

THE  
**IDEAS-INFORMED**  
SOCIETY

WHY WE NEED IT AND HOW  
TO MAKE IT HAPPEN



EDITED BY

CHRIS BROWN  
GRAHAM HANDSCOMB

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Why We Need It and How to Make It  
Happen

EDITED BY

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And

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United Kingdom – North America – Japan  
India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited  
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2023

Editorial matter and selection © 2023 Chris Brown and Graham Handscomb.

Foreword and the Individual chapters © 2023 The authors.  
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**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83753-013-7 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-83753-010-6 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-83753-012-0 (Epub)



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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## ABOUT THE EDITORS

**Chris Brown** is Professor in Education and Director of Research at the University of Warwick's Department of Education Studies and Distinguished Visiting Professor, University of Tübingen. Chris has a long-standing interest in how people go about harnessing great ideas to improve the human condition. Traditionally Chris' work has focussed on the education system, but more recently Chris has turned his attention to the 'ideas-informed society' more generally, and how we can ensure ideas are available and used effectively to the benefit of everyone. Chris has written or edited some 21 books and nearly 100 journal articles in the broad sphere of research, evidence and ideas-use.

**Graham Handscomb** is Honorary Professor with University College London (UCL) and Visiting Professor at University of Bolton, and Durham University, UK. He was previously Professor of Education and Dean of The College of Teachers. He is a fellow of numerous organisations and universities, has written many books and articles over the last 30 years and is editor of a number of journals including *Professional Development Today*. Graham also runs a consultancy service where he provides interim management for medium to large organisations, including schools, local authorities and universities, to help implement complex business critical change in cost-effective, tight timescales. He pioneered the concept of the *Research Engaged School* which has become an internationally adopted practice and policy model.

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## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

**John Baumber** has enjoyed over 35 years of school leadership including being CEO of a Multi Academy Trust and an executive head in three Bolton High Schools before moving to lead schools with Kunskapsskolan in Sweden and the United States. John is at present Director of Education for Global Spirit Ed, facilitating an extensive international group of schools committed to creating high impact from student agency and personalisation. He is also a visiting Professor at Sunderland University. In addition, he leads the Global Research School Partnership encouraging action research by teachers to systematically enhance leadership, teaching and learning.

**Vivienne Baumfield** is Professor of Education at the University of Exeter where her research focuses on the role of universities in initial and continuing professional learning. In her previous post at the University of Glasgow she was Professor of Pedagogy and the International Dean for Eurasia and South Asia. Prior to taking up her first academic post, Vivienne was a secondary school teacher in the North East of England. Working in both schools and universities has confirmed the importance of valuing the knowledge of practitioners and of building partnerships to promote education in democracy.

**Dr Belinda Board** is the founding CEO and Chief Psychologist at Peoplewise. She is a Chartered Clinical Psychologist, with a PhD in leadership behaviours and workplace well-being, postgraduate degrees in Organisational and Forensic Psychology, and is a Fellow of the British Psychological Society (FBPsS). She is a visiting Lecturer at Hertfordshire University where she specialises in Leadership, Workplace Culture and Optimising organisational performance through people. Belinda is a world-renowned business psychologist

and executive coach practitioner who is passionate about the power of psychology to transform people and organisations all over the world. She has particular interests in building change ready cultures, workplace behaviour transformation, leadership potential and development, high performance teams, psychometric design, positive resilience, strategic thinking and cultural and gender diversity. Her published papers on functional and dysfunctional leadership behaviours and workplace well-being can be found in the *Journal of Affective Disorders*, the *Journal of Psychology, Crime and Law* and the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*.

**Sabra Brock** is Chair of the Business & Accounting Department at NYSCAS in Touro University, New York City. She received a PhD in Business Education from NYU in 2007, focusing on transformational learning. Dr Brock publishes widely in scholarly journals and with the Touro University Press. She is on the IdeaSpies Advisory Board. Prior to entering academia, Dr Brock held global leadership positions at Citicorp, Colgate-Palmolive, DuPont, Young & Rubicam.

**The Revd. Canon Helen Cameron** is a presbyter of the Methodist Church. She was ordained in 1991. She currently serves as Chair of the Northampton and the Nottingham & Derby Districts as well as being Moderator of the Free Churches Group and is the Free Church President of Churches Together in England. Helen trained originally as a physiotherapist and after ordination served two churches in Birmingham. She then began a career in theological education and served as Director of Methodist Formation in the Queens Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Formation in Birmingham. Helen wrote 'Living in the Gaze of God' (SCM, 2018) which explores ideas of human and ministerial flourishing. Helen is married to Iain, a retired GP and they have three adult children.

