

**World Changers – The podcast**  
**Ep.7 Bad Education**



**Elle Bradley-Cox** 00:07

Welcome to World Changers, a podcast exploring the trends making an enduring mark on our world of work, and how business leaders, HR teams and internal communicators can stay one step ahead.

We don't need no education. Or do we?

The current education system has long been based on a narrow and linear learning structure, assessed by arbitrary markers. At school, we work towards grades that, on paper, indicate a level of competence. But when we move from learning to earning, we're often ill prepared to meet our employers expectations. It can be quite a culture shock. And what about those learners who march to the beat of their own drum? Teachers don't always have the resources to offer the learning styles they need to thrive. So they don't.

After a year of major disruption for our education systems, and with the world of work facing skill shortages and succession challenges, what can we do to bridge the gaps?

My colleague Alastair Atkinson chose this theme as his world changer for our 2021 report. Later in this episode, I chat with Sarah Magee, professional development manager at the Institute of Internal Communication to get her thoughts on the future of our industry. But before that, Alastair and I sit down with our Marketing Manager, Kate Went to go back to school.

Hi guys, thank you for joining me.

**Alistair Atkinson** 01:30

Thanks for having me.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 01:32

So Al, why did you choose to focus on education for our World Changers report?

**Alistair Atkinson 01:38**

So the catalyst was the school exams fiasco of 2020. I'm sure most people will remember it. But you know, COVID came along in mind that there was tremendous disruption to classroom learning for the lots of kids. And for those kids who were approaching GCSE and A levels, it meant that there was a big debate about how best to test them in a way that will be fair to everybody.

And originally, there was going to be teacher-led assessment, based not on exams, but on work throughout the year, plus coursework. And then the government decided they were going to subject that to an algorithm, the algorithm threw out all sorts of results, which for a whole variety of reasons, suggested that this wasn't quite as fair process as it was intended to be. And they ended up going back to teacher led assessment on its own, and it was all a bit of a mess, to be honest. So that was the catalyst for me choosing this topic.

More broadly, though, it's something that I've been interested in for quite a long time, I was always pretty academic, I did well at school in that school environment. But then I joined the workplace. And it dawned on me that academic success isn't always an indicator of prowess in somebody's job. You know, I've know lots of individuals who are extremely bright academically, but for whatever reason, they don't, they don't always take to the work environment. And equally, there are people who haven't jumped through all the academic hoops that we normally associate with that kind of success, you know, people that haven't maybe been to university to do an undergrad degree, and then they're phenomenal, whatever their chosen career is.

I think it comes down to the fact that there are lots of types of intelligence. If you're an academic person it's tempting to think of it purely through that lens. But actually, there's myriad kinds of intelligence. And it's about time we started appreciating that, I think.

**Elle Bradley-Cox 03:35**

You're absolutely right. It's a really interesting and meaty topic, and I can't wait to get into you guys. And I guess for me, the reason why I'm so interested in it is because I, well, I do have an academic background up to A levels, I went to university and just decided it wasn't for me, it's just something that, I suppose I've made my life 10 times harder by doing it that way, because it's taken me a lot longer to get where I am. But I just didn't enjoy the university experience. So I guess academia was kind of not really for me.

It's really interesting to see different employers, hiring styles and what makes for kind of a good candidate for them. And I guess, Kate, this is where I want to bring you in because you work in the external side of comms. And I guess you're all about talent attraction, right. So, what really has this this report that AI's written kind of made you think about?

**Kate Went 04:27**

Yeah, I think it's a massive consideration right now. It always has been, you know, the future, the employee lifecycle, the talent that we're trying to attract. It's a huge part of what falls into the marketing experience as well. If you have anything to do with the reputation of a company externally, a big part of that is how your people feel and their experience, because that bleeds into the perception of that brand or that company.

I think we've never been as connected as we are right now. You know, we review workplace experiences on Glassdoor in the same way that we review our meals and our travel on TripAdvisor. And we're really sensitive to

sniffing out authenticity and whether a brand or a business's marketing team has essentially stuck a glossy filter over the reality of life at that company. And I think more than ever, now, we're really looking for the stories behind the stock photos.

I think that, just with so many areas of work and life, in the last 16 months, the pandemics really shone a big light on the whole employee experience. And it's made us look at the good and the bad. And inevitably, that bleeds into the talent attraction space. So I think throughout all that turbulence, we've seen some really great examples of leaders leading and businesses walking the walk when it comes to supporting their people. And this sort of expanded out into social media and we were really hungry for those good news stories. James Timpson, who I know you love as much as I do, is a particular favourite who comes to mind.

