, women returners and adults with poor basis skills, it said. The committee saw the opportunity to achieve at Level 3 as the essential basis for the creation of a 'self-perpetuating learning society' and argued that public funding should be redistributed towards those with less success in earlier learning, moving towards equity in funding in post-16 education. The report also called for a credit accumulation system and new 'pathways to learning': a 'united system for recognising achievement'.

The newly elected Secretary of State, David Blunkett, warmly endorsed the vision and spirit of the report. He created a National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning to advise him on a new lifelong learning strategy. Its first report, *Learning for the Twenty-First Century*, was heavily influenced by *Learning Works*, not least in its call for the development of 'a new learning culture, a culture of lifelong learning for all' to meet the challenges of economic, social and technological change. This call was taken up by Blunkett in his foreword to Labour's 1998 Green Paper, *The Learning Age: A renaissance for a new Britain*. 'To achieve stable and sustainable growth,' Blunkett wrote, 'we will need a well-educated, well-equipped and adaptable

labour force. To cope with rapid change we must ensure that people can return to learning throughout their lives. We cannot rely on a small elite: we need the creativity, enterprise and scholarship of all our people.'

While *The Learning Age* remains a touchstone for those with radical ambitions for further education as an engine of social mobility, for others it is also a reminder of much Labour's ambitions for the sector narrowed over the course of its time in office, as it focused increasingly on young people and embraced a more utilitarian approach to education, and further education, in particular. Regrettably, more than 20 years after the publication of *Learning Works*, Kennedy's memorably phrased admonishment, 'If at first you don't succeed ... you don't succeed', remains as relevant as ever for people from less privileged backgrounds. While progress has been made in widening participation in higher education, the potential of further education remains to a large extent unfulfilled, and for most disadvantaged young people opportunities are narrower than they were in the 1990s.

Kennedy was created a life peer, as Baroness Kennedy of the Shaws, in 1997. She played a pivotal role in getting a Human Rights Act into the Labour Party manifesto of 1997 and continued to put social justice and the defence of civil liberties at the heart of her work thereafter. In her own words, she remains a 'champion of the underdog'. Her incredibly diverse work portfolio includes chairing constitutional reform group Charter 88 from 1992 to 1997, the Human Genetics Commission from 1998 to 2007 and the British Council from 1998 to 2004. The Helena Kennedy Foundation was set up a decade after the publication of *Learning Works* by former college principal Ann Limb to

widen participation in education. The foundation provides bursaries, mentoring and support to disadvantaged students, enabling them to complete their studies and move into employment. Kennedy was Principal of Mansfield College, Oxford, from 2011 to 2018. She sought, in the role, to improve access for those applying from FE and other non-traditional routes. Her abiding passion for social justice was evident in an interview with the *Guardian* in 2017. 'We're making a society that's hard, celebrating money as the only thing that really matters,' she said. 'I still believe in the common good. I can't reconcile myself to this market-led world. I shall fight it till my dying breath.'

8

Ellen Wilkinson



Political firebrand and passionate internationalist who become the first female Secretary of State for Education

A PIONEER WITH A PASSION FOR JUSTICE

Ellen Wilkinson was born into a working-class family in Manchester in 1891. Her father, Richard, was a textile worker and Methodist lay preacher, while her mother, Ellen, was a dressmaker. Growing up, Wilkinson's frequent illnesses prevented her from attending school regularly.

Nevertheless, she was an avid reader who shared her parents' belief in self-improvement and won a scholarship to Ardwick Higher Elementary Grade School when she was 11. She often accompanied her father to lectures and public meetings, which sharpened her interest in politics and socialism, and joined the Independent Labour Party when she was 16. In 1910, she passed a scholarship examination to study history at Manchester University, an exceptional achievement for a young working-class woman of the time.

In 1912, Wilkinson joined the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. She was soon recruited as the union's Manchester district organiser, raising funds, recruiting members and addressing public meetings. In 1915, she became the first woman national official to be employed by the Amalgamated Union of Cooperative Employees (which, in 1921, amalgamated further with the National Union of Warehouse and General Workers to form the National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers), with a special

responsibility for recruiting women to the union. During the First World War, she campaigned against compulsory conscription and was active in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, which demanded a negotiated end to the war.

Wilkinson became active in the National Guilds League, an organisation that promoted industrial democracy and workers' control, and in the newly formed Communist Party of Great Britain, and attended the founding conference of the Red International of Labour Unions, in Moscow in 1921. In 1923, while still a member of the Communist Party, she was elected councillor for Manchester's Gorton ward, standing for the Gorton Trades and Labour Council. However, she left the party in 1924 when the Labour Party proscribed dual membership and, later that year, was elected Labour MP for Middlesbrough East, becoming one of only four women (and the only Labour woman MP) in the House of Commons. She remained firmly on the left of the party, however, and was a frequent critic of party leadership. She campaigned actively on issues related to unemployment, workers' rights, parliamentary reform and education. Wilkinson lost her seat in 1931, returning for a time to trade unionism, before standing again, successfully, as MP for Jarrow, in the 1935 General Election.

It was in this capacity that Wilkinson came to national prominence. The unemployment rate in Jarrow was among the highest in the country – thanks, in large part, to the loss of its shipyard – and she used her first speech of the new parliament to highlight the town's struggles and the plight of her constituents. In October 1936, she helped organise and took part in an iconic march from Jarrow to London

where 200 unemployed workers – calling themselves the 'Jarrow Crusaders' – presented a petition to parliament. Wilkinson spoke at public meetings of the marchers at the end of each day's march. Although the march attracted wide publicity, it was not widely supported within the Labour Party and the Conservative Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, refused to meet the marchers or to receive their petition. Nevertheless, the march put Jarrow firmly on the political map, and the marchers were received triumphantly on their return. The Jarrow March came to be seen as a milestone event in the history of the Labour Party.

