



The Lion

Monmouth School's Weekly Newspaper 2011-2012 Edition

QUALIFICATION CRISES

Tom Hall
Editor

Yesterday, the Department for Education announced that over 3,000 vocational courses would be stripped from the GCSE league tables, no longer of equivalent value. At first glance, this seems a sensible move; newspapers express outrage at the equivalency of a Btec in fish husbandry or a level 2 certificate in nail technology to GCSEs. Michael Gove, the secretary of state for education, justified this move, saying, "Young people have taken courses that have led nowhere."

I can certainly see the logic in this move, and one cannot doubt the nobility of Gove's intentions; any attempt to tackle the "go to college – you only have to show up 2 days a week and my qualifications [sic] worth 5 AS" mentality of one *Twitter* user is surely admirable. If it were not for the latest figures released yesterday by UCAS, I would agree entirely. However, the results were a little worrying; the number of applications to universities has dropped this year by 8.7%. A large part of this drop can be accounted for by a drop in "squeezed middle" applicants, and commenters assert that many do not benefit from taking a degree; but the issue is finding a niche for these academically-educated, non-graduate employees unprepared, and underprepared, to do vocational work.

50 years ago, career paths were significantly more defined; one would either go to a grammar school, study academic subjects, and progress to university and later employment in a profession or trade, or go to a comprehensive school and learn vocational and technical skills before progressing to vocational employment. There is a much greater equality of opportunity at present – career paths are not decided by an exam taken at primary school age – but there is no good alternative to GCSEs, and many people find themselves caught between the two paths, struggling to find a job for which they are neither over nor under-qualified. The sheer number of vocational courses seen as useless by employers exposes the problem with British secondary education; vocational education is not preparing schoolchildren adequately for employment.

Further complicating the issue is the sheer shortage of available jobs in economically difficult times; the generation in which jobs will be most difficult to get is also the one which has been failed by an inadequate system of qualifications. It is becoming clear that we will soon have a huge number of people with few employable skills in a country short of employment, who will increasingly be relying on the state for support. If this is to be preempted and avoided, more will need to be done than the current proposed reforms to avert an employment crisis. This crisis is too imminent to be dealt with by the government, and it will be too late for many; one can only hope that the devolution of more curricular control to schools through the rapidly-expanding, and largely successful, academies programme will allow individual schools to address the issue of vocational-academic blurring and ensure that every willing pupil leaves school with appropriate, employable skills.

BENEFITS CAP

David Parfitt
Production Editor

Millions of Britons across the country claim disability and living benefits every year. However, as part of the recent Welfare Reform Bill, the Government is aiming to put a cap on benefits at £26,000 a year; the level of the average salary of working families. The cap applies to out-of-work benefits like Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance, but it also includes Child Benefit, which is currently paid to all parents who want it, regardless of income.

In outrage, disability campaign groups and members of direct action organisation *UK Uncut* chanted, held banners and banged drums in the middle of Oxford Circus.

Child benefits have recently been removed from the cap and the Welsh government has completely rejected any form of a regional benefits cap. A Welsh government spokesperson said: "As with regional pay, we totally reject this idea. We are seriously concerned that the current proposals to change the benefits system are likely to have significant negative implications for Wales. The cumulative impacts of the UK government's welfare reform changes already have the potential to drive many of the most vulnerable members of our society into deeper poverty and undermine the Welsh government's efforts to reduce poverty in Wales."

The cap has been supported by those who, myself included, feel that too many people abuse the system, receiving thousands of pounds in benefits whilst sitting at home. There are some, of course, who deserve the benefits due to illness, disability and unemployment, but there are those who abuse the system and do not attempt to right themselves, and who need to be kept in order.

The initial proposal of the cap was also defeated in the House of Lords, but is set to "ping-pong" between the House of Commons and the House of Lords as many of the Commons support the cap. Lib Dem leader and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg said he was a "strong supporter" of the cap, as were the "vast majority" of people, because it was, "Fair to say you can't receive more in benefits than if you were to earn £35,000 before tax". He claimed that ministers will seek to overturn a Lords defeat for plans to cap benefits for households at £26,000, when the bill returns to the Commons.

