

# **THE END GAME**

## **THE CONTINUING STORY OF KEITH UPSON**

After being made redundant, applying for a new job and being interviewed, I was resurrected as Senior Advisor for Staff Development and INSET. My previous team had been dismantled and an entirely new structure for operating had been put into place. This time the emphasis was upon the 'Area', of which there were six in Kent. There was to be an Area team of Inspectors and Teacher Advisors for each Area as well as an INSET team, all under the management of a Curriculum Support Manager. My staff changed. The post of Assistant was abandoned. I gained two new Staff Development Co-ordinators and the responsibility for T.V.E.I (the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative) which was active in Secondary Schools. In recognition of the burgeoning budgetary and administrative load I also gained a Training Manager to take over the whole business side of the operation. There was also a new colleague with compatible responsibility who came to share my office at the Teacher's Centre. He was appointed Senior Advisor – Advisory Services with responsibility for a team of Teacher Advisors. Both of us were now included in the Area Management Team and worked much more closely with the Area Education Officer.

Despite my change of job title, my job at the local level remained much as it had done before. I went on working with the Primary Consortium Groups and made sure that the wishes of the Head-teachers were carried through to the letter. The only difference was that it was now my Training Manager who did most of the donkey work. This gave me time to head up a number of major initiatives. In 1989 there was a real push for School Development Planning from the Government and documents and money flowed from the Department of Education to ensure that the message got home. It was, of course, exactly what we had been advocating for the last 3 years. Nevertheless, with this endorsement, we redoubled our efforts. We wrote and published our own booklet describing how Development Plans should be constructed and took part in training sessions for both teachers and Governors. We too sat down and produced a four-year business plan of our own and set performance targets. 1989 also saw a massive training effort for the introduction of the National Curriculum. Every teacher in every school was exposed to at least 2 days training. There were compulsory School closures and, in the Primary sector, training was organised on a Consortium basis. It was a massive piece of organisation. There were also County initiatives for Records of Achievement and Assessment, both of which I was closely involved with. From this it became clear that my new role was far more strategic than before. Not surprisingly with all of these initiatives the pressures for change in schools reached unparalleled heights. Given the huge investments of money, I became the person to decide the best way to alleviate the burden in the most practical and efficient way. Initiative after initiative came and went and the whole language of education changed. Where previously change efforts rested upon the whims of individual teachers, now change was forced through with the weight of law. It left the teaching profession dazed, shell-shocked and demoralised. A great many good teachers felt that what

they were doing was no longer good enough, found it difficult to cope, and left. Those that remained struggled to keep pace, resented the interference and complained about mounting workloads.

During 1989 it became obvious to me that a great many Head-teachers and Senior Teachers were ill-equipped to manage the changes. With the advent of Local Management, where all the money and decision-making powers were passed down to the schools, running a school was becoming a business and managing staff to meet National Curriculum Performance Targets demanded new systems and new skills. Very few Head-teachers had received any management training – they were all skilled teachers, but that did not necessarily make them skilled managers. It was a field that interested me and I assembled a working-party to examine the possibilities for local development. This included the Assistant Director of Education. My interest led to my nomination as the Kent representative on an organisation called 'Schools Management South' which was engaged in writing a Management Course for Head-teachers, drawing upon some pioneering methods. In this way I came to be regarded as the spokesperson for the management development of school staff for the County as a whole and, in 1990 I made a contribution to a very prestigious conference held at Wye College. My contact with Schools Management South led to my being trained as a trainer. At the same time, I began to make my first tentative foray into management training using materials published by Bristol University. So successful was this that I submitted my CV to the University and became recognised as a bona-fide tutor.