Wilkinson campaigned actively against fascism in the years before the war, including during the Spanish Civil War, when she argued against the government's policy of non-intervention, and was a member of the International Commission of Enquiry into the Reichstag Fire. During the Second World War, she held a junior ministerial position in Churchill's coalition government, acting as parliamentary secretary to Home Secretary Herbert Morrison, in which capacity she oversaw the provision of air raid shelters and civil defence. She toured Britain's bombed cities, raising morale and encouraging women to get involved in civil defence. In 1945, following Labour's landslide electoral victory, new Prime Minister Clement Atlee appointed her Minister of Education, with a seat in his cabinet. She was the first woman to hold the position and only the second ever to hold a cabinet post. She was responsible for raising the school-leaving age to 15 (she had lobbied to increase it to 16 but the government rejected her plan as too expensive) and for the 1946 School Milk Act that gave free milk to all British schoolchildren. She oversaw the mass recruitment and training of new teachers (including a

scheme to train thousands of ex-servicemen and women), an increase in university scholarships and the expansion of part-time adult education in colleges. Wilkinson also helped draft the constitution of UNESCO, chairing the meeting that established the new organisation's terms of reference and agreed its mandate to 'build peace in the minds of men' [sic]. Wilkinson died suddenly, aged 55, in February 1947. The official cause of death was 'heart failure following emphysema, with acute bronchitis and bronchial pneumonia, accelerated by barbiturate poisoning'.

Short of stature – she was just four foot 10 inches tall – with red hair (often offset with a bright green dress) and a reputation as a firebrand, Wilkinson cut a vivid, distinctive figure, even among the small number of women who had advanced in politics at the time. Despite popular nicknames such as 'Red Ellen' and the 'Fiery Particle', she was taken seriously as a politician and was widely respected for her loyalty to her constituents. She was an important, outspoken and independent-minded contributor to the international fight against fascism and to efforts to build peace in Europe after the war. Her commitment to social justice and equality was evident throughout her career, as well as in her time as Minister of Education, which saw her strive to expand the reach of education, increasing the school leaving age and opening up more opportunities for adults to learn. While her time in office was cut short, and she was reportedly frustrated at her failure to implement more radical reforms to the education system, she remains important as a key pioneer of female participation in political life and as a crucial early advocate of equality of opportunity in education. After her death, Churchill said of her:

Active, courageous, competent, accessible, she had many of the traits at which ministers of every government and of every party have been taught to aim. She had a very warm sympathy for social causes of all kinds, and was fearless and vital in giving expression to them. But she also had a great pride in our country and in its flag. This was very noticeable in several of her speeches and actions, not only during the crisis of the war, but later. She always wished to see this Island great and famous, and capable of offering a decent home to all its people.

9

Alice Brown



Glass-ceiling breaker who became Edinburgh University's first female vice-principal, despite leaving school at 15

CREATING A CULTURE OF EQUALITY

Born in Edinburgh in 1946, Alice Brown left school aged 15 to 'get a proper job'. She worked as a shorthand typist for an insurance company, leaving in 1964 when she became engaged, as it was the policy of the company not to employ married women.

She joined a firm of surveyors where, she later recalled, she was treated as an equal and was able to learn the business. However, her limited qualifications prevented her from progressing as far as she might have. At the time, her husband was studying at university so it wasn't possible for Brown to return to education. She spent the next seven years supporting her husband's studies and looking after their two children, undertaking 'odd jobs and bits and pieces just to keep the home going'.

When Brown returned to work, she went to night class at Stevenson College to take her Highers (Scotland's university entrance qualifications). The experience convinced her to enter higher education and, aged 34, she enrolled at Edinburgh University to study politics and economics. It was a daunting experience. She felt 'old and out of her depth'. After her first day, Brown told her husband she wasn't going back. However, she stuck at it, supported by sympathetic staff used to working with mature students, and, in 1983,

graduated with a first-class degree and winning the DP Heatley Prize – awarded to the top honours graduate of the year – in the process. She continued with her studies, undertaking a PhD at Edinburgh while also working full-time at the University of Stirling and then the University of Edinburgh. She gained her doctorate in 1990. Her research, which was funded by ACAS, focused on industrial relations.

Brown held a series of temporary lecturing posts at Edinburgh University before securing a permanent job in the politics department in which she had taken her first degree. A series of rapid promotions followed, with Brown becoming a senior lecturer and a professor before appointments as, first, head of the department, and then as head of faculty. Much of her research focused on improving equalities policies and addressing the under-representation of women in decision-making roles, in work and in public life, including through the Gender Audit for Scotland, which she and her colleagues developed. In 1998, Brown was appointed Co-director of the university's Institute of Governance and, in 1999, she became Edinburgh's first female vice-principal – less than 10 years after graduating with a PhD. Through her leadership roles in the university, she strove to create a 'culture of equality' at every level of institutional life, among both staff and students. Universities, she argued, should be about the production of 'useful knowledge', providing open and inclusive spaces in which to engage with politics and society.

External recognition followed her appointment and Brown began to take an active role in public life, for example through her involvement in the Nolan Committee into Standards in Public Life, which identified seven key

principles of conduct for holders of public offices. She was also invited by Donald Dewar, the first holder of the office of First Minister in Scotland, to be a member of the consultative steering group responsible for designing procedures for the new Scottish Parliament (for which she campaigned). In 2002, she was appointed to the newly created role of Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, gaining 'a unique insight into all areas of public life' and having an opportunity to improve the delivery of public services. She held the post until her retirement from full-time employment in 2009. Nevertheless, she continued to contribute to public life in Scotland and the UK. She served as General Secretary of the Royal Society of Edinburgh from 2011 to 2013, and as Chair of the Scottish Funding Council from 2013 to 2017. In both cases, she was the first woman to hold the position.