But on the flip side, we also saw the complete opposite. We saw employees who were feeling let down, they were unsupported. And they were feeling like they were finding out company bad news through the media, as opposed to their internal channels. And I think it didn't paint those organisations in a particularly good light, and reputational damage like that can leave a lasting legacy when it comes to both customer retention and also attracting new hires.

So I think now as we start to realise new ways of working businesses are going to see that their candidates are really savvier than ever, and perhaps a bit more choosy. I think the flexibility means that the talent pool has massively widened. But it also means that those job seekers have so much more choice themselves, and they don't have to compromise to get something local. So they can look at companies that really share their values and practice what they preach.

So, reputation EVP, employee voice, it's all going to matter more than ever, when it comes to finding talent for the future. And you know, we always say in marketing 'people buy from people'. And we can expect to see engagement with what employees say about the workplace far outstrip what the organization's say about themselves. And that experience inside absolutely has to match the external messaging because you can bet that if it doesn't, people are going to find out.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 07:19

I mean, you make some really great points. Okay. And I just want to build on kind of the one about people seeking people. And I think I think what's really interesting is, you know, when you're sitting there applying for a job, and basically, I think it says a lot about you your application form, right, and how personable it is, and how 'tick boxy' it feels. And I think people might choose to do their research for companies in different ways.

So for example, Netflix has got a brilliant podcast, which is called, We Are Netflix, and it's something that I will probably tune into and think 'am I going to create a great workplace experience at Netflix?' And by listening to some of the answers and some of that innovation that they talk about on there, I actually have such a great opinion of Netflix as a company to work for not just a provider of a great service. That's where things are changing up and doing different things. But I'm really interested in your thoughts on on COVID. And I know Kate, you've talked a bit about this. But Al, I want to bring you in here. Where do you think we're at?

**Alistair Atkinson** 08:17

In terms of how COVID has changed things?

**Elle Bradley-Cox 08:19**

Yeah, I think so. Because I think from what you were saying before, it sounds like this is an issue that's probably been around for a while. But I think COVID has shaped and shifted it,

**Alistair Atkinson 08:29**

I think certainly the fiasco of the exam process last year. To an extent, you know, the people will have gone through similar stress - students who have gone through similar stress this year, and wondering how they're going to be assessed. I think has brought it all to the fore. I think this is something that goes back much further than that, though. And I think there are two sides to this coin.

So on the one hand, I think for a long time, it's been very difficult for employers to rely upon the education system, as it is and has been to gauge whether they should employ somebody or not. And you know, the few stats that I looked at when I wrote the article. So for example, if you go back to 1994, less than 53% of candidates at GCSE gained an A\* to a C grade. You fast forward 20 years to 2014. And that figure is that almost 70%.

So you can see that there's been a kind of grade inflation there. And then in 2018, the system changed altogether. So went to a numbering system from one to nine rather than the grades, but there was no direct correlation between the old letter based grades and the new numerical ratings. So I think that makes it really hard for employers to keep track of how they should gauge candidates if indeed they want to gauge candidates based on academic achievement, which is a whole other issue which we kind of touched on earlier.

Secondly, I think there's an element of miss selling to kids. So, you know, I don't want to get political about this. But if you go back to the Labour government in the UK of the 1990s, the late 1990s, early 2000s, a big tenet of their manifesto was to get more and more young people into higher education into university. And, you know, there may be many laudable reasons for that. But again, if you look at the stats, you know, the UK is outside the top 10 EU countries when it comes to new graduates quickly finding a job.

So what that means is effectively, you've got people leaving university with potentially a very good degree, but not been able to find work or not work in the sector that they actually want to work in, you know, equally you look at the states on the face of it, they fare much better. So the stats say that about 96% of their recent graduates are in work. But if you dig beneath the surface of that it's thought that more than 40% of those US graduates take jobs that don't actually require them to hold a degree.

And when you think about the cost of higher education in the States and now increasingly in the UK, you know, 1000s of 1000s of pounds to go to university, and then you look at those stats, you got to think is it worth it? And are we are we miss selling a dream to young people, when actually, I think attitudes are changing. And it's not all about having been to university. I've got certain qualifications anymore. Not in a lot of professions. I mean, there are still some, clearly, I mentioned in the article, you don't want to see a doctor that hasn't been through medical school. But, you know, I think they are exceptions rather than the rule.