Recently, it has been believed that many ministers will fall to "peer" pressure from the House of Lords.



A TUNE OF BLEAK FIGURES

Jamie Brown

Form IV

One in every four users of the internet make illegal music downloads every month, a leading industry body has claimed this week. *The International Federation of The Phonographic Industry's* annual global report has stated that 28% of internet users access unlicensed content. The body estimates 3.6 billion downloads were bought globally in 2011, an increase of 17 per cent (combining singles and albums downloads).

The report also said that the digital music industry has grown by at least 8%, being worth an estimated \$4.9 billion dollars to the international economy; however, IFPI's president, Frances Moore, has said that the figure would be much more impressive if it wasn't for the rising popularity of illegal downloads. Ms Moore said music piracy was starving online retailers and music subscription services and the legitimate music business was working in an "extremely challenging" environment.

One study in Australia cited in the report found in April 2010 that 89 per cent of all torrent files were from a sample linked to infringing content.

Spain and Brazil were reported to have the highest pro-

portion of internet users getting their music from illegal sites. Overall music sales in these countries have fallen by 55% in the past three years. "South Korea has taken action against illegal downloading and is one of the few countries seeing an overall growth in revenue for recorded music by 10 per cent in the first half of 2010," the report said.

However, European countries such as France have much more relaxed attitude towards rising illegal downloads, hoping that the industry will reach a natural point of balance as consumers decide to not compromise on sound quality. Meanwhile the industry faces uncertainty as the economy plummets, and buying illegally seems to be a much more favourable option.



THE BEST OF A BAD BUNCH...

Olly Hudson

Form V

'President Gingrich'. Is there a ring to it? In time, perhaps, though I would be inclined to suggest otherwise. The 68 year old ex-Speaker of the House of Congress has enjoyed, of late, a period of sustained interest with the American public, culminating in an emphatic victory in the recent South Carolina Republican primaries. As Republican politicians go, however, he is perhaps not so much what you might expect. A twice-divorced, Catholic convert, Gingrich's history by no means promotes him as your every day Republican Candidate, not by current standards at least.

Please, do not succumb to any misconceptions about Gingrich. He is as fervent in his Conservative attitudes to taxation and as hawk-like in his approach to US foreign policy as they come. He is also devout in his religious belief, though the extent, or rather non-extent to which he allows his religious belief to direct his political and social vision for America, sets him apart distinctly from the likes of Romney, Paul, and Santorum, many of whom readily forego the credibility of their campaigns in pursuit of a relentless, irrational war against same-sex marriage and abortion.

With an element of discernible rationale in his campaign, Gingrich establishes himself as the more credible, Conservative alternative to the hate-fuelled politics of dissatisfaction exhibited by his Republican rivals. The one-time proponent of 'Medicare

Part D', the prescription drugs benefit programme (a decision which attracted scathing criticism from a number of Republicans), Gingrich belongs to the compassionate Conservatism school of thought. He is by no means a social liberal. He is vehemently anti-abortion, and has in the past likened same-sex marriage to 'pagan behaviour'.

Though perhaps not the embodiment of Social Liberalism on the American Right, much unlike his fellow candidates, Gingrich appears less inclined to allow his more extreme social views to direct his campaign. He has thus far been the least vocal of all the major candidates on social issues, perhaps a good thing, were we to hear what he had to say, though perhaps more so indicative of his desire to sell himself on the grounds of rational policy over the sort of emotionally-fuelled drivel spewing forth from the likes of Rick Santorum and previously, Michelle Bachmann.

I, of all people, can assure you that you would be devastated were America to choose to take two colossal steps backwards having previously taken an emphatic one forward in 2008. I do not believe that Obama will win the 2012 Presidential Election off the back of his own credentials, though he can do so off the ineptitude of his rivals. Gingrich, I believe, would be best placed to hit the Democrats where it really hurts; on the issues of taxation and the budget deficit, where Republican policies resonate with Middle America more so than anything Obama has to offer. He is, so to speak, the best of a bad bunch.

DRUGS ARE BAD...

