

Exporting Ideas

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The 6th November provided me with some confusing moments of reflection on our status as an unavoidably sea-based nation.

King Richard 1 ordered the construction of Portsmouth dockyard in 1194. King Henry VIII ordered the construction of the Mary Rose there in 1510. Charles 11 created the Royal Navy in 1670 and made Portsmouth his Royal Dockyard. In the early 1800s the Portsmouth dockyard was the largest industrial complex in the world and included the revolutionary block-making factory. It was Marc Isambard Brunel (Isambard Kingdom's father) who created the first mass production factory in the world – producing pulley blocks for rigging the navy ships. In 1808 that factory, in the Portsmouth dockyard, produced 130,000 rigging blocks. Over 300 naval ships were built in Portsmouth – including HMS Royal Sovereign 1857 and HMS Iron Duke in 1912. But on 6th November 2013 BAE Systems (now the owners of the dockyard) announced the end of ship-building in Portsmouth.

London has traded from wharves along its waterfront (The Pool of London) for centuries. The Romans traded all over Europe in the 2nd and 3rd centuries from a harbour by London Bridge. The first Customs House was built in 1275 beside Billingsgate and Geoffrey Chaucer was one of its more notable officials. The Billingsgate wharf was the busiest in London until the 16th C – when it became the specialist fish market. Elizabeth 1 created 'legal quays' in the Pool, between London Bridge and the Tower where trading was officially regulated (and taxes paid). But progressively the river-side quays were unable to cope with the growth in ship size – and purpose-built docks had to be created. This started a process of slow, steady, expansion downriver. The great East and West India docks in 1802/3, in the 'Isle of Dogs' seven miles downriver from London Bridge; The Millwall dock (1868); The Royal Albert dock (1880) in Gallions Reach; and the Tilbury dock (1886) 25 miles downriver from London Bridge. But finally, and most recently, the largest deep-water port in Britain – Thames Gateway - was opened near Thurrock, 30 miles downriver from London Bridge. It will be capable of handling the largest deep-sea container ships, including a 2,300 metre long container quay with a capacity of 3.5 million standard container units a year. Thames Gateway opened for business on 6th November 2013.

Perhaps you can see the confusion that this caused for me. On the very same day that we closed our last big

ship-building facility south of the Scottish border, we opened one of the biggest sea-trading ports in Europe. Isn't there something a bit awry about this? Is it just further evidence that in post-Thatcher Britain we are more interested in trading than we are in designing & manufacturing? In the hey-day of dock building along the Thames, in the late 18th and 19th centuries, the world was supplied with manufactured products shipped from Britain. We became the 'workshop on the world'. But the evidence of 6th November 2013 suggests that we might now better claim to be the 'shopping-mall of the world'.

As our manufacturing base declined through the 20th Century, we developed an economy increasingly based on services, with finance and banking (and those jolly old hedge funds) at the leading edge. We have all seen where that got us...teetering on the very brink of total economic collapse. I was always a bit sceptical about a service-based economy and not just because I have a deep attachment to designing and manufacturing. I was doubtful about how services could provide an income for the nation. You can't ship services out from Thames Gateway quite like you can tractors. Is it possible to have an export-led service industry? We should all hope so when services amount to nearly 80% of UK GDP.

Well, with the synchronicity that often fuels these reflection pieces – I have recently been associated with a bid to provide an education service to an overseas nation. The plan is to provide some assessment expertise – and some associated technology – to enhance their vocational provision. So I am, it would seem, a very small part of a UK export initiative, and I thought it would be interesting to discover how much of it there is going on.

Astonishingly it turns out that (in 2012) education exports were worth £14 billion to the UK economy. I find it difficult to relate to such numbers, so for comparison the financial services export number is £25 billion. So *education* exports contribute more than half the figure (actually 56%) contributed by financial services. We have all heard – endlessly, from politicians and bankers about the importance of finance and banking to the economy. When did you ever hear (from anyone) that education is such a significant part of our export income?

And it gets better.