**Elle Bradley-Cox 11:39**

I think so too. And when I think, you make such a good point on the 1000s and 1000s that people pay, and actually, for certain jobs, are you ever going to be able to be in a position where you're earning enough to pay

those fees back? Not unless you go into probably a traditional red brick University kind of job that they were famous for, you know, lawyers, doctors, that sort of thing. Actually, the skills in the future, while those jobs are clearly needed, are quite different and quite disparate as well. If I can stand here and bang a drum for English literature, because despite having done it as a university degree and dropping out of it, because I didn't enjoy it, it was more to do with the culture of the university.

I genuinely believe that English literature is a study of human behaviour, and can really, really help with interactions, and helping you know how people tick and work. Of course, we've seen a big push towards STEM subjects, which are also highly employable, and really important, but maybe I got on my soapbox a little bit.

**Alistair Atkinson** 12:38

Well, no, I agree. And what I do want to say is that this is absolutely not a hatchet job on higher education from me. I went to university, I've been up into a few universities now and got various different undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications. And that was the right thing for me and my undergrad degree, it was not a vocational course at all. And I loved it, I loved every minute. And I think there's tremendous value in education for its own sake.

If people enjoy a subject, and they're gonna get pleasure out of it, there's nothing wrong at all with pursuing it. And I also think that you learn a lot more than just your subject, when you go through various kinds of education, whether that is a school or a university, or vocational college or whatever you learn about dealing with people. And that's really important. But I think there has to be a really honest conversation about the true value of whatever piece of paper you're going to come out of that education with.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 13:38

I couldn't agree more. And so let's think about some alternatives then. I did want to talk about work experience a little bit and just understand, probably harkening back to my own days of going on that work experience, does it actually help young people understand the world of work? Or is it all about the company you join the attitudes around actually, what even is work? And what kind of job could I put my hand up for at 16 to go and do some work experience.

I'll never forget the Inbetweeners episode where Will wants to go to the local newspaper and ends up in the local mechanics and his head of 6th Form literally couldn't give a monkey's about sorting it out for him. And he desperately wanted to go off and be a young journalist. And then you've got the juxtaposition of the of the currency like actually said, and what I wanted to do was great. I mean, what do you think about work experience honestly, Kate?

**Kate Went** 14:29

Love that episode! Yeah and it rings really true. You ask, you know, does it help his work experience valuable? And I think, yeah, to a point, but it has to be thought out and it has to be intentional because a student who's going into any kind of placement or work experience, whether it's for a week or a few weeks, over the summer or a month, whatever it is, they don't know what they don't know. They're walking in completely unprepared so they don't know the questions necessarily to ask and it really is daunting.

You have to take the lead and create a bit of structure around it. I remember, a string of workplace placements that I did in various publicity departments when I was much, much, much younger. And I was essentially stuffing envelopes for seven hours a day and fetching tea and coffee. And it's par for the course. But it's also you know, essentially free labour.

But when I look back, it really didn't teach me anything about the industry, it didn't teach me anything about the day-to-day particularly, or the nuances of the workplace. And actually, if anything, I found it quite isolating and quite cliquy. Because it's such a power imbalance, you are a kid in an unfamiliar workplace, trying to be polite, and do your best and not annoy the adults who are working around you. And if they're not proactively kind of reaching out with tasks and saying, you know, do you understand what this means? Do you know why we might do this and talking to you about it, you sort of sit there and shut up and you get to the end of the week, and you think I don't really know what I learned, but at least I can tick the box on the form for school.

I do think it depends where you go and what you do. I think some organisations are much better than others, because they truly recognise the importance of engaging young minds really early. Because after all, this is going to be the future rising stars and the leaders. So they want to nurture them and give them a reason to come knocking when they're mapping out their careers. But it's definitely not a uniform experience across the board.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 16:24

Al, have you got any points to build on top of that? Maybe on apprenticeships or grad placements from some of our clients, perhaps?

**Alistair Atkinson** 16:32

Yeah, absolutely. So EY the Big Four professional services firm is a major client of ours. and I also worked there myself for nine years, five years in a client facing role and then another four years and an in-house role. You know, when I joined that business, you basically needed an undergrad degree. You needed a 2:1 from the university at undergrad level in order to get your foot in the door, get an interview. And that's changed since then. I mean, I'm going back a little while now. But it's changed since then. And it's changed for the better.