Once more I felt that my team was making excellent progress. We had forged ahead on a number of fronts, my Training manager was super-efficient and the machinery ran smoothly. I personally had identified a niche for my own development, was pursuing it vigorously and making good progress. Then, as before, in January 1991, the carpet was once more pulled from beneath our feet and we were all made redundant AGAIN! Once more a new slimmed down Education Department was conceived and we were back to competing for far, far fewer jobs. On this occasion the Curriculum Support team was ravaged. The devolution of Inspectors and Advisors to the six Areas was reversed and centralised. Over 50 of us were to be laid off. Under the new regime there would only be a skeleton staff of very senior people attached to the Area Offices and the rest were to be brought together to form a new Curriculum Support Agency operating from Maidstone. It had to sell its services. The expectation was that Schools would be charged £250 per day for an Advisors time and each Advisor would have to spend 180 days per year in schools in order to earn his keep. If he failed to do it he would be replaced. The reality of Thatcherism finally hit home and bit deep! Our futures were now to depend upon our skills and the vagaries of market forces. The role of Advisor was no longer a soft option. The situation was exacerbated by the abandonment of Local Authority inspections as the new Ofsted Inspections took over, so even the most senior and revered educationalists in Kent now feared for their livelihoods. Luckily, as far as I was concerned, In-Service Education was too important to ditch. There was still a need for it to be managed, not least because it attracted huge sums of money from the Government which could pay for some salaries. My function was therefore preserved, new responsibilities were added to it, it was up-graded to full Inspector level and re-labelled, this time to Area Advisor – Curriculum Services. The problem was winning acceptance in a hotly contested battle to be re-appointed.

It was as if the previous four years had never existed. We were forced through one of the most demeaning and humiliating selection procedures imaginable. We were given English and Maths tests and put through a battery of psychometric tests. Days later we were subject to two interviews. I came away feeling aggrieved and unvalued. The procedures were orchestrated by a new Senior Inspector who found pleasure in intimidation. There was no humanity in it. I got the job, but I was wounded by the total lack of recognition of past efforts and the bully-boy tactics.

I took up the post of Area Advisor – Curriculum Services in April 1991 and my working life changed appreciably. Whilst my core responsibilities remained unchanged I gathered important Inspectorial duties for 18 Schools in Thanet. Traditionally Kent Schools were allocated a 'Pastoral' Inspector whose function it was to keep a watching brief on behalf of the Authority and to arbitrate in any difficulties that might arise. This task remained an important part of the new order. My Schools were drawn from across the spectrum of education and included 12 Primary Schools, 5 Secondary's, a Grammar School and a residential Special School. During a two year period I performed many tasks from School Reviews, to Headship appointments and the disciplining of staff. The Head-teachers looked to me as their mentor and confidante and expected solid and reliable advice in any issue of the moment. It was an awesome responsibility and one I was pitched into without any training. It was stressful but enjoyable. To bolster my armoury of coping skills I persuaded my boss to release me to attend a course on 'Inspecting Local Authority Primary Schools' at the Bishop Grosseteste College in Lincoln during 1991. This gave me confidence to be more authoritative.

In keeping with my higher status I was also drawn into the County Council machine. With heavy cut-backs in staff some very important jobs were having to be shared around. One that fell upon my shoulders was writing the bids to Central Government in order to obtain the funds for certain categories of In-Service Training and School Development. This entailed drawing up and costing detailed plans for how developments would be managed across the County for the coming years. It was important work – people's jobs depended upon it. I remember being shocked at the attitude of the senior echelon of the Department who cared nothing for the plans but only wanted the money. Once the bid was successful it seemed that the carefully prepared plans were thrown out of the window.

There were other changes at the local level. Soon after appointment my office was relocated to the Area Education Office, at first in old Victorian buildings in London Road, Canterbury, but later to plush new offices, complete with a conference suite on the Thanet Way at Whitstable. Both of my Teachers' Centres were closed down. Even more of my administrative load was transferred to my Training Manager. I continued to take all the Head-Teachers Consortium meetings and agreed with them the actions that should be taken, but that was all. All subsequent organisation and budget management was done by clerical staff. As the indications that privatisation was looming became clearer, with the help of my son Stephen, I set new standards in the quality of INSET Programmes and Course Advertisement to enhance their professional appeal and ensure we had the edge. I also further developed Management training by leading and organising two year-long courses for Head-teachers which absorbed

half of the Heads in the Area. These were based upon the Schools Management South course which I had been involved with previously. It relied upon me to train trainers as well as take a group through myself. It was accompanied by management courses for lesser mortals especially in Primary Schools where there was virtually no management culture. National initiatives also continued to draw upon my time. During 1991 -2 Assessment became the main theme, especially assessment of National Curriculum Attainment Targets and the pioneering phase of SATS Tests. I was nominated as the Assessment Co-ordinator for East Kent although I was never given the opportunity to develop the role. In November 1992 we were notified that another re-organisation was on the way. We were all Being made redundant AGAIN!