Unsurprisingly for someone whose career has broken so much ground for women, Brown has been and remains a passionate advocate of social justice and equality of opportunity. Throughout her career, she has striven to promote gender equality and widen participation in education, as well as in politics and public life. She has also taken an active role in high-profile campaigns to support the equal representation of women and was a founder member of Engender, a women's campaign organisation. Her energy and commitment to achieving equality have been remarkable. Her contribution was recognised with a CBE in 2010. She has also received numerous honorary degrees and fellowships, and, in 2017, the *Herald* Higher Education Lifetime Achievement Award followed by the Scottish Public Services Lifetime Achievement Award later

that year. In a speech to graduates at Edinburgh College shortly after receiving the *Herald* award, Brown highlighted the importance of hard work, resilience, adaptability, mutual respect and encouragement and support of others – all fitting descriptions of her own career.

10

Alison Wolf



An academic and writer whose work has exercised significant influence on the shape of further education policy over the past two decades

SHAPING THE FURTHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

Born in 1949, Alison Wolf had little interest in education when she graduated from Somerville College, Oxford, planning to begin work as a financial journalist on the *Daily Mail*. However, a job offer to her husband, the economics commentator Martin Wolf, took her to Washington, where she completed her postgraduate studies and taught at George Washington University while working as a stringer for English newspapers.

It was there that Wolf was offered her first role in policy analysis, working on a review of federal education programmes which had been commissioned by, and reported to, the Education Committees of the US Congress. She worked for some years as a policy analyst within the Federal Government and then combined freelance policy work with raising her young family.

On returning to the UK, she took up a post at the Institute of Education, University of London, where she raised funds for research, initially on mathematics teaching within work-based learning, which gave her some initial insight into further education and training, the focus of much of her subsequent work. In the early 1990s a grant from the

Nuffield Foundation to undertake a national evaluation of GNVQs saw her return to policy work and the world of vocational education and qualifications. Her research led her to question the value of many of the new vocational qualifications which the government was developing, notably NVQs. Many, she found, were of no value to students when they went out into the job market.

The work gave Wolf an enhanced profile in the media and an increased opportunity to influence policy, both as an academic and as a journalist and commentator. She became a notable critic of the general drift of government policy. Her 2002 book, *Does Education Matter? Myths about Education and Economic Growth*, questioned the widely accepted connection between increased education spending and economic growth and prosperity. Wolf argued that a large proportion of spending on further education and universities might be usefully redirected to teaching basic mathematical and linguistic skills at school. She was strongly critical of politicians' attempts to 'organize education for economic ends', noting:

[We] have almost forgotten that education ever had any purpose other than to promote growth ... To read government documents of even fifty year ago ... gives one a shock. Of course, their authors recognized that education had relevance to people's livelihoods and success, and to the nation's prosperity. But their concern was as much, or more, with values, citizenship, the nature of a good society, the intrinsic benefits of learning.

Wolf won the Sam Aaronovitch Memorial Prize in 2008 for her critique of the Leitch report on skills, which exemplified the tendency in policymaking to prioritise 'economically valuable skills' and to do so by setting qualification targets, in the belief that more and more accreditation was the critical factor in improving economic productivity, and that government could ensure 'productive' vocational education and training through central direction of what was provided.

In 2009, Wolf published *An adult approach to further education*, a detailed and persuasive critique of government policy on FE, the move towards over-centralisation under Labour and the increasing focus of education policy on narrow economic outcomes. She noted that a decade of 'tighter and tighter central regulation' and 'endless reorganisation', premised on the conviction that 'the only forms of education and training that justify government subsidy are those that contribute directly to economic productivity', had resulted in the disappearance of non-vocational adult education from state-subsidised institutions, with no discernible gains in terms of productivity or wage growth. A new model for further and adult education was required, Wolf contended, in which further education subsidies 'go directly to and through individuals' and provision responds directly to their preferences and choices rather than to 'governments' purchases on their (supposed) behalf'. She argued against loans for 'occasional' learning such as evening courses, calling for the creation of individual learning accounts to support this form of education.

In 2010, the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government commissioned Wolf to conduct a review of

pre-19 vocational education and training and to tackle the long-standing weakness of vocational education in the UK. It was a huge undertaking and a significant responsibility, which Wolf felt acutely, working around a clock to deliver the report while political attention was still focused on the issue. The *Wolf Report*, published in 2011, argued that while there was some very good practice in vocational education, too many further education courses did not offer a pathway to work or to further training or education. Meanwhile, it said, schools were being encouraged to direct academically weaker pupils into alternatives to GCSEs which had no labour market value and did not help them progress. It called for pupils to study a core of academic subjects until they are 16 and for a greater focus on achieving a Grade C in English and Maths, at both pre- and post-16.

The funding system, Wolf argued, encouraged schools and colleges to put students through a succession of low-level qualifications, many of questionable labour market value, but not to improve their core English and maths skills where they were lacking. Funding for pupils aged 16 to 19 should be per student rather than per qualification, she recommended, with good and accurate general careers information, advice and guidance allowing them to navigate their way through a much simplified, more coherent system. The report remains an important touchstone in thinking about vocational education and training in the UK.