**John Castling** is an archaeologist, researcher and curator who works to make archaeology engaging and accessible. He's been a field archaeologist, museum curator and educator, and now looks after archaeology on The Auckland Project's estate in Bishop Auckland – including a mediaeval castle and a Roman fort. He's also a PhD student at Durham University exploring Roman and

Early Mediaeval North-East England. John is passionate about using archaeology's power to bring about positive change through people engaging in discovery and curiosity. He has a three-year-old daughter and four-year-old sheepdog, who regularly inspire and exhaust him with unrelenting, unbounded and uncontrollable curiosity!

**Professor Sir Paul Collier** is Professor of Economics and Public Policy at the Blavatnik School of Government, Oxford University; a Director of the International Growth Centre and a Distinguished Invited Professor at the Paris School of International Affairs, Sciences Po. In *The Future of Capitalism: Facing the New Anxieties* (2017), he attacked the misdirection of public policy and private business that has caused avoidable polarisation and the decline of Britain's regions. Having grown up in South Yorkshire, now the poorest region in England, he advises local and national government on practical ways of regional renewal.

**Katherine Crisp** is the Founder of Social Innovation for All, a social enterprise on a mission to unleash the creative potential of children and young people to address social challenges through programmes such as the Young Green Briton Challenge and Primary Pioneers. She was previously global lead for youth innovation at UNICEF, scaling UPSHIFT (UNICEF's flagship youth social innovation programme) from 6 countries to its current footprint of 45, alongside designing and delivering global youth social entrepreneurship challenges. Katherine initially qualified as an engineer before working as a strategy consultant. Her work spans sustainable livelihood development in India to new service development and new financing models for disabled children and young people. Katherine is a Fellow of the RSA and Chair of Governors at the Windmills Junior School.

**Alastair Donald** is Associate Director at Academy of Ideas and co-convenor of Battle of Ideas festival. For the charity Ideas Matter, he organises Living Freedom to allow younger generations to explore the meaning and ideals of freedom. Alastair has worked in the United Kingdom and internationally to develop festivals, exhibitions and curated programmes. He is author of *Letter on Liberty*:

*The Scottish Question*, co-editor of *The Lure of the City: From Slums to Suburbs* and *The Future of Community: Reports of a Death Greatly Exaggerated* and co-author of mantownhuman's *Manifesto: Towards a New Humanism in Architecture* which featured in *100 Artists' Manifestos* by Penguin Classics.

**Professor Sir Les Ebdon CBE DL**, after a distinguished career as an award-winning Professor of Analytical Chemistry and University Vice Chancellor, was a highly successful Director of Fair Access to Higher Education. Consequently, he is recognised by the media as one of the leading voices in this country promoting the benefits of higher education and social mobility. Three times he has been cited as one of the 100 'most influential' people in Britain by *Debrett's* and *The Sunday Times*. He received both his BSc and PhD from Imperial College London and has taught in universities in Uganda, Sheffield and Plymouth. He is regarded as having transformed the University of Bedfordshire during his time as Vice Chancellor. He was awarded a CBE in 2009, appointed Her Majesty's Deputy Lieutenant for Bedfordshire in 2011 and knighted in 2018. Currently he chairs the Board of Spurgeon's College, London, a Baptist theological college with degree awarding powers.

**Dr Benjamin Freud** is an educator, advisor, writer and podcaster. He is the founder of Coconut Thinking, a educational consultancy that creates spaces for emergent learning that contributes to the welfare of the bio-collective – every life form that has an interest in the healthfulness of the planet. He is also the Head of Upper School at Green School Bali and has held several leadership and teaching roles in some of the world's most innovative schools. Benjamin began his career in consulting, where he worked in Silicon Valley, Europe and Japan across different industry sectors.

**Dr Sam Fowles** is a barrister and author specialising in constitutional law. He is a member of Cornerstone Barristers, Director of the Institute for Constitutional and Democratic Research and a Lecturer at St Edmund Hall, University of Oxford. Sam has acted in many of the leading matters in modern English constitutional law, including *Miller v The Prime Minister* (concerning the unlawful prorogation of parliament in 2019), *Hamilton v Post Office* (the

unlawful conviction of Post Office workers) and the parliamentary enquiry into the policing of the Clapham Common vigil for Sarah Everard. He is the author of *Overruled: Confronting Our Vanishing Democracy in 8 Cases* (Oneworld, 2022) and writes a regular column for *Perspective* magazine.

**Stéphane Goldstein** has been Executive Director of InformAll since 2015, which, through research, analysis and facilitation, promotes the relevance and importance of information literacy. He is the author of reports, articles and other material on the relevance and applicability of IL to a range of settings. As an advocate for IL, he brokers relationships between information professionals and other stakeholders, and facilitates joint projects. He is the coordinator of the Media and Information Literacy Alliance (MILA) and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (RSA). His prior roles included 10 years spent at the Research Information Network (RIN) with a focus on scholarly communications policy and practice. He previously worked in a range of science and research policy roles at the Medical Research Council and Research Councils, UK.

