

Western Morning News

THE VOICE OF THE WESTCOUNTRY

Better ways are needed to measure the best students

Nothing worth having in life comes easily. Multi-million-pound lottery wins aside, there is probably something in that statement. And the veiled suggestion today that students who have successfully gained a first class honours degree, or a 2-1, didn't have to work as hard to get it as top-scoring students a couple of decades or more ago, is baloney. If anything, studying in 2018 is a more intense activity for the majority of young people than it was in the 1990s and many young people bear the mental scars to prove it.

But there is something in the call yesterday for a plan to be put in place to tackle what a right-of-centre think tank calls "rocketing" grade inflation at UK universities, including those here in the South West. Because when everyone is a star performer, picking out the really exceptional students gets more and more difficult, for employers and those selecting undergraduates for important post graduate study.

The statistics tell their own story. "From 1997 to 2009 the proportion of firsts almost doubled from 7% to 13% and since 2010 it has gone up to 26%. The proportion of 2:1 degrees has risen from 40% to 49% since 1995, meaning that 75% of students now achieve one of the top two classifications," the report says.

Students can only work within the parameters they

are given. But they may well be unaware of the role played by university managers and the pressure being put on the academics teaching them and marking their work, to present the university in the best possible light where results are concerned. It's not surprising the managers should want to do that; education has become highly competitive-driving not just the expansion of the best universities themselves, but giving a significant boost to the towns and cities in which they are based. Where would Exeter be without its Russell Group University, now able to attract the best students from around the world?

Look at the impact on Falmouth of the university there while the development of Plymouth in recent years owes a great deal to the transformation from polytechnic to university of its educational establishment.

Right through their school and college years, more is now expected of young people than was the case, even 20 years ago. But with a huge increase in the numbers going to university and now significant grade inflation, there needs to be greater rigour applied to differentiate between the best and the rest. Whether that rigour comes from the universities themselves or is imposed from the outside is a matter for debate. But it must happen.



We want to hear your views

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On this day

1377: Richard II inherited the English throne, aged ten.

1814: MCC beat Hertfordshire in the first major match played on the present Lord's cricket ground in St John's Wood.

1896: Marconi patented his invention of the "wireless".

1937: Joe Louis won the world heavyweight boxing title by knocking out James J Braddock in Chicago.

1940: France capitulated and accepted the armistice terms of Germany.

1941: The German Army invaded Russia.

1969: Singer Judy Garland was found dead in her flat in London, aged 47.

1987: Fred Astaire, American actor and dancer, died aged 88.

2018: A former NASA astronaut revealed that the sprawling Glastonbury Festival site can be seen from space.

Birthdays

Prunella Scales, actress, 86

Kris Kristofferson, singer/actor, 82

Esther Rantzen, TV presenter, 78

Meryl Streep, actress, 69

Alastair Stewart, newscaster, 66
Danny Baker, DJ, 61 *pictured*



Thought for the day

Proverbs 15:1 – A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.



Harry Enfield as the archetypal awkward and stressed teenager Kevin in the BBC comedy, Harry Enfield and Chums

Parents need the tools to take back control of unruly teens

Children have never been more stressed and need rules and help, writes **Di Lobbett**

Since puberty and the gift of an Xbox, "Callum" has become half-man, half-mattress and is never up on time for school. Sneaking out before his exhausted parents return from another day at the rock face, Callum has again defied the grounding that was supposed to be the painful consequence for last week's "lates". Callum slopes in at 10pm unconcerned.

Callum's parents ask him where he has been. Callum chucks his bag down and yells, "For God's sake!" before bounding upstairs, two steps at a time. Vibrating walls advise his parents that the little love has arrived safely in his room.

Callum's parents look at each other defeated. Today was going to be the day they made Callum clean the toxic dump that now passes for his bedroom. Instead he has brazenly defied them ... again! "I'll clean it while he's at school tomorrow," his mother sighs.

Callum is not unique, and neither is he a demon child. Callum is just a boy; he is what has sadly become a "typical teenager". In my job as an independent behaviour and emotional health consultant, I meet Callums and their female counterparts every day.

He behaves as he does because it works for him and it works for him because his bewildered, exhausted parents have no idea how he became so angry and powerful, or how to begin to take the power back. Callum's parents are typical of thousands of across the

country, desperately looking for help.

Parents tell me they are afraid because they can see that their child is an unhappy, reluctant dictator who is desperate to be reined in. Parents also tell me that instead of securing the practical help they avidly seek, they usually encounter blame. Blame is spectacularly unhelpful. This situation arises simply because the grown-ups have been using tools that are not working. The smart money is on those willing to try something else.

How have we arrived at a place where children and adolescents have become a heady mixture of anger,

changed. Education is obsessively assessment focussed: children have never been more stressed at school.

Also, children are struggling to grow up happily in a society where shallow values such as "perfect" looks, material wealth and inane celebrity dominate life and have become the icons of worship. An 11-year-old told me last week that she spends her pocket money buying "likes" on social media sites, "Cos if I don't have many, I get bullied." Of course, thanks to that same social media, children are ever available targets for the bullies. Stress erodes emotional well-being and

empower parents to assertively reclaim their 'free range' children.

For over 16 years I have been supporting parents to stage a bloodless but robust coup in their homes to secure a respectful, nurturing, autocracy. It's not rocket science, but it works. Parents learn to use the right language to secure compliance and deal with rudeness and arguing. Parents learn how to control their own emotions so that they consistently model the behaviour they want to see and not the behaviour they are getting. Parents also learn the essential differences between the adult and the adolescent brain.

They learn for example, that when faced with rudeness, we should always address the rudeness and never the point being made. Parents learn that consequences must be non-negotiable, incremental, and have currency for the child. Parents learn how to impose consequences effectively.

I don't think there is an adult who would not agree that children are the country's most precious resource. We need to make young people feel safe and we need to teach them emotionally literate rules and values that, along with education, will secure their futures and the future of this country.

Di Lobbett is a behaviour and emotional health consultant. She will be holding a Parenting Training session at Penair School, Truro on July 9, 7pm-9.15pm, for parents, carers, grandparents and anybody who works with children. For details go to dillobbett.co.uk

Tomorrow:
FARMING New EU rules on antibiotic use are at risk from Brexit, says Molly Scott Cato

power and insecurity, and where family relationships are often so frazzled?

The reasons are many and complex but include:

- Parents are often exhausted by financial hardship and/or hard work. Tired, stressed parents give in under pressure and children know that.
- Boundaries become blurred and inconsistent or totally non-existent.
- Guilt-induced over-indulgence by so many parents has become the new "love"; children are confused and don't know the difference between a right, a responsibility and a privilege.
- The adolescent world has

often causes children and adolescents to act out.

As politicians impotently scramble around pretending to seek a fix, they deflect their failures and have made schools responsible for everything. Surely the business of schools is learning? The boundaries have been increasingly blurred to the extent there is now a confusion between a school's statutory obligation to teach (and teachers' passionate drive to care) and an obligation to parent the nation's offspring.

This is crazy! In, some quarters, this has driven a wedge between parents and their children's schools and done nothing to support and