Wolf continues to combine journalism, broadcasting and policy work with her role as Sir Roy Griffiths Professor of Public Sector Management at King's College London, where she is Director of the International Centre for University Policy Research at King's Policy Institute and Director of

the university's MSc programme in Public Sector Policy and Management. She was also one of the founders of the King's College London Mathematics School, a state school for 16–19 year olds that enrolls mathematically gifted students from across the London region, as well as providing outreach to 14–16 year olds, and was its first Chair of Governors. She received a CBE for services to education in 2012 and, in 2014, became a crossbench life peer, as Baroness Wolf of Dulwich. Wolf's influence on UK education policy is perhaps greater than ever and she continues to write and comment on further and vocational education and on the relationship between the world of education and the world of work. As ever, her work is characterised by a willingness to challenge orthodoxies, a forensic attention to the detail of policy and a commitment to ensuring education does what it is meant to do and provides young people and adults with the opportunities they deserve to reach their potential.

11

Estelle Morris



*Much-admired Education Secretary
who listened to teachers and
championed their role in education*

THE TEACHER WHO BECAME EDUCATION SECRETARY

Politics is in Estelle Morris's blood. She was born in Manchester in 1952 into a staunchly Labour family. Her father, Charles, and her uncle, Alf Morris, were both long-serving Labour MPs for Manchester constituencies.

Her own route into politics, however, was unconventional. She went to Rack House primary school in Wythenshawe and Whalley Range High School, where she failed her English and French A-levels. This meant that she could not go to university but, at the time, this was no obstacle to becoming a teacher. She attended Coventry College of Education, gaining a BEd in 1974 and encountering its inspirational founding principal, the progressive educationalist Joan Browne, whom she described as 'a pioneer in showing what women could achieve, long before it became fashionable to do so'. Morris became a social studies and humanities teacher at the inner-city Sidney Stringer School in Coventry in 1974, working at the school until 1992, when she was elected to Parliament.

Morris was appointed head of sixth-form studies at the school and became increasingly active in local politics. She was a member of Warwick District Council from 1979

to 1991 and in 1992 stood as Labour candidate for the marginal Birmingham Yardley constituency. She succeeded in capturing the seat from the Conservatives, with a majority of only 162. She used her maiden speech in the Commons to denounce policy turbulence in the education sector and to argue against the return of selection in UK education policy:

When I met people during the election, the one thing that they wanted for education was stability. They are fed up with ministerial changes of mind. As soon as one ministerial directive has been answered, it is countered with another and they start again. They also want stability of funding so that head teachers do not have to spend their time applying to this or that government department for funding for this or that project in order to educate the children whom they seek to serve. Those who want stability in education will be deeply disturbed by the recent talk of the possible reintroduction of selection in secondary schools. If we were to reintroduce selection, it would be the biggest upheaval that schools have had to face in recent decades, and the biggest danger to children's education that they have had to face in their lifetime.

Morris became Labour's opposition spokeswoman on education and employment, holding the position until 1997 when Labour won the election and Morris became a junior minister, for school standards. Her teaching background and her willingness to champion comprehensive education made Morris a popular choice with teachers. Politically, she had a reputation as a pragmatist rather than an ideologue,

keen to listen and to find ways in which to make things work. She was highly esteemed by teaching unions despite pushing through performance-related pay in the face of their fierce opposition. Her straightforward, softly spoken approach and her evident sincerity also made her popular with education department officials, who credited her with improving standards in primary schools.

In 2001, Morris was promoted to education secretary, succeeding David Blunkett in the newly created Department for Education and Skills (previously the Department for Education and Employment). She was the first former comprehensive school teacher to hold the position. It was unusual for an MP with less than 10 years' experience of frontline politics to be appointed to a key Cabinet post, but it reflected her growing influence and reputation as a minister in the department. Her appointment was widely welcomed, particularly among teachers and teachers' unions, though her relative inexperience also made it a risk. She quickly found herself dealing with crisis after crisis, as evidence of overspending and fraudulent misuse of the Individual Learning Account (ILA) scheme – one of Labour's flagship education initiatives when it was elected in 1997 – emerged, and news broke of the upgrading of 1,000 students' A-level results. Although Morris was not directly responsible for these problems, she was obliged to deal with them, and, for some critics, she did not do so effectively. Faced with so much fire-fighting, she struggled to be effective in her new role. She resigned from her post suddenly in October 2002, explaining that she did not feel up to the job. In her resignation letter to Prime Minister Tony Blair, she said that she felt she had been able to achieve more as a junior minister. 'I've learned what I'm

good at and also what I'm less good at,' she wrote. 'I'm good at dealing with the issues and in communicating to the teaching profession. I am less good at strategic management of a huge department and I am not good at dealing with the modern media.'

David Hart, General Secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, described Morris's resignation as both 'a tragedy for her and a tragedy for the education service.' Doug McAvoy, General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, said she was 'a minister who cared about education and understood the problems teachers faced ... It's a great pity that she has decided to go. On too many occasions, the Education Department's position has been too highly influenced by the wishes of Downing Street rather than the needs of the service. Estelle fought hard to prevent that.' These sentiments were widely shared within the teaching profession, as well as among civil servants in the department who warmly applauded Morris as she left the department for the last time as education secretary.

Morris returned to government in 2003 as Minister for the Arts in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport but stepped down, both as a minister and as a Member of Parliament, at the 2005 general election. Her constituency was gained by the Liberal Democrats. Later that year, she became Baroness Morris of Yardley and was appointed Pro Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sunderland, a post she held until 2009. In September 2005, she succeeded Baroness Helena Kennedy as President of the National Children's Bureau. Also in 2005, she helped to set up the Children's Workforce Development Council and, in 2008, became Chair of the Institute of Effective Education. Morris has

also continued to contribute thoughtfully and critically to debate about education as a journalist. In a 2016 *Guardian* article, she urged Labour to do more to offer a clear 'credible alternative' to Conservative policies on education and to set out to the electorate what its education reforms were intended to achieve, writing:

There is a growing chasm between politicians and the public, in education as elsewhere. What should be a shared national agenda of higher standards for more children has turned into mistrust and friction, no more so than in the relationship between government and teachers. Any sense of shared purpose and joint endeavour has given way to weary suspicion.