**Charlotte Hankin** is co-founder of Coconut Thinking and an international educator with over 23 years' experience in a variety of roles including teacher, leader, school-to-school consultant and education policy advisor for the UK government, working in the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia and Thailand. Currently, Charlotte is a homeroom teacher of mixed-aged students, relishing the creativity, technology and collaboration that this community of learners bring. Working at the nexus of theory and practice, Charlotte is also pursuing her PhD in Education with Bath University, exploring how schools frame children's relationships with nature and the natural world.

**Valerie Hannon** is a global thought leader, inspiring systems to re-think what 'success' will mean in the 21st century, and the implications for education. The co-founder of the Innovation Unit, Valerie is a radical voice for change, whilst grounded in a deep understanding of how education systems currently work. She now works independently to support change programmes across the world. She has advised governments and worked with systems, schools and leaders in

education innovation on every continent. Valerie advised the OECD on its *Education 2030* project, and on its current *High Performing Systems for Tomorrow* programme. She is a regular keynote speaker and facilitator at international conferences and workshops. Her best-selling book *THRIVE* has been highly influential. Valerie was the Australian Learning Lecturer for 2020 on the subject of *The Future School*. The resulting book *FutureSchool* is published by Routledge. In 2021 she received the Edufuturists' award for Outstanding Achievement in Education.

**Anne-Lise Harding** (she/her) is Senior Liaison Librarian at the House of Commons and Deputy Chair of the CILIP Information Literacy Group (ILG). After graduating with an MA in Librarianship in 2011, she held several roles in the education sector, making the transition to the government sector in 2020. Her role supports both the House of Commons Library and Select Committee Teams, focussing on Information Literacy training, liaison and outreach. She is leading on Information Literacy work to make research for scrutiny more diverse, inclusive and representative. Anne-Lise is currently working on developing the Media and Information Literacy Alliance's (MILA) framework with the support of ILG and the wider information professional community.

**Jude Hillary** is co-head of the UK Policy and Practice team, leading two of NFER's strategic portfolio areas, namely Systems and Structures, which incorporate school funding and accountability, and Optimal Pathways, which incorporates education to employment and social mobility. He is also the principal investigator of a large Nuffield funded research programme entitled 'The Skills Imperative 2035: Essential skills for tomorrow's workforce'. Jude has directed several quantitative research projects including: the evolving nature of the school system; University Technical Colleges; projects on free schools; and social selection in top comprehensives in England, Scotland and Wales. He was the principal investigator of a major quantitative research project on teacher retention and turnover, funded by the Nuffield Foundation. Recently, Jude has overseen work to develop new longer-term post 16 destination measures. Prior to joining NFER in 2016, Jude had worked as a statistician in the Government Statistical Service for over 25 years,

including several years as head of statistics and data in the Department for Education.

**Jilly Johnston** is an artist, creative facilitator and transformative arts officer. She's been a teacher in primary, early years and higher education, and now works in the engagement and learning departments at The Auckland Project with a focus on the Spanish Art Gallery, Mining Art Gallery and artistic collections in the castle. She creates arts projects aimed at connecting people to art and creativity. Jilly loves using creative facilitation and creating engaging projects and programmes which address key barriers in the community of Bishop Auckland. She loves painting, drawing and encouraging others to find their creative spark!

**Carolynn Kerr** started teaching English in a secondary school in Wallsend almost 30 years ago, and has taught and led English departments in secondary schools in Northumberland and Newcastle. At Valley Gardens Middle School, she took on responsibility for Project Based Learning, working with staff to develop and embed a creative, innovative and bespoke curriculum for children and harness the passion and interest of staff.

**Iain King CBE** is based in Baghdad as Director of NATO's Mission in Iraq. He spent four years working for the EU and UN in Kosovo just after the 1999 intervention, coordinated international civilian operations in Benghazi during the Libyan civil war of 2011, and has worked in more than 10 conflict-affected countries. He is the author of five books spanning international interventions, military history and philosophy.

**Rafael Klein** is an artist who grew up in Brooklyn and studied at the University of Chicago and the Art Students League of New York. His work has been exhibited extensively in the United States, the United Kingdom and Europe and is held in collections including the Tate, the British Library, MoMA and the Brooklyn Museum. Klein has created many public sculptures and his work has been featured in the press including the *Times*, the BBC and *la Repubblica*. Klein lives and works in London and Puglia.