The analysis suggests that from the current baseline of £14.1 billion, the value of the education-related export

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market might be approximately £21.5 billion in 2020 and £26.6 billion in 2025 (both in 2008/09 prices). <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/e/11-980-estimating-value-of-education-exports.pdf>

I would refer you to three sources. The Wikipedia pages on the UK economy are broadly informative, (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_the_United_Kingdom), but for the real gold nuggets I refer you to a couple of obscure reports from the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS). The quote above is from page 10 of BIS research paper No 46 'Estimating the value to the UK of education exports' (June 2011). But numbers alone are not particularly helpful because I want to know *why*? Why are we so good at exporting education services? And for that we need to look at another BIS report that analyses all export sectors, along with what are seen to be their strengths and weaknesses.

BIS Economics Paper No.17 ***"UK trade performance across markets and sectors"***

(Feb 2012)

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32475/12-579-uk-trade-performance-markets-and-sectors.pdf

Chapter 12 in this report (pp 83-90) is devoted to 'Creative Industries and Education' and it provides some very encouraging reading. I'll offer you just a few tasters,

The UK has a well-established education and training system, and a strong global brand.

There are particular areas in which the UK has great strength: Teaching and Learning Resources, including educational ICT; Educational publishing; Qualifications and quality assurance and English Language Training.

The UK has a strong international reputation for the high quality and effectiveness of the hardware and software it produces to support learning at all levels, from pre-school to post-graduate and research.

The UK has the oldest, best-established and most highly-regarded educational publishing industry in the world.

The UK has a reputation for the excellence of its academic, vocational and professional qualifications, and the rigour with which its validating bodies can bring to overseas institutions seeking to improve their standards.

The UK is a leading source of operational expertise for school creation, development and management, with

specialist organisations able to deliver high-quality UK-style education across the world, in many cases using the National Curriculum, suitably adapted to accommodate local culture.

The UK is a world leader in the development of teaching and learning resources for children and adults with learning difficulties

The UK's Building Schools for the Future programme has created a legacy of expertise in "green" school design, fit out and operation. Additionally, UK companies have pioneered the use of "green" teaching and learning resources

Summarising its analysis, the report concludes ...

Where the UK does have a strong position is in innovative teaching and learning products and technology. Few countries are thought likely to be able to compete on the combination of intellectual input, technical expertise and creativity in developing teaching and learning products and their methods of delivery.

Well – as I read that – my immediate reaction was one of relief. Thank God someone has the sense to see this. And interestingly this analysis is from people *outside* the education service, looking in to analyse our strengths and weaknesses. But having overcome my relief, a different reaction set in.

There was a time (when I was younger and just a bit naïve) when I would have expected the Dept for Education to be fighting *for* schools and doing its best to help and support them. But the current situation is that the excellence that has been identified by a different department of state is being (it would seem) deliberately ignored. The DfE script says that the education service has to be poor and even failing – so that Mr Gove can justify turning the clock back to the 1950s when all was sweetness and light.

He won't want to hear about our excellence with innovative teaching and learning approaches when the script demands traditionalism at any cost. Nor will he want to hear about the reliability and excellence of our examinations bodies, when the script demands that they be incompetent. He certainly won't want to hear we are a world leader in developing resources for those with learning difficulties...or in developing 'green' schools. Why does either of them matter? One has to assume that Vince Cable (Business Secretary responsible for those BIS reports) and Gove meet now and then – if only in Cabinet. What do they say to each other? Does Cable

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say.... "Hey you are onto a real winner with all that expertise in our schools"? And does Gove then reply with.... "They are a useless bunch of to..ers"? I suspect that Mr Gove sees Thatcher as his role model: A few years in Education with lots of ritualised shock/horror and associated shake-up – to make an impression, and then on to the real job. Like Thatcher. Be warned.

So, just hang on to this thought....

Few countries are thought likely to be able to compete (with the UK) on the combination of intellectual input, technical expertise and creativity in developing teaching and learning products and their methods of delivery.

And my explanation for the lack of any DfE celebration of this great news from BIS? Pure politics.

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