Few education ministers or secretaries of state, before or since, have understood the sector as well as Estelle Morris, and perhaps none has been as willing to listen and work closely with the teaching profession, at every level of education. Although her time as secretary of state was beset with crises, she continues to be remembered warmly and respectfully as an intelligent, committed politician who understood education and worked hard to improve it.

12

Susan Pember



*Former college principal and civil servant
who became one of further education's
most sincere and effective advocates*

STANDING UP FOR FURTHER EDUCATION

Susan Pember was born in Pontypridd, South Wales, in 1954. Her father was a disabled examiner and her mother, a factory worker who took evening classes to learn new skills.

Pember harboured early dreams of becoming an Olympic swimmer.

Speaking to *FE Week* in 2014, she told how at primary school she had written an essay expanding on her dream of life as a competitive swimmer and her plans to support the training through a career as a self-employed hairdresser. Her head teacher, disappointed by the scope of her job ambition, told her to write the essay again. She did, this time setting out an ambition to become a teacher. Although she did it to placate her head teacher, she stuck with her newfound ambition and never looked back.

After finishing school, Pember enrolled on a certificate of education course at Glamorgan College of Education, on Barry Island. She was guided by the college towards a degree course, eventually graduating with a bachelor of education degree from the University of Wales. Her specialisms in textiles and geography led her to a first teaching job at Redbridge Technical College in London, where she taught textiles, fashion and clothing from 1977 to 1983. Although her training had prepared her for a career in primary/

secondary school teaching, as soon as she set foot in the college, Pember knew this was where she belonged and wanted to spend her career. 'You felt you could make a real difference to these young people and adults' lives,' she said later. A job at Southgate College in north London followed, this time as deputy head and lecturer, a first senior role in which she stayed until 1986.

Pember was soon offered another leadership position, which took her away from the classroom for a time. She took on a policy role within the education department of the London Borough of Enfield, working for the next four years as senior education officer for further and adult education, career and youth services. In 1991, she became Principal of Canterbury College, where she would remain for the next nine years. In that time, she also studied part-time at the University of Hull, gaining a doctorate in business administration. This course gave an underpinning academic rigour to the business strategies she was pursuing at the college and shaped the analytical skills she was to need in her future career. Her success as a college leader was recognised with an OBE for services to education in 2000 and, in 2003, with an honorary doctorate from the University of Kent in recognition of her work in increasing higher education participation in Kent.

She left Canterbury College to take up her first job in national government as part of the leadership team commissioned to implement David Blunkett's *Learning Age* strategy. Pember's appointment prompted the *Guardian* to wonder whether government was 'finally taking basic skills seriously'. She was charged with developing a strategy to help 7 million adults improve their literacy and numeracy skills and establishing and leading the Adult Basic Skills

Strategy Unit. The resulting Skills for Life programme went on to be one of the largest-ever government-led social intervention schemes. Between 2001 and 2011, more than 14 million adults participated and 8 million achieved qualifications. The strategy laid the foundations for programmes being offered today and established in statute the right of adults to an entitlement to free literacy and numeracy provision. The legacy continues with over 500,000 people participating annually.

In 2004, Pember was charged with conducting a government review of apprenticeships. The review made a number of groundbreaking recommendations, including the proposal that new apprenticeships should be available to learners from age 14 and include adults. It made a persuasive case for increased investment in apprenticeships and proved a springboard for the rapid expansion in the provision of apprenticeships. The agenda is still being pursued in Whitehall over a decade later.

For over 13 years, Pember worked in government on behalf of the FE and skills sector. As well as making evidence-led recommendations, championing reform and providing insight to politicians and other senior civil servants who, in most cases, lacked direct classroom and sector experience, she worked through a period of tremendous organisational turbulence within Whitehall. This saw numerous changes in departmental names and responsibilities, from the Department for Education and Employment to the now expired Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and regular changes in senior personnel. Over her time in office, she worked directly with more than ten FE and skills ministers and eight secretaries of state.

Leaving government in 2013, Pember worked as a consultant and change leader in the sector, concentrating on supporting learning organisations and government departments to improve their governance and quality processes while, at the same time, campaigning for adult learning. She also took up governance roles and became Vice-Chair of Bedfordshire University. In 2015, Pember returned to sector leadership as Director of Policy and External Relations of HOLEX, the lead professional body for adult community education and learning. In a blog post for FETL, she described revitalising adult education as 'the new leadership challenge for the sector'. Adult and community learning providers, she wrote, are 'our unsung heroes and, by hook or by crook, we need to create the political circumstances for them to use their skills and knowledge to educate and retrain more adults. This is the new sector leadership challenge. If we don't speak up who will?'

Few leaders in the further education sector can boast Pember's combination of chalkface experience and policy knowledge, gained in almost every part of the sector and at different levels of government. She remains one of its most respected and articulate advocates. Throughout her career, she has demonstrated the value of having leaders in key policy roles who know and understand the impact of policy initiatives on the ground. Through her role with HOLEX, she continues to make a case for increased investment in further education, and for adult education in particular, and for greater recognition of the sector's key role in promoting both personal fulfilment and economic prosperity. The need for such a voice has never been more keenly felt.