He is married with two daughters. <https://rafaelklein.com/>.

**David Leat** is Professor of Curriculum Innovation at Newcastle University. His career has included classroom geography teaching, teacher training and working for the Department for Education. His research interests started with thinking skills and developed to embrace Learning2Learn, metacognition, formative assessment, widening participation, teacher coaching and professional learning. He was Executive Director of the Research Centre for Learning and Teaching at Newcastle for 12 years. His current projects revolve around Enquiry/Project Based Learning and Community Curriculum Making – supporting schools to collaborate with cultural venues, businesses, conservation bodies and Northumbria Police Violence Reduction Unit. He is a director on a local Multi Academy Trust board, with responsibility for Climate Change and Sustainability, an Associate Editor of the *Curriculum Journal*, and has many conservation interests including bird ringing, forestry and regenerative agriculture.

**Paul Lindley OBE** is Chancellor of the University of Reading and an award-winning British entrepreneur, social campaigner and author. Paul founded Ella's Kitchen. Built on a core social mission, it is now the UK's largest baby food brand. In 2017 his first book: *Little Wins: The Huge Power of Thinking like a Toddler* was published, and he second, *Raising the Nation* will be published in 2023. He is Chair of the Mayor of London's Child Obesity Taskforce and of Robert F Kennedy Human Rights UK and is a Trustee of Sesame Workshop, the creators of Sesame Street.

**Anthony Mackay AM** is immediate past CEO and current Co-Chair of the Washington DC -based National Center on Education & the Economy. He was inaugural Chair Australian Institute for Teaching & School Leadership; Inaugural Deputy Chair Australian Curriculum, Assessment & Reporting Authority; immediate past Chair Australian Council for Educational Research and immediate past Deputy Chair of the Education Council New Zealand. Anthony is Deputy Chancellor Swinburne University, Melbourne; Honorary Senior Fellow, Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne; and Visiting Professor, International Center for Educational Enhancement, University

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**Will Millard** is an Associate Director at the policy and economic research consultancy, SQW. Will's expertise relates to the education and youth sectors, and he leads a wide range of research and evaluation projects for clients across national and local government, business and the third sector. A former school teacher and leader, Will writes and presents regularly, and is a trustee for the children's charity *I Can Be*.

**Judith Mossman** read Classics at Corpus Christi College Oxford. After a Junior Research Fellowship at Christ Church, Oxford, she taught at Trinity College, Dublin from 1991 until 2003, becoming a Senior Lecturer and a Fellow. She was Professor of Classics at Nottingham University until 2017, when she was appointed Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Arts and Humanities at Coventry University. She works on Greek tragedy, mostly Euripides, and Greek literature under the Roman Empire, mostly Plutarch. She believes strongly in the power of the arts and humanities to change lives for the better.

**Lesley Saunders** has worked all her life in education, as teacher, researcher, policy adviser and independent consultant. Her main posts were as Principal Research Officer and Head of the School Improvement Research Centre at the National Foundation for Educational Research; and subsequently as Senior Policy Adviser for Research, General Teaching Council for England. Lesley is a visiting professor at UCL Institute of Education and her professorial lecture, given in 2004, was called 'Grounding the Democratic Imagination: Developing the Relationship between Research and Policy in Education'. She is also a published poet, with seven full collections.

**Sir Anthony Seldon** is one of Britain's leading contemporary historians, educationalists, commentators and political authors. He was Vice Chancellor of The University of Buckingham from 2015 to 2020 after being a transformative head teacher for 20 years of Brighton College and then Wellington College. He is author and editor of over 45 books on contemporary history, including the

inside view books on the last five Prime Ministers. Anthony's contribution to public life is extensive and wide ranging. This includes: the co-founder and first Director of the Institute of Contemporary British History; the co-founder of Action for Happiness; honorary historical adviser to 10 Downing Street for 10 years; the UK's Special Representative for Education to Saudi Arabia; Deputy Chair of The Times Education Commission; a member of the Government's First World War Culture Committee; Chair of the Comment Awards; Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company; President of the International Positive Education Network; Chair of the National Archives Trust; Patron & member of several charities; Founder of the Via Sacra Western Front Walk; and Executive Producer of the film *Journey's End*. Anthony appeared on Desert Island Discs in 2016. For the last 15 years he has given his money for writing and lecturing to charity. He has three children; his wife of 34 years, Joanna, died of cancer in December of 2016, and he married Sarah in 2022.

