



► Les Walton has a wealth of experience in the education sector. A searing experience at school when he was just 13 helped to shape his views

Lewis Arnold

Let's learn to have belief

IT'S been 20 years and education supremo Les Walton still hasn't got round to penning the book he promised.

Many profess to having a life worth writing home about but few can claim to have turned a childhood tragedy into a spur to success in the same way Les has.

The former headteacher, who was born and raised in Rowlands Gill, was just 13 years old when he lost his father in a freak accident. Two years earlier his 14-year-old sister died, leaving a young Les in charge of holding his small family and grief-stricken mother together.

Les, now 69, remembers going to school on the day of his father's funeral, as by law children were not

allowed time away from the classroom for a family funeral. "I distinctly remember being told off for not doing my homework," he said. "My father had died and I had failed to produce a piece of homework. I felt as though the teachers didn't care about me or my family's situation."

That is partly why in 1982 I established the National Association of Pastoral Care with fellow education

heavyweight Michael Marland. It's difficult to imagine now that the 'pastoral care movement' at that time was incredibly powerful.

"This indeed was a forerunner of Every Child Matters and NAPCE is still going strong. Our catch line was 'caring, confident and capable children'. A school that purely focuses on exam results and doesn't focus on care for children is not good enough."

Les achieved national recognition for his work as headteacher of Northam Community Technology College, in North Shields, one of the first community specialist colleges in the UK.

The school was sponsored by significant private sector organisations including Rolls Royce and Procter & Gamble. It was cited by HM Inspectors as one of the most effective urban schools in the country and in

1996 he was awarded the OBE for services to education during his time at the school.

As executive director and chief education officer in North Tyneside Council, Les achieved beacon status for tackling failing schools in 1999.

In 2000 he led the interim management and subsequent outsourcing of education services to the private sector in Bradford. During this period he introduced partnership boards involving some of the country's most outstanding headteachers.

In 2002 Les was appointed as chief executive and principal of North Tyneside College. He then created

Turn to Page 16

Region is falling behind in young getting into uni

Ruth Lognonne

Reporter

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THE North East is falling behind the rest of the country in getting young people to university, new figures show.

The cost of higher education - with fees of up to £9,000 a year - is putting off many school leavers from going to university, educationalists said.

It is also thought that the growing popularity of apprenticeships in the North East, with people given the chance to earn while they learn,

means fewer choosing to go to university.

According to figures released by university admissions service Ucas, the number of university applicants from the North East has gone up by less than 1% from last year, whereas other regions across the UK are up 4% on the same point last year.

Andrew Jordan, principal at Dyke House Sports and Technology College in Hartlepool, said a lot of his students are seriously thinking about not going to university because of the financial implications.

"There is a big risk involved with

trying to spend that much money on a university education," he said. "There are other options that perhaps present themselves as more attractive, such as apprenticeships. Students are able to earn money while they are trained for the world of work."

"I'm sure this option is exaggerated in the North East because of the region's buoyant engineering and manufacturing economy."

"Although we're trying our best to get our students to university, it is important to recognise there is a raft of different pathways that people can go on rather than just university."

Some 659,030 people submitted applications by the end of June. In the North East that figure grew from 19,760 at this point in 2013, to 19,840 this year - an increase of just 80 applications.

In London, the number of applicants grew from 85,700 in 2013 to 90,110 this year; a marked increase of 5%.

The final deadline for candidates applying through Ucas was June 30.

After that, unfilled places are allocated through a post-results process known as clearing.

The latest Ucas statistics show a rise in applications in England, Wales and Scotland of 3%, 2% and 3% respectively. In Northern Ireland the numbers have remained static.

Applications from other EU students rose 5%, while those from non-EU overseas students were up 6%.

The figures also show that, in general, more women have applied than men.

Les Walton, chair of Northern Education Trust, said the reluctance of many young people to go to university is not necessarily a negative.

"It could be to do with the fact we have been very successful on offering apprenticeships in this region," he said. "That is not a bad thing and the fact school leavers are taking up worthwhile apprenticeships as opposed to going to university should not be deemed as a negative."



➤ Les Walton, chair of Northern Education Trust

THE FIGURES

Region	2013	2014	rise
North East	19,760	19,840	(0%)
Yorkshire and Humber	40,720	41,970	(+3%)
North West	60,410	62,420	(+3%)
East Midlands	33,930	34,810	(+3%)
West Midlands	46,840	48,560	(+4%)
East of England	45,070	46,100	(+2%)
London	85,700	90,110	(+5%)
South East	69,230	71,600	(+3%)
South West	40,130	41,530	(+3%)

➤ Charlotte Osb

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TEENAGER Ch no regrets abo changing decisio sity.