Rob Burnet

Form VI.I

Of all those people convicted in 2010 of drug dealing or supplying, 56 per cent were jailed. In 2011, statistics show that every 4 in 10 offenders received cautions. The proportion of dealers and suppliers sent to jail has fallen from an average of 60% in the past three years. 75% of people carrying class A drugs were jailed.

Figures released in 2010 showed that 11,069 people were convicted of supplying or possession with intent to supply drugs. Of these 11,069, more than half were sent straight to prison while the rest were given non-custodial punishments such as suspended sentences or fines. Last week the Sentencing Council issued guidelines for courts so that drug runners and minor dealers could receive a community order rather than be sent to prison.

Supposedly, according to high ranking police officials, the number of offenders being spared prison sentences was a source of frustration for the officers who catch them. The chairman of the Metropolitan Police

Federation said, "It is hard enough to catch someone involved in supplying hard drugs, but when we do we would expect the courts to take appropriate action. We would say that normally a custodial sentence would be the appropriate action, particularly where hard drugs such as heroin and cocaine are involved."

However, this leniency in sentencing offenders to prison does mean that those who are exploited into carrying or selling drugs, such as mules (old or vulnerable people forced to carry drugs by the dealers) could have a better chance at proving their innocence and also be treated fairly. The punishment should always be proportional to the crime.



MOPPING UP JUSTICE

Bryan Leighton

Form IV

Three men dressed in white masks attempted to force entry into a family run convenience store in Rushden, Northamptonshire, last Tuesday. The trio had a variety of weapons with them, from a 2ft machete to a crude iron bar. Mr Dinesh, the owner of the store, was mopping the floor of his shop when the gang entered. He not only managed to defend himself using the mop but also to force all three criminals out into the street. The gang members retreated to their getaway car empty handed after smashing Mr Dinesh's and his son Kishan's cars.

Mr Dinesh has become a hero overnight. With the scenes of his daring defence captured live on his store

CCTV. In an interview with Mr Dinesh he told press that he was not afraid and that he only wanted to defend his store. "Shopkeepers work hard, 16-hour days, and this shop is open seven days a week, and then these people come and mess about. I'm just trying to pay the bills."

The captured video is sure to make Mr Dinesh an internet star thanks to the ease of access of sites such as YouTube: it makes for an interesting watch.



TO ARMS! THEY'RE BACK!

James Powell

Form VI.II

This week marks the anniversary of the beginning of the Revolutionary Wars that broke out between Britain and France in February 1793. War broke out following the execution of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, which came following four years of imprisonment after the Bastille fell in August 1789. Prime Minister Pitt the Younger declared a state of war on 1st February, so beginning a war that lasted right until 1802, but which continued with the ascension of Napoleon until Waterloo in 1815.

Marked by French revolutionary fervour and military innovations, the campaigns saw the French Revolutionary Armies defeat a number of opposing coalitions and expand French control to the Low Coun-

tries, Italy, and the Rhineland. The wars involved enormous numbers of soldiers, mainly owing to the application of modern mass conscription, which would be the norm for most European land armies throughout the 19th century.

The First French Republic founded after the events of 1789, had defeated all its enemies (Bar Britain and the United States, whose inability to directly strike at France made this a moot point) and produced a revolutionary new army that would take the other powers years to emulate. With the conquest of the left bank of the Rhine and domination of the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Italy, the Republic had achieved nearly all the territorial goals that had eluded the Bourbon monarchs for centuries.

HOWLER-'AMERICA GIVE UP' REVIEW

Jack Weeks

Form V

At first glance, the fact that these guys didn't make the BBC Sound of 2012 list seems like an insult to the rock n roll world and a massive injustice within the confines of genuine music. Yet as we dig deeper, there's an inevitable deduction that this could've been the best thing ever to happen to Howler.

Unlike The Vaccines, who hit the mainstream chart show like a train full up of sweat, beer and bubble gum melodies, Howler have been rather unnoticed amongst the general public. Once you hear tracks like 'I Told You Once' and come across EP titles like 'You Like White Women. I Like Cigarettes', it's clear that this isn't about the hype. Those who get it will get it, and they now can enjoy this band without an endless stream of idiots -spying the *Converse* and the fact that they're

on Rough Trade -writing Howler off as a feeble incarnation of The Strokes. True or not, the story of the record company getting on a plane to Minneapolis the minute they heard the demos is a fantastic one. That's exactly how the rock n roll business should be done.