This time the notification of impending reorganisation was made much earlier and rumours were rife about the depth of cuts to come. I was heartily sick of the insecurities and the back-biting atmosphere that went with them and I hated the thought of yet another demeaning selection procedure. I feared the indignity of being found wanting and surplus to requirements, who wouldn't? This time, however, I had an escape route. I had reached the magic age of 50 when I was able to retire and draw a pension. In the lead up to Christmas Jenny and I sat down to review our finances and to calculate the absolute minimum income that we could exist on. It was surprisingly low and I began to ask myself serious questions about the quality of life and the need for such a stressful life when we didn't need the money. I also realised that, for the first time in my career, that's exactly what it had become – a Job! A large part of the intrinsic satisfaction was being crushed. The positive strokes had disappeared. For me it was like being denied the elixir of life. I was becoming increasingly demoralised and ready for escape. When I received details of the unbelievably generous severance package that the Authority were offering to facilitate the cut backs in staff, the temptation to cut and run was too much for me. They were offering a 10-year enhancement on my pension and a redundancy lump sum. It was too good to miss. Pensions were calculated upon the number of years 'service. To qualify for a full pension of half salary you needed to have worked for 40 years. I had done 29 years so was eligible for only 75% of this (ie) 3/8ths of my final salary. The 10 year enhancement meant that they would calculate my pension on the basis of 39 years' service which gave me almost a full pension. Over Christmas we decided that I should go for it and I applied for release under these terms. Towards the end of January I heard that I had been awarded the 'package'. Not only that but I also discovered that the costs of my lease car paid by the Authority would also be included as salary. This raised my final salary from £33,000 to £35,500 and so gave me a higher pension still. With the papers signed and sealed I cannot describe the relief. I felt physically lighter as though a load had been lifted from my shoulders. Such was the spring in my step that it felt like moonwalking! I left on March 31<sup>st</sup> with a lump sum payment of £50,000 and a pension of around £18,000 per year.

Obviously there were questions about what I would do next. I entertained the idea of setting up as an independent advisor and worked out a way I could continue to serve my Primary School Consortium groups by charging a fee. However, in a surprising turn of events, before I had chance to clarify arrangements, I was offered a job. It came out of the blue. For years I had had dealings with ChristChurch College in Canterbury, the local Teachers Training College. I had worked with them to plan courses and supplied and financed students from East Kent.

In late January, 1993, I was attending a meeting at the College when I received an invitation to go to see the Vice Principal. When I confirmed that I was to leave the employ of the Local Authority he immediately offered me a job – 3 days per week for £15,000 per year. I could not believe my luck. I had been head hunted!

I took up appointment on May 1<sup>st</sup> 1993. It was the most peculiar situation. There was no pre-ordained role for me and, apart from the over-sight of about 8 post-graduate students on teaching practice, it seemed that I was expected to carve out a niche for myself. I immediately finalised a service agreement for my Primary School friends and went out to sell it to the consortium groups I had been working with for so long. It was a big step for them. It meant turning their backs on the Local Authority – an allegiance steeped in the tradition of boss and employee. Three groups instantly took up my offer and transferred. The remainder hesitated. They wanted to see what would emerge from the newly reconstituted Education Department. It was not long before 3 more groups came on board. They realised that the kind of personal service I was offering them could not be replicated. When my ex-colleagues discovered they were losing out to my competition there was a storm and I found my access to Kent advisors blocked.



It took a number of high-level meetings for them to realise that they were cutting their noses to spite their faces. And although I had to invent a wheeze to prevent them from charging me VAT on their services, working relationships were restored. So I continued to organise the training for half of the Primary Schools in East Kent for a further 5 years and earned half of my salary doing it.

Since I had been appointed 'Senior Lecturer' and worked for a Training College there was a clear expectation that I would engage in some teaching. Once more I fell back on my developing skills as a management trainer and began to run courses all over East Kent and beyond. At first these were short non-accredited courses, but as my grasp of the intricacies of the system of accreditation for Higher Education grew, I began to develop longer-term courses leading to the Advanced Certificate of Management Studies. Within a short while I was appointed Course Director and took responsibility for the content and standards of all such courses run by the College across the South East. I also taught on the 3-year Diploma in Management Studies and wrote much of the course material used by the students.