13

Margaret Hodge



A passionate supporter of quality education, her early experiences as an immigrant gave her a fierce commitment to inclusion and equality

AN OUTSIDER AT THE HEART OF THE ESTABLISHMENT

Margaret Hodge's story begins in Egypt, where she was born Margaret Eve Oppenheimer in 1944. Her father, Hans Oppenheimer, a German steel entrepreneur, moved to Alexandria in the 1930s to take over his uncle's metals business.

It was there he met and married Austrian-born émigré Lisbeth Hollitscher. As Jews, they were rendered stateless when the Second World War broke out. Unable to return home, they remained in Egypt for the duration for the war. After the war, Hodge's father became increasingly concerned about the rise of antisemitism in the Arab world. When a rock was thrown through the window of their family home, he decided enough was enough. Requests to settle in the United States, Australia and Canada were turned down before Britain agreed to take them. It was a decision, Hodge remembers, for which her parents were 'forever grateful'.

They moved to Orpington, London, in 1949, following a stay in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. One of Hodge's first memories was of the taste of 'overcooked cabbage and tasteless porridge', those dismal staples of life in post-war Britain. The family soon settled and Hodge's father

started a new steel-trading company. British citizenship was not immediately forthcoming, however. Hodge recalls an inspector coming to tea and questioning her – over cucumber sandwiches and fruit cake, the most British things they could think to offer – about her friends, the games she played and the books she read. Britain was, then as now, in many respects a 'hostile environment' for those new to the country. British citizenship was finally won in 1954, but the sense of being an outsider stayed with Hodge. Even now, while she feels 'deeply British, deeply European', she remains, in her own words, 'an outsider in the British establishment'.

By the time the family was awarded citizenship, Hodge's mother was gravely ill with stomach cancer. Hodge was just 10 when she died. With her father struggling to cope alone, Hodge was sent to Oxford High School, a boarding school she quickly came to loathe. It was her first encounter with the British class system and was another formative influence on her politics. Oxford High was a direct grant grammar school, which meant that a proportion of places were funded by government, while the remainder were fee-paying. This meant that girls from working-class backgrounds learned alongside girls from wealthy, professional families. In practice, however, these children formed two discrete groups which had little to do with one another. Observing this as an outsider gave Hodge distaste for the class system, and helped make her a 'determined socialist'. In 1960, aged 16, she went on her first Aldermaston march with CND, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. The Labour Party, she found, was the 'natural home' for immigrants, the party of 'equality, equal rights and internationalism'.

Hodge won a place to study economics and political science at the London School of Economics. She enjoyed her time at university, but was, she later admitted, a 'terrible student' who did not take her academic work as seriously as she should have and left with a third-class degree. The 'missed opportunity' this came to represent for Hodge gave her a strong sense of the importance of giving people a fair chance at realising their potential, something that would be key to her political career, at both local and national level. After university, she worked at Unilever as an economist but her interest and involvement in community politics was growing.

In 1973, while still pregnant with the second of her four children, Hodge was elected as a Labour councillor for the London Borough of Islington. She became chair of the housing committee within two years and oversaw an expansion in housing in the borough, as well as a programme of refurbishment of older buildings. She was appointed leader of the council in 1982, a position she would hold for the next 10 turbulent years. It was a high-profile role. The council was frequently attacked in parts of the press for what were seen as 'loony left' policies, though many, such as equal opportunities monitoring and workplace crèches, have since become the norm for local authorities and other organisations. While learning the hard way the costs and compromises of frontline political life, Hodge was also able to substantially increase funding for early years and pre-school education in the borough, a significant achievement that she would later replicate at national level. Listening to people and delivering on their priorities, she learned, was key to winning elections.

Hodge worked as a senior public sector consultant for Price Waterhouse from 1992 to 1994 before being elected Member of Parliament for Barking in a by-election in June 1994. Her committee work as an MP included a stint as chair of the Education and Employment Committee. Her first major ministerial role was as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment and Equal Opportunities in the Department for Education and Employment. She joined the department in 1998 at a moment when Labour was increasing investment in education across the board, and implementing parts of *The Learning Age*, David Blunkett's ambitious Green Paper. She held the post for three years before being promoted to Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education in June 2001.

This was an important role in a department charged with delivering Tony Blair's promise to make 'education, education, education' the priority of his government. Hodge put access and equality of opportunity at the heart of her work. In higher education, she made widening access to higher education for working class young people a priority, criticising the poor intake among some elite institutions while also supporting Tony Blair's controversial tuition fee policy. In further education, she oversaw substantial increases in funding for the sector, as Labour began to roll out its ambitious Skills for Life initiative to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of 2.25 million adults in England by 2010. Improving adults' basic skills was a key policy priority of the Blair government, a focus strengthened by the publication of the 1999 Moser report, which found that there were between 5 million and 7 million functionally illiterate and innumerate adults in the UK.

In June 2003, Hodge was appointed Minister of State for Children, a newly created role that included responsibility for the new Sure Start scheme, early-years education and childcare, special educational needs, the Children and Young People's Unit, teenage pregnancy, the Family Policy Unit, and child welfare. It was, she said at the time, her 'dream job', and it was one she set about with commitment and determination, turning the vision of Sure Start into reality for thousands of families. She substantially boosted investment in free childcare and advanced the government's Every Child Matters agenda, which aimed to 'to construct and build services around the needs of children and families'. The Sure Start programme resulted in a network of almost 4,000 children's centres in England, offering not only childcare but also access to health, education, parenting and employability support. It represented an important and serious attempt to put families at the heart of communities and to develop holistic approaches to supporting them. It was also a very successful trial of a new, more integrated approach to policy-making in government; cross-sectoral, cross-departmental and joined-up.