The 19-year- joined North through clearin onto BA (Hons, cation, despite study medicine.

However, thi area has led h feels passionate credits the uni ing her every st

She said: "I process, I was programme lea mary education discussed the ble.

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Education: Have we forgotten more than we learned?

In the first of his fortnightly columns, LES WALTON says the view that education is to be suffered rather than enjoyed has proved difficult to shake off over the years

LET me say from the start that I am in love with the sight, the shape and the sounds of education.

I have the same attitude to education that Bill Shankly had to football when he said: "People believe football is a matter of life and death. I am very disappointed with that attitude. I can assure you it is much more important than that."

Even I think education is more important than football. Throughout the whole of my life education has been fought over by political parties, advocacy groups, pressure groups, lobby groups, campaign groups, interest groups, parent organisations, teacher organisations, employer organisations... I could go on. It continually changes, whilst staying the same.

It tries new ideas, repeats old ones and introduces old ideas as though they have been just invented.

An operating theatre in a hospital is, I know, very different in terms of technology and culture compared to the 19th Century.

Most people's view of school classrooms is that they appear exactly the same as when I was attending my local Infant and Junior School in 1949. That is where the problem lies. We all understand and have clear views on education because we remember clearly our own education.

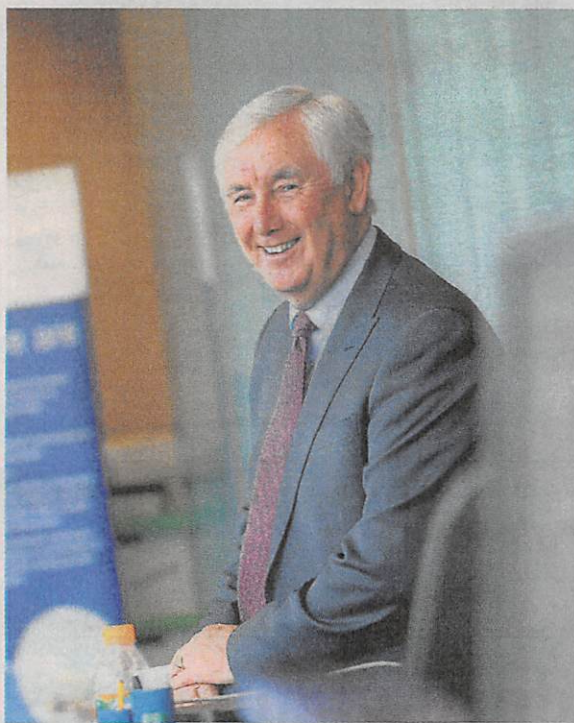
The reason why I accepted the invitation to write this column is because I do believe we have forgotten more than we have learned in our continual quest to improve the education of the children we love.

I also believe we need to celebrate the improvements we have made and be critical of the lack of progress.

I will attempt, in my small way, to reflect on current education thinking by referring to my experience of education over the second half of the 20th Century.

A couple of weeks ago I visited my 'old primary school'. My memories of the 'old school' in the 1950s were of being strapped with a leather belt in the infants' school and with a cane in the primary.

This school is now described by Ofsted as an 'Outstanding School'. Without doubt it is outstanding. I met a committed and highly experienced Chair of Governors and a truly remarkable headteacher supported



➤ Les Walton: "We need to celebrate the improvements we have made and be critical of the lack of progress"

by dedicated staff and wonderful pupils.

Everywhere I looked there was quality. In the teaching, the learning, the displays inside the classrooms and the activities in the playground.

There was also discipline! Not the discipline imposed by the strap or the cane but a discipline driven by outstanding teaching, building on the children's innate desire to learn.

Interestingly, when I later drove around the area in which I was brought up, very little seemed to have changed. There is a new fast food shop and factories where there once were 'pit cooling ponds'.

However the level of deprivation and employment in the area has not significantly changed.

On June 2, 1953, Queen Elizabeth II was crowned at a coronation ceremony in Westminster Abbey, London. The previous Sunday we celebrated the coronation in our local chapel by staging a mock coronation. We made paper mache models of the orb, sceptre, rod of mercy and the crown. It was a wonderful event.