Yes, there are internship programmes for undergrad students. And they were around when I was there as well. And they're useful, you know, they are paid, they are very well thought out to Kate's point about having a structure around them, making sure that these young people that are coming into the office, are given some meaningful tasks to do and are involved as genuine team members on projects. And there's a certain amount of thinking that goes into what they might need to learn, personal development and the social side of it as well. So that's great.

But more than that, I think firms like EY and others are looking at ways to get people in before the university level. You can do apprenticeships now - paid apprenticeships at a big four firm and learn from, I think, the age of 16 or 18. And how good is that? I think that's fantastic. Because there are people that don't want to go to university for whatever reason, it might be the expense of it, it might be that environment just won't suit them. But that shouldn't be a bar to them to getting into these very prestigious organisations if they're bright enough, and they're willing to work hard enough. And guess what? Loads of them are. So isn't that a good thing.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** I completely agree with you. And I am a passionate believer in diversity of thought breeding innovation, and the same thing, blending different backgrounds. So that it's not everybody who's been to Oxbridge, who gets to work together, actually listening to other voices. Kate, have you got any thoughts on that?

**Kate Went** 18:42

Yeah, I actually recently had the opportunity to look at some CV sifting software, which was really interesting. It uses sort of built in AI that recognises certain terms like names, addresses, universities, and it blanks it out, it gives it a completely random name like 'waterfall cantaloupe', something completely strange, that you can't base any kind of opinion around. And the idea is to just completely remove any biases that you might have, conscious or unconscious, about somebody's name, or what university they've come from, so that you actually can just take it on the merit of skills and abilities and pass that CV through the chain fairly. It's a really clever piece of kit, but it's a shame that it's needed.

I think we talked a lot about the pandemic, being a source of digital democratisation in a lot of ways, and I think, you know, from a marketing perspective, and as someone who just lurks on social media, I'm seeing that a lot in spaces like YouTube and LinkedIn, you know. Young people with skills and talent. They're not waiting for someone to give them permission to demonstrate that. They're out there creating content, building, setting trends, advocating for themselves, and I think savvy employers need to be looking in those spaces to find the talent that doesn't necessarily come through those traditional routes.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 20:04

You're right. I'm a big believer in an opportunistic hire as well. So somebody who presents themselves, and you didn't even know that you needed them until they showed you the business case for it. And I love it when employees have the flexibility to work outside the restraints of the roles available and have the chutzpah and the gumption I suppose to get involved in something like that.

But I am really interested, and you could talk about our internal pipeline into internal comms, or just overall. What can employers really do to bridge that gap between learning and then earning, entering the world of work?

**Alistair Atkinson** 20:39

I think that the employers who give genuine consideration to what they really need in employees are going to take a big step forward. And some, some do it really well already. Others not so much I think they're stuck in a rut of thinking, well, this is how we've always recruited, this is how we should recruit. And this doesn't just play to the point about educational background, but it plays to the way we interview people, the way we test them.

Some people will not necessarily fare well in a conventional interview, again, for all sorts of reasons that might be linked to neurodiversity, for example. But that doesn't mean they're not going to be any good to your business. So think more broadly, think laterally. And consider what do you really need? And then how are you going to look for that in a meaningful way? And where are you going to look for it in a helpful way? I think that is that the massive first step.

I think also, we need a more honest conversation between our education system, our educational institutions, and the world of work. So that young people who are considering their options around education and work are

able to make a really well informed decision. I think that it's getting better. It's certainly better now than it was when I was at school. But I think it could improve further.

**Kate Went** 22:04

I think just to build on that, there's a massive opportunity internally for internal comms teams, HR teams, marketing teams to really get together and consider the messaging that they're putting out and how early to start, you know, for this building a future talent pipeline. You know, start early, talk to schools, tell stories and tell the stories of unconventional routes to careers.

You know, if nothing else, we know in Internal Comms, how unconventional our routes can be, if you ask anyone in comms, they won't say, 'Oh, well, you know, this is what I wanted to do. Since being a teenager'. We fall into it from backgrounds of marketing, PR, journalism, and wider and broader than that. So tell those really unconventional stories and show the different routes that get you there. And, you know, show the diversity and really bring forward some mentors and some leaders that that can give you somebody to look up to.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 23:05

Al, Kate. I've got no more questions. Thank you so much for your time and your energy. Really interesting conversation. I loved it, thank you.