In 2005, Hodge was moved to another new post, as Minister of State in the Department for Work and Pensions with primary responsibility for employment. Other ministerial posts followed, including Minister of State for Culture and Tourism, a role she held from June 2007 to May 2010, when Labour lost power. In the General Election, she comfortably fought off a challenge from Nick Griffin and the British National Party in her constituency – dubbed the 'battle for Barking' – doubling her majority to 16,555. In June 2010, Hodge became the first woman chair of the Public Accounts Committee. She brought a passionate commitment to tax

justice to her new role, taking on giants such as Google, Amazon and Vodafone and putting tax avoidance on the political agenda. CEOs, bankers and ministers were subjected to her straight-talking, forensic questioning and analysis. 'I think you do evil!' she told a Google executive she tackled on tax avoidance. She held the role until 2015, when she announced she would not stand for re-election. She now runs an all-party group on tax-dodging.

Hodge became a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (DBE) in August 2015. She remains a respected and well-liked MP and an energetic and thoughtful contributor to public debate. Her calling out of antisemitism in the Labour party, and her outspoken criticism of its leader's handling of the issue, has won her new friends and new enemies, within and outwith the party. The sudden death of her daughter-in-law when she was struck by a car in 2017 was a devastating blow to her family. She has coped with the loss, and the new childcare responsibilities it has brought, with typical courage. Hodge's career has been characterized by a commitment to equality, social justice and inclusion, including in education, and she continues to address these issues with uncompromising frankness and determination, whether they are in fashion or not. It is perhaps her tenacious commitment to these causes, and her willingness to look across party lines in pursuing them, that keeps her on the outside of the establishment, where her sharp mind and critical voice can be of most use.

14

Ruth Silver



An inspirational leader who has stimulated and helped shape thinking within and about further education

PUTTING THE LEARNER AT THE HEART OF ALL WE DO

Ruth Silver was born in a Scottish mining village in January 1945, in the North Lanarkshire constituency where Jennie Lee had first served as MP. Weighing just three pounds at birth, she spent her first few months in an incubator. She grew up in a close-knit working-class community, characterised by solidarity and strong values, where everyone took care of everyone else's children.

When she passed the 11-plus and went to grammar school, the only child in the village to do so, the community gave her full support, chipping in to make sure she had the correct uniform. She felt as though she had been 'kitted out by the whole village' and was conscious of the responsibility this implied. She was 15 when her father died. The whole community, she recalled, 'wrapped itself around the family' and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) undertook to support the rest of her education. She was awarded an NUM scholarship to study literature and psychology at the University of Glasgow.

While studying for an MA, Silver taught literature to coal miners and their wives at the local working men's club – an expression of her deep gratitude to the NUM. It gave her an acute sense of the value of learning. She recalls asking one miner, a man who had amassed a string of qualifications but who continued to work in the mines, what kept him coming to class. He answered that while he wasn't in a position to change his job, 'through education he could change himself': 'In the area where he lived, he said, being educated was as good as being rich. He got into learning because he wanted to be able to help, to know what he was talking about and to never feel embarrassed. What he hadn't known was that learning would become so important to him.' This helped Silver understand why her graduation felt 'bitter-sweet'. Education, she recalls, had given her an enlivened appreciation of the world and its possibilities – including the possibility of changing it – and she was determined to continue learning.

The NUM offered to fund Silver's continued study and she began postgraduate study in developmental psychology at Southampton University where her work included a comparative study of deprived young people on housing estates in Southampton and Glasgow. She combined her studies with part-time work for the Inner London Education Authority in schools and youth clubs, supporting children and young people in poor parts of London. It was her first encounter with serious disadvantage and exclusion and led her to write her first novel, aimed at young people and tackling, among other issues, that of racism. She continued her education at London's Tavistock Clinic in Adolescence and Transition. It fed her growing appreciation of the development needs of young people from poorer

backgrounds and of how education 'can rescue people from all sorts of difficult places and take them towards their desires'. Watching young people and adults learn and finding ways to 'reframe learning' and help them 'become the people they want to become' became the heartbeat of her work.

Silver began her career in child guidance, working at the pioneering Woodbury Down child guidance centre in Hackney. When the school leaving age was raised, Silver moved out of child guidance and into the Civil Service, where her work focused on curriculum design, devising learning programmes to engage reluctant remainers in schools. Her work on personal social careers development curricula was further taken up and developed in vocational education, specifically through the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education, the Youth Opportunities Scheme, the Youth Training Scheme and the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative. She also acted as adviser to Sir Geoffrey Holland working on issues of personal effectiveness among excluded adolescents, and continued to combine her professional work with writing and broadcasting. Silver's work brought her increasingly into the orbit of further education and she was asked to undertake curriculum design work on access to HE courses, by Margaret Levy, and community colleges, by John Baillie.

Silver took up a teaching post at Southwark College, becoming Head of Faculty at the college before moving to Newham Community College, where she was appointed Vice-Principal. It was just before her five years at Newham that Silver had her only child, a daughter; the 'very best thing I have done,' she says. With her partner taking on

much of the responsibility for childcare, Silver was able to return to work, but it was a difficult time, during which she struggled with the separation from her daughter. In 1991, she made a move to a new role, the one for which, she felt, her career to date had been preparing her, as Principal of Lewisham College of Further Education. The college, based in an area of south London with relatively high levels of poverty and unemployment, was struggling, with crumbling infrastructure and a far from outstanding reputation. She would stay there for 17 years, transforming it into a thriving learning community, described by Ofsted inspectors as a 'thinking college', characterised by 'strong, imaginative leadership inspiring confidence among staff, student and governors'. Everything the college did, she says, was about 'putting learners at the centre of things'.

