

GUEST COLUMN – September 2025

The rewards of teaching Harry Hudson

As far back as the supposed golden years of fourth century Athens, teaching was not a profession held in high regard. Even Demosthenes, the famous statesman and acme of ancient oratory, would frequently insult his rivals by calling them teachers. Yet wind forwards a couple of millennia, and teaching still gets a bad rap.

If you went solely off the headlines in the UK, you'd find a profession suffocating under bad behaviour, a crisis in Special Educational Needs, and high numbers of vulnerable pupils persistently not attending school. It's not to diminish the reality of any of these issues to say that they don't reflect the full reality of what it means to be a teacher.

I love teaching, and so do thousands of my colleagues. But such is the popular conception of the job that it feels controversial to say it – and indeed many people are surprised when I do. Teaching deserves better than this, and there is little hope of attracting the best and the brightest to a profession perennially plagued by a hang-dog caricature.

We need to redress the balance. The August publicity around A Level and GCSE results days, for instance, offers the non-teaching public a glimpse of the joys and privileges of teaching. Teaching is about much more than exams, but stories of happy pupils and happy parents powerfully bring home the weight of responsibility that comes with teaching other people's children.

And this resonates: at a time when it's not uncommon for young people in particular to question the value of their job, teaching has a sense of purpose and fulfilment that's especially precious – and is also not about to be subcontracted to AI.

Few other jobs can replicate the energy, vitality and humour that come with working with children, and few other jobs are as rewarding.

What's more, most people aren't aware of the significant changes that have taken place since they were at school themselves – the professionalisation, the advances in cognitive science now informing classroom practice, the flourishing of teacher-led research. It's true that teaching is hard, and that it's both physically and emotionally tiring. But this is precisely because it matters, and the joys are greater and keep teachers coming back for more.

There are signs that policy-makers are starting to take seriously the need to improve the image of teaching, although the impact of initiatives like the Teaching Commission is yet to be seen.

We'll know we've made progress when it doesn't feel like a surprising or outlandish thing to say that I'm a happy teacher – and not just on August results days and at the start of the autumn term.

Harry Hudson teaches in West London and is the author of *The A – Z of Early Career Teaching*.