**Alistair Atkinson** 23:13

Thanks Elle.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 23:20

What's the purpose of education? Does the current system serve or stymie? And how can employers help bridge the expectation gap? Sarah Magee, Professional Development Manager at The Institute of Internal Communication immerses herself in these questions every day. I caught up with Sarah to chat about bridging the education work divide after a year of disruption, and the educational challenges and opportunities for our own industry. Sarah, welcome to World Changers. Thank you so much for joining me.

**Sarah Magee** 23:49

Thank you. Thanks for having me.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 23:51

You kindly contributed to our World Changers report, and we compiled it and the back end of 2020. And at the time, you told us that our current education systems are missing opportunities to prepare young people for the world of work. Now, has your view changed?

**Sarah Magee** 24:04

So I don't think my view, in terms of whether or not the education system is fit for purpose for all young people, will ever really change until we're kind of able to move away from this one size fits all approach and this kind of big focus on data and persistent testing. And obviously, if you're thinking about whether or not something is fit for purpose, you need to consider well, what is the purpose of that? And I don't think there's one single answer to that question of the purpose of education.



I think it is kind of undeniable that one of the purposes of education is preparing young people for work, you know, whether or not that's preparing them for work in terms of them being able to meet the needs of society at the time or just being able to kind of live a fulfilling and flourishing life and being financially stable and all of those types of things. So no, my view hasn't changed. I think there's too much focus on gaining and retaining knowledge and information. And you know, that's not to say that that's a bad thing, that acquiring knowledge is a bad thing. But in terms of schooling, it just doesn't leave enough space in the school day for skill development. So you know, those practical skills as well as personal skills, interpersonal skills, critical thinking skills, and all of those things, I think are hugely important in the workplace.

I also think that we kind of put young people on this kind of conveyor belt, which just takes them through the education system with very few opportunities or space and time for them to really consider what it is that they want to learn and what it is that they want to do. And then we just kind of spit them out at the end of it, and expect them to have this ability to start making their own decisions and kind of start thinking about what it is that they want to do and choosing their own direction. And they, they haven't really had enough guidance or kind of personalised support to start making those decisions. And I think in some ways, the pandemic has kind of exacerbated, all of those things.

Young people are just being assessed and tested even more regularly. And, you know, there's all of these tests to kind of identify the gaps in their learning because of all of the missed opportunities they've had in education, because of lockdown and things. And, you know, there's just all of these assessments to test how quickly schools are able to fill those gaps. And that's obviously not preparing them for the world of work. And I think there's also been really significant issues in terms of access to education, or equitable access to education throughout these various lockdowns. And I think that's going to be hugely detrimental in terms of levels of social mobility, which is, you know, hugely measured by employment and access to work and readiness for work. And I definitely think there's opportunities which are being missed, to plug those gaps.

**Elle Bradley-Cox 26:43**

So much to unpick there I mean, hard relate on there being spat out of the school education system, hurtling into the world of work not really knowing what I'm doing. You made a really interesting point about equitable access to education, particularly with the lockdown creating such a kind of imbalance on who had what kit at home, for example. I mean, do you think we have an opportunity to create some meaningful change here to this system? And where would you start?

**Sarah Magee 27:11**

I do, yeah. I think there's always opportunities to kind of create meaningful change and drive meaningful change. And I actually think one of the most important places to start in terms of changing things in the education system is really similar to where an internal communication professional would start.

So in terms of actually listening to the people who are impacted by the decisions and the changes that are being made, and that was kind of one of the key recommendations from the research that I was doing as part of my dissertation, because my interest in in this question of whether or not the education system is fit for purpose for all young people came about because I was working with young people who had been really severely failed by the education system and had ended up in a young offenders Institute. And those people had some really powerful insights in terms of how their educational experience could have been better and could have meant

that they weren't in a young offenders Institute. But nobody had ever asked them, you know, what could we have done differently? How could this have been better for you? I think a lot of the time, because they've been so badly failed by the education system, they just don't have the language to even express properly, how or the opportunities to express how things could have been different.

