
According to John Rentoul¹, this book is «The most important political book of the year». Its author, Andrew Adonis, former Minister of State for Education (May 2005 – October 2008), was able to persuade the leading forces of the Government to approve the “academies programme”, which replaced failing and under-performing comprehensive schools with all-ability, independently managed academies, run on a not-for-profit basis. By the time he left the Department in October 2008, 133 academies were open and 300 more were in the pipeline.

The book, which tells the story of a reformist attempt, has been entitled *Education, Education, Education* after a Tony Blair’s speech pronounced shortly before becoming Prime Minister². «I had been yearning for this moment since my own school and university days in the 1970s and early 1980s» comments Adonis, «That someone in power would do something about the jungle which passed for an education system, from which few emerged with anything resembling an education»³.

How to be a reformer, according to Andrew Adonis

There are many very exciting topics throughout the book. I will concentrate in particular on the last chapter, entitled *How to be a reformer?*⁴, because it contains valuable advises that may be applied even outside of the British education system. In this part of the book, the author presents twelve fundamental rules that should lead the activities of those who want to change things: the first one is “Undress the big problem” because «power is finite and evaporates much faster than you expect. It is vital to expend it on large not small objects⁵». Among other advices given in the text by the reformer Adonis, I will mention the following. «Seek the truth and fail to succeed» (2), together with the quote by Andreas Schleicher – OECD’s education director - «without data, you are just another person with an opinion». «Keep it simple» (3)⁶; «Be bold, but go with the grain as far as possible» (4); «Lead and explain, lead and explain» (5)⁷; «Build a team» (6)⁸; «Build coalitions not

¹ John Rentoul is political commentator for *The Independent on Sunday*, and visiting professor at Queen Mary, University of London, where he teaches contemporary history.
⁴ Ivì, p. 240 ss.
⁵ Ivì, p. 240, Adonis continues: «In the case of education, England’s single biggest problem in the mid-1990s was the chronic underperformance of the bottom half of its comprehensive schools. Fundamental change was obviously required; in its absence, millions of children, and the country at large, were suffering».
⁶ «In my experience», writes Adonis, «almost all the solutions to big problems are simple» (ivì, p. 243).
⁷ «If you don’t lead and explain, the Whitehall machine stops, your party becomes restless, and opponents seize the momentum. You have to be a message machine on constant ‘replay’. And you need to be passionate and persuasive in what you believe, and convey this every day» (ivì, p. 245).
tabernacles» (7); «Champion consumers not producers» (8); «On important issues, micro-manage constantly» (9); «Keep calm and carry on» (10); «Reform is a marathon not a sprint» (11) and «Always have a plane for the future» (12). This last point allows us to focus on the further reform proposals suggested by Andrew Adonis. As he says: «academies have now passed the thousand mark, but academies and other successful reforms of recent decades are only the beginning of the transformation of the English school system required for England to be an open, classless and prosperous society in the twenty-first century.11

The Adonis’s Manifesto

The further proposals, we mentioned above, are explained in an interesting appendix at the end of an essay entitled Manifesto for change12: the “Manifesto”, in twelve points, provides hints of how the British school system can change in the next years. The second point of the “Manifesto”, A new deal for teachers, is particularly interesting: Adonis says that «No school can be better than its teachers. The best education system in the world recruit their teachers from their top third of graduates transforming teacher recruitment is the most urgent priority for England to build a world-class education system». According to the author’s statement, this reform requires a new deal for teachers, a radical change and not only a gradual improvement. This "New Deal" is in turn composed of eight steps, proposing first of all to expand the Teach First’s experience, the highly successful Charity that recruits, trains and places top graduates into schools with lower incomes.13

Another important element is to gather teacher’s training in a far smaller number of the best universities and schools; besides, teachers’ trainees should be paid a salary. However, the most difficult point Adonis outlined is, perhaps, the one concerning the increase in teachers’ salaries: «on the evidence that starting and top salaries matter most to recruiting good teachers» writes Adonis, «there should be a much higher starting salary for target groups of teachers». In a historical period, marked by increasingly limited economic resources, the proposal of increasing salaries of a portion of such a large population may be seen as madness. Nevertheless, Adonis explains it in details: «for new maths, physics, chemistry and IT teachers, the salary should be in the region of £30,000 outside London, and £35,000 in London, and for new headteachers I suggest a starting

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8 «There can be no leadership without leaders, and government is no exception. Equally, leaders achieve almost nothing alone. If you don’t build a team, you build nothing» (ivi, p. 246).
9 «To carry major reforms, you cannot have too many friends and you should seek to make them at very turn» (ibidem).
10 «As a reformer, you need constantly to put yourself in the position of the citizen and consumer, and seek to judge things from their viewpoint» (ivi, p. 247).
11 Ivi, p. 250.
12 Ivi, p. 251 ss.
13 Particularly, Teach First should increase its recruitment by 500 a year to reach 5,000 a year by 2020, by when it would be supplying one in four new secondary schools teachers and perhaps half in more challenging schools and academies. Universities should systematically support Teach First to achieve this recruitment target.
14 «Graduates should be employed by a school, and work a standard forty-eight-week year for two initial training years. They should teach or assist at their school during the whole thirty-eight week term time, with out-of-school university courses taking place in the other ten weeks, starting with a summer training programme in the six week before their first autumn term» (ivi, p. 252).
salary of £70,000 for larger schools (£115,000 in London) and £100,000 for secondary schools (£115,000 in London)»\textsuperscript{15}.

In conclusion, we can say that Adonis' book can be very useful for anyone who wish to improve the education system in his own country and to build a better society.

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\textsuperscript{15} Ibidem. Adonis also specifies that «for teachers and headteachers on these higher starting salaries, there should be an end to nationally determined increments. Pay progression should be at the discretion of the individual school». Besides, «teachers and headteachers on these higher starting salaries should be subject to a longer probationary period of three or four years, during and at the end of which employment could be ended without recourse to claims of unfair dismissal». 