**Tim Slack** is the founder and co-director of Appreciating People. He has worked in youth work and community based regeneration for over 35 years, holding several senior posts in local government, community engagement and arts organisations. Tim is an experienced Appreciative Inquiry trainer and facilitator and author of a number of practical Appreciative Inquiry resources including 'How to be more Awesome', a journal and workbook co-designed with young people supporting resilience and well-being. He has been the AI adviser on the Appreciating Church programme and the co-author of Appreciating Church resource and workbook. Currently with NHS partners he is co-create Appreciating Health and Care an Appreciative Inquiry guide to the health (published in late 2023).

For more information [www.appreciatingpeople.co.uk](http://www.appreciatingpeople.co.uk).

**The Revd, Fiona Thomas** background includes agricultural botany, community work in India, international development, adult learning, theological education and pastoral ministry. She values appreciative enquiry as an approach which draws together theory and practice from all of these areas. After co-authoring the book *Appreciating Church* in 2017 she co-founded the organisation of

the same name as a self-supporting community of practice across churches and their communities. Fiona was Head of Education and Learning for the United Reformed Church. Alongside consultancy work she is currently offering transitional ministry with three small United Reformed Church congregations in South London.

**Ulrike Thomas** is a Research Associate in the School of Education, Newcastle University. Before embarking on a career in research she was a Primary School teacher for 9 years. Her interest in Community Curriculum making has developed as a result of her involvement in a range of research projects which have examined the impact of innovative pedagogy and curricular on students and teachers. She works with university academics, community partners and schools to develop project ideas and resources that will inspire teachers to adopt this approach to curriculum-making.

**Neil Thompson** is an independent writer and educator. He has held full or honorary professorships at five UK universities and is currently a visiting professor at the Open University. He is a well-published author, sought-after international conference speaker and highly respected developer of online learning. His recent books include *Anti-racism for Beginners* and *The Managing People Practice* manual. His website, with his acclaimed Manifesto for Making a Difference, is at [www.NeilThompson.info](http://www.NeilThompson.info).

**Ruth Webb** is a class teacher at Valley Gardens Middle School. She had 15 years of teaching experience and managerial experience with the John Lewis Partnership prior to this. Ruth has a passion for the environment, with a degree in Environmental Science, so in addition to teaching responsibilities, she coordinates the activities of the school's Eco Club, and her school was recently awarded the prestigious 'Green Flag Award'.

**Alison Whelan** was a former Modern Foreign Languages teacher who now combines her skills and experience in languages and classroom-based educational research in the role of an Associate Lecturer and Research Associate in the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences (ECLS) at Newcastle University. Her main research interest is in collaborative curriculum innovation and she has worked with schools, FE colleges and

heritage and arts organisations in supporting the creation and sustainable implementation of research-based, innovative approaches to learning.

**Dr Raphael Wilkins** started as a teacher before progressing to local authority educational administration, including 12 years at chief officer level. He had advisory and consultancy roles in Parliament and with the local authority associations, and other bodies, before joining the (then) University of London Institute of Education, as Pro Director (London), subsequently Pro Director (International Consultancy). He was President of the College of Teachers UK, in which capacity, with others, he enabled the creation of the Chartered College of Teaching. He has written five books and over 70 articles and book chapters, and is currently an independent scholar.

**Lynn Wood** is the Founder and Chief Idea Spy of IdeaSpies, an open innovation platform sharing ideas that do good. She has an MA (USYD) and an MBA (AGSM). Her executive career included senior marketing positions with American Express, Myer, Citicorp and Schroders. Lynn also has experience on many private, public and government boards, including as Chair. She was awarded a Centenary Medal in 2001.

# FOREWORD: ARE IDEAS ENOUGH?

This startling and opportune volume shines a vivid light on a little-studied or understood aspect of modern Britain.

Ideas.

Without ideas, no progress can be made.

With the wrong ideas, no progress can be made.

But with the right ideas, at the right time, anything is possible.

Ideas can be portmanteau, like capitalism or communism, feminism or wokeism. Or they can be micro, as with ideas which affect just a particular area, like the idea of creating vaccines to combat coronavirus, or a new style in architecture, like art deco. Many Prime Ministers try to define their premierships by having big ideas, like ‘Thatcherism’. But most fail to do so, whether John Major with his ‘citizens’ charter’, Tony Blair with his ‘Third Way’, David Cameron with his ‘big society’ or Boris Johnson with ‘levelling up’. Only rarely is it given to a prime minister to define their entire premiership with a wraparound idea. Most find it hard to deliver even micro ideas.

Why do ideas matter so much? And why are they never of themselves enough? This Foreword will explore both these questions.

Without ideas, sterility reigns. Without John Maynard Keynes, government economic policy would’ve remained rooted in the non-interventionist ideas of the early twentieth century. His advocacy of fiscal and monetary policy paved the way for governments managing aggregating demand, and mitigating the worst effects of economic depression. Without social reformer William Beveridge, the welfare state introduced by the Labour government of Clement Attlee from 1945, would not have emerged in the form it did. Ideas

are equally important in the world of art, with perspective, impressionism, expressionism and abstract art ushering in successive revolutions in art forms.