Throughout my time at the College no pressure was brought to bear on me to do anything. It was a relaxed place to work. I worked Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays each week and never taught for more than 6 hours. Most weeks were less and some weeks not at all. This was because all of my work was in Schools. The courses I ran were for serving teachers and

had to be after school hours, between 4pm and 6pm. So I whiled away my days and sidled off to schools in the afternoon. Unfortunately, of course, at that time of the day teachers were not in a particularly receptive mood and it was not easy work to excite them with management theory. I took great pains to produce slick, highly participative sessions to shift them from their exhausted malaise, but it was an uphill battle. Despite my efforts to keep things light and bubbly they were only really interested in venting their pent-up frustrations and in having a good moan about their lot, which said something of the demoralised state of the profession at the time. The crunch came when I asked them for work! This was far more difficult than it was with children and I had to draw on every trick in the book to humour, flatter, cajole, intimidate and threaten in order to get them to produce the coursework necessary to gain the Advanced Certificate qualification. You could see their resolve weaken under the pressure of yet another demand on the time they didn't have. Most managed to produce something, but standards were not high. Thank God for the handful of people whose submissions were brilliant. They made it all worthwhile.

Whilst I enjoyed the teaching and was invited back to some school's time and time again, it was not such fun as teaching children. I used to have a grand old time larking about with youngsters and I missed the light-hearted banter terribly when I left school for higher things. Working with adults was a much more serious and sober affair. There seemed to be a direct relationship between my status and negativity. The higher my position the more teachers' seized on me to pour out their troubles. I suppose it was a release for them but it didn't make my days any lighter. In fact, status tended to take the edge off relationships. People kept their distance. They preferred not to draw attention to themselves as if fearful of my use of power. Life at the top therefore tended to be lonely, particularly as the majority of time was spent 'out in the field' on my own and there was little contact with colleagues back at the ranch. Even my days in College were spent mostly alone in my Study. The result was that nobody in authority really knew what I was doing and were therefore in no position to comment on or commend my efforts. Survival in this environment it seems, depended upon a degree of conceit and self-belief – character traits which I did not find endearing in others and fought to play down in myself. I needed to be told I was doing well. It was the one thing that drove me on. Without it my enthusiasm waned and I usually ferreted around to find something that would attract approval. So it was that in my final year at the College I turned to writing and poured out course materials for Diploma students – something that I found more rewarding than humouring reluctant learners. Perhaps at this stage you can sense a degree of weariness and developing cynicism. It often happens towards the end!

Throughout the 90's as the Thatcher revolution bit ever deeper, trust was usurped by accountability. The very essence of professionalism was filched away by the new order. It seemed that nobody would be trusted to do anything without rigorous checks to ensure you were doing your job. Teachers were subject to Appraisal, Ofsted Inspections and SATS results all to ensure they passed muster. By 1997 similar accountability safeguards were on the horizon for all of us involved with In-Service Training. In that year the Government launched the National Qualification for Head-teachers and a similar qualification for Subject Leaders. At last they recognised the importance of good management to the quality of schools and the standard of Education. However, the bureaucratic detail laid down a requirement that all

those involved in teaching the new courses would need to be trained. At 56 years of age I felt I was too long in the tooth to put myself through training. To be truthful, after some years creating and teaching the material I felt insulted by the expectation that I should. Early in 1998, therefore, I gave notice that when my contract expired in the summer I would not seek to renew it. We did not need the money and I no longer relished the hassle. It was time for the younger generation to take over. In mid-June I passed gracefully into full retirement.

It was the end of a magnificent career. I could not have wished for more. There was never a moment of regret from the first day I stepped into the classroom. Teaching suited me perfectly and played to my strengths. I taught the subjects I loved and cannot recall a moment of boredom. There was the constant opportunity to learn and develop and the freedom for creativity and self-expression. It provided a real sense of achievement and huge job satisfaction. It was more pleasure than work and I loved it. How many people can reflect on 34 years in such glowing terms? I was blessed!