In 1998, Silver received a CBE for services to education. Recognising that this was a shared achievement, she bought strips of ribbon in the same colour as those on the medal and attached them to cards which she sent to the hundreds of people she felt had contributed to her work – 'their share of my CBE'. In 2006, she was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire. When Silver left Lewisham in 2009, a quiet retirement beckoned. However, in 2010, she was invited to become Chair of the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), a post she didn't feel she could turn down. She was attracted to the idea of a sector-led body supporting improvement in further education and skills. Silver was also appointed co-chair (with Barry Sheerman MP) of the Skills Commission, an independent group of educationalists that meets in Parliament. In 2014, she supported Glasgow's colleges in the post-merger

realignment of their curricula. The following year, she was appointed chair of the Scottish Government's Commission on Widening Access to Universities. The Commission's report, *A Blueprint for Fairness*, set out an ambitious plan to ensure that every child in Scotland had the same chance of entering university, irrespective of where they started in life. It was enthusiastically endorsed by First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon. In 2013, Silver became founding President of the Further Education Trust for Leadership, with a mission to foster leadership of thinking within the further education sector.

Silver's career demonstrates both the diversity of her interests and the strength of her commitment to education and learning, and to further education in particular. She was a member of the influential Women and Work Commission, served as an advisor to the Education and Skills Select Committee and chaired the Working Men's College governing board between 2002 and 2005. She also chaired the National Taskforce on the Future of the Careers Profession. She acted as board member of the Jamie Oliver Foundation, the Edge Foundation, the Baker Dearing Trust for University Technical Colleges and the London Skills and Employment Board, among numerous other commitments. Her passion for learning and her commitment to open, ethical leadership continue to inspire. Leadership, she says, is about 'winning hearts ... you can't buy a heart, nor instruct it'. She remains sought after as a speaker, a writer, an adviser and a mentor. Her contributions to public debate about further education are thoughtful, wise and consistently constructive and forward-looking. She continues to outline a vision of further education as the 'adaptive layer' of the education system, with a special role in responding

creatively to the challenges of wider social and economic change, and to encourage leaders to think about the future as something they are building rather than travelling towards. Her focus remains on the future of a sector she believes can be a driver of social and economic progress, and on the learners it exists to support.

AFTERWORD

A force for good

Denise Brown

This book has had a dual purpose: to celebrate further education and to celebrate the women who have contributed to and shaped it over the past 100 years. Less directly, it has also sought to reflect the important role further education has played and continues to play in the lives of women in the UK. Anyone who has worked in further education for as long as I have will have heard hundreds of stories, from women and men alike, of the transformative role FE has played in their lives, setting them on a new career direction, helping them return to work, restoring their confidence and giving them a sense of agency, or providing a second chance following a negative school experience. The sector, across all its different settings, is hugely valued by its learners, past and present. But it has played a special role in promoting equality, challenging gender stereotypes and supporting women into new worlds.

While universities have often been slow to adapt to social change, and to women's demands for equality in particular, further education has taken a lead; providing safe, local spaces in which women could learn, developing crèche facilities and flexible forms of provision, and, perhaps most importantly, listening to the learning demands of women. At my own college, Stoke on Trent College, listening to the learning needs of women in our community has long been part of our mission. Like much of our sector, we put special stress on building links with local women's groups, finding out what kind of learning they need and want, understanding the barriers and creating bespoke pathways

for them. Often, women with family commitments require different modes of study and the presence of child-support facilities. It took a special kind of commitment and attention to deliver meaningful change for women taking their first steps into further education in the twentieth century. We continue to honour that commitment today.

Many of the women whose lives and aspirations have been transformed by further education have also made their career in the sector. Many successful careers in FE have begun with a simple desire to 'give something back'. Often, they have worked their way up the career ladder into senior leadership, where, as this book shows, their impact has been overwhelmingly positive. Yet, despite making up the majority of the sector's workforce, women continue to be under-represented in senior leadership positions and among principals, in particular (though we do better than many other sectors). There is also serious under-representation of black and minority ethnic staff, male and female, in leadership positions. There are signs of this situation improving but things are moving far too slowly. I would like to see further education, as a sector, taking a lead in encouraging women from all backgrounds to work to their full potential by making the route to leadership open and flexible, and removing the barriers, institutional and cultural, to their progressing further at work.

As the stories told in this book amply demonstrate, we should not wait for change to come. It is everybody's responsibility to help create educational environments that are inclusive and diverse. Despite cuts to funding, further education continues to build bridges between the world of home and family and the world of work, to offer routes to employment and continuing education for people with few or no qualifications, and to provide progression from basic education to higher study. We offer more than just training for work. We affirm people's knowledge and skills, create a supportive environment in which to grow, promote active, critical citizenship, and foster resilience, creativity and cohesion in the community, particularly among

the most vulnerable and least well-off. It is one of the obligations of leadership in the sector to keep our unique moral mission in mind, despite the attacks on our funding and the ceaseless barrage of reform and accountability demands. We should never try to reduce the benefit of what we do to pounds and pence. We are about so much more, from equality to social inclusion, from critical thinking to environmental responsibility. This is an important part of our story, through which we honour and acknowledge the different roles women play in society, whether as workers, carers, mothers, lovers, citizens or activists. It is my hope that the sector will continue to blaze a trail for women and that women will continue to play a pivotal role in shaping and defining its future. For all the wonderful progress of the past 100 years, there remains much to do.

Denise Brown is Principal and Chief Executive of Stoke on Trent College and is a member and former Vice-Chair of the FETL Board.

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