Ideas matter because they break the hold of status quos. The status quo hates new ideas, and will try and discourage, disparage and snuff them out whenever they see them. They might succeed in the short term, but ideas will inevitably break through sooner or later. The absolutist monarchies of France and Russia were brought down by ideas of equality. The mighty coercive power of the Soviet Union was broken by the ideas of freedom. For each idea, a season. Millions of companies worldwide that flourished for years were brought down within a decade of the digital revolution arriving in their countries. High Streets are being revolutionised by the idea of online shopping.

Ideas matter because we live in a dynamic world. To stand still is to go backwards. Resisting ideas is as futile as baying at the rising sun snuffing out the despondent moon. Ideas embrace and enshrine new technologies, new mindsets and new frontiers. Humans cannot go anywhere but forward. Retro thinking is not about going backwards: it's about reimagining the past and serves it up nice and crisp in the modern era.

Finally, ideas matter because they refresh policy and politics. Britain has a partially broken democracy, a deeply flawed education and health system, and it has a culture which is heavily skewed towards the well-off. We still have to find solutions to combating climate change, the cost of social care, how to reduce inequality, have affordable green energy and address the concerns around artificial intelligence (AI). As the chapters in the book show, there are solutions on all these areas and many more.

No one argued more persuasively than the late Ken Robinson that creativity is as vital as it is undervalued. We have a school and university system which privileges regimentation and producing the 'right' answer over creativity. And we have an economy which has been historically weak at rewarding creative thinking and developing promising home-grown ideas into successful products in the market place.

So are ideas then our total salvation?

No. Ideas are necessary but not sufficient to securing future survival and flourishing.

Why aren't ideas then sufficient? First, as I argued in 'Ideas are not enough' [in the book I edited with David Marquand *The Ideas that Shaped Post-war Britain* (Fontana, 1996)], they are only effective if they are in a positive relationship with three other forces: individuals, interests and circumstances. Ideas need to be adopted and advocated by those in positions of power, with the finance, authority and the means to make them happen. Even then, they will be unsuccessful if there are powerful forces ranged against them: it could be the media, financial interests or popular opinion. Even if the ideas, interests and individuals are all positively aligned, it still requires the right circumstances for them to flourish. Disruptive change (e.g. war, economic downturn or natural disasters) has often been the friend to the blossoming of new ideas. World War I thus allowed nascent ideas, including popular democracy, the vote for women and scientific and medical advance to fructify, while World War II changed notions of the role of government and the size and responsibilities of the state.

Some ideas are bad. Eugenics is one such. Aryanism and Nazism equally ideas all reasonable people would find repugnant. Other ideas are more subjective. In the west, we celebrate democracy: most of the world lives in regimes that are autocratic. The idea that the Iraqis en masse would welcome the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and want to embrace democracy proved not to be the case. The majority of the world lives in states that refuse to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Ideas can provide the solution when so many are diametrically opposed to each other. The rights of the unborn child versus the woman's right to choose, for example. The right of each individual to choose their gender versus the rights of others, including some parents, female athletes and women's groups, to argue that gender is not a choice. The European Union is an idea, but so is Brexit. Fervent supporters on both sides believe that the evidence supports their own case.

Ideas can easily be exaggerated in importance. Many of the most significant changes in history have been brought on by developments, which have nothing to do with ideas, including epidemics,

natural disasters and the changing climate. Elevating ideas to being all important can distort human agency.

Often people don't want governments with highfalutin ideas: they just want the potholes filled and for the trains to run on time.

Finally, we can elevate the importance of ideas forgetting that we have still to develop applicable ideas to save humankind from the biggest risks to its future, including weapons of mass destruction, rogue states with aggressive ambitions and AI out of control.

Relying on AI to solve the biggest problems we face might just be the most stupid idea of them all.

This volume is clever precisely because it elevates ideas while recognising their limitations.

Sir Anthony Seldon

# PART 1

## THE CONCEPT OF AN IDEAS-INFORMED SOCIETY

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# POTENT IDEAS, ENGAGED CITIZENS, HEALTHY SOCIETIES

**Chris Brown and Graham Handscomb**

## SPARKS OF INSPIRATION

Let's start with what we know. Ideas always have and always will change the world, whether this happens via gradual shifts in understanding or behaviour, or from the introduction of revolutionary new ways of knowing and being.<sup>1,2</sup> When these ideas are good (and naturally how we judge 'goodness' is very much steeped in our norms and values), we all benefit as a result. This is expressed well by television presenter, archaeologist and historian Neil Oliver,<sup>3</sup> who suggests that when life-enhancing, life-changing ideas have occurred during humankind's history, sparks of inspiration have become flames and these flames have served to positively light up the world.

