

Trust

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The recent White Paper's ambition that this decade will deliver a trust-led education system far removed from the 1944 Education Act's original vision of schooling in this country has set me pondering on the word 'trust'.

This five letter word has its origins in the Old Norse *traust: safe abode, confidence, security*. The Vikings brought the word to England in the 800s. We have been playing with it ever since.

Interestingly, the Mercers, Haberdashers, Skinners - to name three philanthropic organisations involved in education today - were established in the 14th and 15th centuries as distinguished Livery Companies, a reflection of their guild and trading origins.

The Charitable Uses Act of 1601 enshrined in law the idea of a list of purposes or activities that 'the State believed were of general benefit to society, and to which the State wanted to encourage private contributions'.

Charitable Trusts gathered momentum in the nineteenth century with the advent of hundreds of cooperatives across Europe. Today, according to Pro Bono Economics, the UK charity sector contributes a mammoth £200 billion in economic value each year, many times the official estimate. It is a thriving part of the economy, and brings much to society's wellbeing.

A trust conveys something soft and not-for-profit, an entity which speaks of cooperation, collegiality and working for the greater good.

The notion of academy trusts, alongside hospital trusts, is a more recent one, launched by Tony Blair's government in the 1990s. And immediately this enduringly trusted word 'trust' somehow became an object of suspicion. Memorably, one of Blair's cabinet members Robin Cook lamented that the advent of competing NHS trusts meant surgeons no longer shared best medical practices.

Over the past twenty years, the abuses in governance and finance which have been a regrettable feature of the academy landscape - albeit in a tiny minority of cases - have reinforced views that trusts are in some way dodgy.

How sad this is. Every teacher knows that great teaching is rooted in trusting relationships with students. Every leader knows that great schools are founded upon trusting professional relationships.

In shaping the trust-led landscape ahead, all stakeholders must commit to transparency and work in good faith with others. The system's collective ambition must surely be to create families of schools which benefit those within and beyond their boundaries. A culture of *traust* must be the bedrock. Ego-driven competition between trusts has to be a feature of the past landscape. Rebecca Boomer-Clark of Academies Enterprise Trust speaks rightly of 'system generosity'.

Trust is of course a word that lies at the heart of our personal lives. A breakdown of trust in a relationship or family is a torpedo to the heart. Most of us as humans have experienced that feeling. And no organisation can escape human error. So let the coming decade in education be one in which, by 2030, we can sing the praises of a trust-led system: run for the benefit of children and young people's wellbeing and academic achievements, led by professionals who are proud to serve.