The singer is already a star, opening their debut album with a song called 'Beach Sluts', sounding like The Supremes and then building to a joyous, gritty peak. The album boasts lines that scream next-big-thing: 'I wanna girl and a new car/I need a drink and a guitar'. These 11 songs are full of energy, wit, fun, fuzz, fizz, sugar, spice and everything in between. They've even managed to write a song called 'America' and not make it a load of self-righteous, preachy garbage.

To put it simply, this is an effortlessly brilliant debut album, and although it doesn't set the world on fire, I don't care, and neither should you. 8/10

THE 84TH ACADEMY AWARDS

Henry Nott

Form VI.I

The most prestigious award ceremony of the year is back: The Oscars. The golden figure of the award, standing to attention, is something every aspiring actor dreams of having in their own personal library in their house in Malibu. "Who's gonna win then...?" I hear you cry...well, that's available for discussion, as many people jump straight at the all-star British cast of 'Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy', as it enthralled audiences worldwide (and glorified British cinema).

As usual, when it comes to nominations, it is always a battle of the titans. This year, the two films expected to pick up most of the awards are 'The Artist' and 'Hugo'. Martin Scorsese's new 'family' film, as it's being called, takes a look into the history of cinema and its complete origins. 'Hugo' brings to life the story of a young boy named - you guessed it - Hugo, a Parisian orphan who enjoys observing the lives of those who pass through the train station.

The one film that hit cinema screens at the end of 2011, that has taken the industry by storm, is 'The Artist'. This new French silent film that has shocked audiences throughout the country, and believe it or not, some people who went to watch the film in a cinema in Newcastle demanded a refund from the cinema because apparently the sound system wasn't working properly. Only in Newcastle. Jean DuJardin, the French heartthrob who has stolen the hearts of thousands of women with his performance (without even talking), said he is very honoured to be nominated. He did, however, add that there should be a new Academy Award for animals, as his co-star, Uggie the dog, puts in an exceptional performance.

Other films that show their name on multiple occasions are 'Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy', 'The Descendants', 'Iron Lady' and 'Moneyball'. Many people have pointed out both that the two films that have dominated all the others through nominations tell stories about the origins of cinema...so who's gonna win

BALLSED UP

George Brandram Jones

Form V

It appears that Beach Volleyball is a much demanded activity at the Olympics for the government; so much so that £26,000 had been spent buying up 410 tickets for civil servants and ministers to see the Beach Volleyball being held this summer at Horse Guard's Parade, Whitehall, in central London, costing around £40-£90 each.

Civil servant Jonathan Stephens tried to defend the action of buying these tickets, which also comes after the government decided to allow itself up to £750,000 buying tickets for members to all the venues, including almost £200,000 being spent buying VIP tickets to see the opening and closing ceremonies.

He claims that the fact that so much attention was placed around the Beach Volleyball is merely 'a coincidence' and that it was the event which met the requirements of most of the people going, as the matches will be held on the weekend; the time when he believed most of the staff would be free to go out and watch out. However, it seems slightly less of 'a coincidence' when it turns out that only 256 tickets for Athletics had been bought, as opposed to the 410 for Volley Ball, almost double the number.

To the mirth of many at the committee Stephens tried to answer the question from former labour sports Minister Gerry Sutcliffe, 'Can you explain why there seems to be such strong interest in beach volleyball among ministers and civil servants?' and calling the purchase an 'oddy'; Stephens replied that he himself thought it was an oddity too, but assured the crowd that 'the explanation [for the tickets] is coincidence rather than conspiracy'

Overall the government had bought 8,800 tickets to be given out for the Olympics: 2300 to 'people who have worked consistently on the Games', 2000 to local authorities, and 3,300 going back to the government for them to host guests, most of whom are expected to be very closely linked with business promotions going on throughout the Olympics. Nevertheless, I'm sure that there's bound to be a very happy certain 410 people at this summer's Olympics...