But, as you will have noticed, Western society is actually in a bit of a fix right now. Smack bang in the midst of environmental emergency and an obesity crisis, we are also faced with growing disparities between the haves and have nots, and a danger that hard won moves towards equity and rights might be lost. We have also seen, in more recent times, many individuals beginning to turn their back on what science and what traditional politics have to offer, with a concomitant growth in reactionary populism and forms of social media that are rapidly becoming the Wild West when it comes to veracity and honesty. So it would seem that now – more

than ever – it's timely to consider how to support citizens to become both willing and able to engage with and evaluate ideas.

## THE BENEFITS OF AN IDEAS-INFORMED SOCIETY

With this context in mind, we see the notion of the ideas-informed society as a desirable situation. One in which (1) our citizens see value in being well-informed through staying up to date and (2) citizens regularly keep themselves up to date by actively engaging with new ideas, doing so both openly and critically.<sup>4</sup> But ushering in an ideas-informed society is not simply a desirable intellectual exercise; research indicates a range of benefits materialise from citizens actively engaging with ideas. These include (3) citizens becoming more knowledgeable and (4) citizens finding themselves better positioned to make beneficial decisions and achieve personal fulfilment. For instance, being ideas-informed is linked to better health and other measures of wellness, since the key to personal fitness – as well as tackling many illnesses, such as diabetes – is information and education. Likewise, within the overall umbrella of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the spread of the Omicron variant (which occurred after the mass availability of vaccinations and booster jabs) highlighted how those less well informed were more likely to end up in intensive care units as a result.

Being ideas-informed can also, amongst many other things, ensure that people (1) maintain a broad understanding of scientific and technological advances and, where relevant, how these can be harnessed to improve our own lives as well as that of society more generally<sup>5</sup>; (2) demonstrate a general awareness of artistic, literary or cultural developments – with cultural capital linked to a range of positive outcomes, from success at school to future levels of income<sup>6,7</sup>; and (3) are cognizant of political events.<sup>8</sup> This final point leading to strengthened democratic processes, with politicians and local community leaders being held to account.

A further benefit of ideas engagement is that citizens can align their perspectives with desirable societal values.<sup>9,10</sup> By this we mean values that are progressive in nature: i.e., values that tend towards fairness, equality and social and environmental justice. This

tendency is evident in recent studies which show that the vast majority of the UK population (80% of those surveyed, based on a poll of 2,244 UK citizens) now believe it important to be attentive to issues of racial inequality and social justice.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, progressive norms present themselves in terms of increased concern about the current environmental emergency and attitudes regarding how it might be tackled, including the now widespread acceptance of veganism.<sup>12</sup> The totality of these benefits also positively impacts society when they result in a population that is generally more happy, healthy, inclusive and empathetic, and where there is more social, cultural, scientific and political engagement, as well as educational and economic productivity. While in an ideas-informed society, these types of outcomes may not always materialise, nor always result in behaviours that are commensurate with understanding, the more citizens engage with ideas, the more likely this will be the case over the longer term.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, we also believe that more ideas-engagement has significant and positive implications for the whole area of leadership and decision-making in society. As more citizens engage with ideas, and become more critically informed, then the momentum towards collaboration and participation, not just in the democratic process, but also in collaborative social leadership more generally, becomes increasingly compelling. As such, we see more genuine ideas-engagement fostering a ‘density’ of leadership and social participation throughout society.<sup>14</sup> Given its potential positives, it is our aspiration, therefore, that the ideas-informed society is available to all and can be enjoyed by everyone.

## CAVEATS AND CHALLENGES

It’s also worth that we briefly pause to introduce some pragmatism into our argument. Having made the case for the promotion and fostering of ideas-engagement and the hugely positive dividends this can bring to society, we are not so naive that we cannot also see that there are some potentially problematic considerations with our position. Certainly, we are not labouring under the simplistic assumption that all ideas that ‘take off’ (or take root) will be ‘good’,

‘positive’ or actively contribute to human flourishing. Indeed, as a number of our contributors argue, although we may like to believe that good arguments will always defeat bad ones, with the truth winning out, this is often evidentially not the case when ideas battle themselves out.<sup>15</sup> In fact quite the opposite situation can occur when toxic ideas or fake news gain momentum to overwhelm and corrupt society.<sup>16</sup>

The other caveat also explored in this book is that the promotion of a society which encourages ideas-engagement may be met by considerable organisational, cultural and even psychological resistance – often by the very people and sections of society that would gain most from this.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, as indicated earlier, we believe our aspiration is well worth pursuing, with potential benefits far outweighing such concerns – if these concerns can be adequately addressed – and its development best achieved by drawing from a range of sectors.