In contrast, Tuesday, June 2, was a miserable, overcast day. My primary school celebrated the coronation by giving us the day off and then insist-

ing we returned to school for a Coronation Party.

Right from the start I thought this was unfair. The injustice was compounded when on arrival we were all sat down in the gym/dining hall and given a rock cake and a Coronation mug filled with warm milk!

The thought that we may 'enjoy' the day never entered the teachers' or pupils' minds. Of course this was in keeping with the view that education is to be suffered and not enjoyed; a view that is still held by some people today.

Every alternate Monday, I will attempt to reflect on the current education scene. I'll cover curriculums, discipline, academics - even school meals. I have always in my professional life tried to remain 'apolitical' - but the problem with education is that every time we say anything it is positioned within a political perspective.

You may decide I am a wishy-washy liberal come socialist/conservative!

Nevertheless, I hope I can bring some insight to what is a key topic for all of us.

■ Les Walton CBE is chairman of the Northern Education Trust



TOM GUTTERIDGE
COLUMNIST

IT seemed like a good idea at the time.

Boots was about six inches long when we bought him, with the sweetest face and long, soft hair. I don't think we ever checked the size of a fully grown English shepherd. Or if we did, we must have read centimetres for inches. For soon Boots was the size of a Shetland pony, an enormous hairy beast.

Our three dogs suited our 20-acre farm. Two spaniels and an English shepherd masquerading as a horse.

We could throw them out of the back door in the morning and they'd come romping back covered in mud straight on to the polished tiles.

After a while, Jo stopped screaming at them. She accepted mud as an essential ingredient in Northumbrian life. You just hose them down - first the dogs, then the tiles - and start again, till the next romp.

The spaniels loved our farm. Mabel, an occasionally golden cocker, liked nothing more than finding great big muddy puddles to spread around the house. While Truffle could spot a pile of fox poo at half a mile, and roll in it quickly before we could even shout "bad dog". Once experienced, no one forgets the sweet, pungent smell of fox.

And Boots? Boots was particularly partial to rounding up cattle. He really should be called an English cowherd. Even the bulls enjoyed the game after a while. I'm not sure the farmers agreed.

Apart from the summer, which in Northumberland means a couple of weeks in June, most of our time in that idyllic rural existence was spent cleaning mud off clothes, cars and dogs.

Even worked out an interesting mathematical formula: the exuberance of your dog is in direct proportion to the whiteness of your shirt - you'd be leaving the house smartly dressed for a business meeting when Boots would leap up with joy and wrap both muddy paws round your newly laundered collar. That's why I generally wore black. And why I would spend the first hour of my weekly train journey to London getting caked earth and dog dribble off my clothes so I could face the city.

Then, reluctantly, we moved South. Our house is right on Hampstead Heath. For those who aren't familiar, it's a thousand acres of wild open land and woods overlooking the capital. It's also

full of dogs. Sounds perfect?

Well, it would be, except we no longer have a kitchen door we can throw them out of. We have to bring them through our hallway and sitting room, so the process of de-mudding is now seriously complicated. For, like everyone else in London, we have cream carpets and polished wood floors. Or we used to.

The destruction took three weeks. We tried keeping the dogs in the utility room. Boots ate the flooring, then the door. We built a kennel for them in the garden. Boots ate the door, then started nibbling our front door to get back in. Now it's summer, and the demolition of our home is complete. And the cream and the wood are the same shade of brown.

The spaniels have never been so

I would spend the first hour of my weekly train journey to London getting caked earth and dog dribble off my clothes so I could face the city

happy, or so fit. Mabel is favourite to win the all-London stick fetching championships, in the slimy pond event. She goes in golden and comes out green, wagging her entire body in excitement. Truffle has discovered that foxes live on Hampstead Heath too, and that their poo smells just as good as their Northumbrian cousins'.

And as for Boots? He's found out that big dogs are even more fun than cattle. When he spies another big dog, he does that crouching thing that all collie breeds do. He waits and pounces. Posh owners scream in fright as the giant gallops up, mouth open, tongue dripping with white glob.

He only wants to play. Look, he's jumping up at you to lick you. See? He loves you. And your terrified mutt is fine, cowering behind you. The spaniels really love your new Prada jacket - look, they're shaking their pond slime and fox poo all over it.

Yes, moving to London with three dogs seemed like a really good idea at the time.

■ www.blogfromthenorth.com