Given our goal, we note with interest, but also concern, that there are some who neither engage with ideas, nor make attempts to do so; an issue, because the presence of these attitudes and behaviours serves to limit the extent to which the types of beneficial outcomes we detail above can be achieved.<sup>18</sup> Of particular worry are the findings of previous studies which indicate that, amongst the population generally, there are substantive numbers of people who are ‘ideas refusers’: i.e. members of the public who see little value in engaging with ideas. For instance, findings from a representative survey of some 1,000 voting age citizens in England, show that, in response to the question: ‘How important is it to you to keep up to date with news, current affairs and new developments (such as political, economic and scientific developments)?’, 13% of respondents indicated that this was ‘unimportant’ to them, with 16% seemingly ambivalent (responding that it was ‘neither important or unimportant’).<sup>19</sup>

Analysing this data further reveals that ‘ideas refusers’ are more likely to be from low education backgrounds, reside in communities where friends, family and colleagues also possess low levels of education, and will predominantly be in low skilled employment. An additional insight of interest is the reluctance by ‘ideas refusers’ to discuss new ideas with friends, family or work colleagues. This

places ‘ideas refusers’ in a diametrically opposed position to those who are ‘ideas engagers’. What’s more, as well as ascribing low value to ideas-engagement, ideas refusers are also less likely to see value in the types of progressive ideals we see as vital. For instance, the same survey asked respondents to consider the importance to them of a range of topics, including the importance of inclusion and tolerance; the importance of business practices that are both ethical and sustainable; and the importance of supporting one’s own and other’s physical and mental health. Again, a sizable proportion (ranging from 15% to 24% depending on the statement) considered these items to be of no or of indeterminate value. Interestingly, these findings mirror those of other recent studies.<sup>20,21</sup> At the same time, such individuals (as well as the wider communities within which they live) stand much to gain from becoming increasingly knowledgeable, in a better position to make good decisions and from being more responsive to progressive beliefs and norms. So, as we see it, there is a clear need to know more about how to close the gap between the ideal (i.e. the actualisation of the ideas-informed society) and the real (i.e. the current situation). But how to achieve this is the part we don’t yet know: hence the need for this book.

#### OUR AUTHORS – WIDE EXPERIENCE AND DEEP INSIGHTS

It is our belief that, if the benefits we outline above are to be realised and concerns successfully mitigated, a collective endeavour is required. Naturally, therefore, in order to pull together this work we reached out to the great and the good: those with vast experience and even vaster minds, to see what they thought was required in understanding the nature of an ideas-informed society and how to make it happen. We also wanted our contributors to outline the challenges and pitfalls that might potentially hinder what we would like to see realised, or that might even threaten to corrupt our aspirations into something undesirable. And we are more than delighted with the result.

What you have in your hands represents the wisdom of 35 respected, authors, thinkers and practical players in the field of

ideas. Our contributors hail from a diverse range of fields and include leading lawyers and entrepreneurs, as well as artists, archaeologists, church ministers and educationalists – with a number of leading academics thrown in for good measure. Individually, they have been working in the broad field of ideas-engagement in very different ways. So, just to give a few examples: Dr Sam Fowles, as a barrister focused on public and constitutional law, is concerned with truth telling and holding our leaders and democratic system to account (even successfully taking former Prime Minister Boris Johnson to court for illegally proroguing Parliament); Sir Paul Collier is a leading campaigner tackling what he argues is a starkly unequal, polarized society in the UK; Katherine Crisp is Founder of Social Innovation for All, a social enterprise on a mission to unleash the creative potential of young people to address social challenges; Paul Lindley is an award-winning British entrepreneur and Chair of the Mayor of London’s Child Obesity Taskforce; Sir Les Ebdon is a champion of fair access to higher education for the marginalised; The Revd Canon Helen Cameron of the Methodist Church, meanwhile, has, for some time, been concerned with the idea of human flourishing. Some have also been directly involved in ideas-related initiatives. For example, see the IdeasSpies website discussed in the chapter by Lynn Wood and Sabra Brock; the ‘Battle of Ideas’ festival that is co-convened by Alastair Donald from the Academy of Ideas; or Stéphane Goldstein’s ‘InformAll’ initiative, which promotes the relevance and importance of information literacy.

## THE SECTIONS OF THE BOOK

To corral all our contributions effectively, we have arranged them into the following sections:

1. The Concept of an Ideas-Informed Society;
2. Truth-telling, Democracy and Community;
3. Creativity, Arts and the Environment; and
4. Education and Empowering Young People.