So I think it's really important to listen to people who are being impacted at the moment, and especially the people who have been failed by the education system and kind of work out, well, how could we make it better for more people, but I think another thing that I would definitely start with is the kind of extrinsic motivation drivers that we apply to education, which I think also applies to the professions. This kind of culture of 'while you're here, you know, you're in school, because you need to get a qualification because you need to get a job, and you're not going to get a job if you don't have these qualifications'.

I think that kind of sometimes follows through into professions in terms of, you know, I was speaking to some other professional development professionals the other day, about how difficult it can sometimes be to engage them in this CPD. And I think a lot of the time, it's because of this extrinsic motivation driver that we use in terms of, well, you need to get this many hours of CPD under your belt in order to maintain your membership status. So your chartered status rather than kind of talking about the intrinsic motivation of just learning for the sake of learning and getting better at things and being able to improve and develop your knowledge and things. So that's probably one of the places that I would start changing that, that real focus on extrinsic drivers and really kind of nurturing a culture of just lifelong learning and a love of learning.

**Elle Bradley-Cox 30:00**

Those two points so beautifully brought together actually that you've got, you know, the people who through no fault of their own have had, you know, unfortunate experiences with education, where, to your point that they don't even have the language to explain how bad it's been. To then actually wanting to cultivate that lifelong love of learning and how difficult that can be, it's fascinating.

I mean, thinking about our own industry, IC has really come to the fore like, no time ever before. Because so many of us have kind of dropped into this job. And it's just a really common story. But do you think that now people are starting to see IC as a proper profession? Is there an actual talent pipeline? Are people coming for jobs in IC and do people know about it more now?

**Sarah Magee 30:41**

I mean, I would hope that with some of the work that we're doing with the #IChoseIC campaign, the talent pipeline or the talent pool is kind of increasing, and people are becoming more aware of internal comms as a career of choice. And, you know, hopefully, we'll start to see a bit of a shift in that narrative of falling into internal communication to really proactively choosing it, that is kind of the real aim of the #IChoseIC campaign.

A lot of the time when we're running these kind of career insight sessions, the numbers of people who are attending those sessions is still quite small. And I think that is because you put this opportunity out there to come and find out about a career in internal communication and people don't know what internal communication is. So, they might see that and kind of think, 'what is that I'm not really interested in that'.

So I think maybe there's a bit of work that we need to do in terms of positioning it slightly differently, and kind of talking about, you know, come and hear about a profession where you can have a real impact on people's working lives and people's well being and you know, people's happiness at work. So yeah, the numbers are quite small. But the people who do attend those sessions are really engaged and really kind of interested in finding out more. And I think that kind of inquisitiveness, and innovation is going to be a huge trait of the talent pipeline. And you know, always just kind of asking, 'why things done that way? And why can't we do things differently? And how can we start to do things better?'

But yeah, I do you think that there is a small number of people out there who could already be doing amazing things for the internal communication profession. And I do see that on the career insight sessions that we do. And, you know, especially the sessions that we've been doing recently, with the Taylor Bennett Foundation, they are trainees, I think there's a group of really motivated amazing young people out there. But I think the most important thing is for us to make sure that there are opportunities for them to enter the profession so that they don't just become disillusioned. You know, one of my biggest fears is that we create this group of people who we are going to and saying internal comms is an amazing career choice for you, you should really consider internal communication and for them to take that away and think 'actually, yeah, this would be great for me, how do I get into it?' and then they can't find any opportunities to gain exposure or experience or you know, just gain their first role out of college or university or school.

So I think it's really important that we are kind of doing the work to increase awareness, but also to make sure that there are opportunities for people as well.

**Elle Bradley-Cox 33:02**

I like your point about meaningful opportunities too, that it's not just kind of making the tea while other people, you know, do the big thinking, it's the chance to use the skill that you've hopefully learned or certainly lend some more. It's such an amazing job, internal comms, just, you know, going on my own bandwagon here, you've got the chance to develop so many interesting skills. And it's not just the obvious ones that you think about, you know, stakeholder management, interpersonal relationships, writing, engaging, persuading all of that really interesting stuff that you might write off and think that's not what an job in IC is about but it so is and it's really rewarding.

Speaking of kind of the things that are improving in the job, I mean, it's been a year of real kind of massive technical innovation in our industry, much more demand for greater measurement, strategy and purposeful work, which is all good stuff, as far as I'm concerned. But are there any skills gaps that we need to address in order to help comms teams in the future thrive.

**Sarah Magee 34:01**

Yeah, I mean, I always feel like a little bit of a fraud answering this question, because I'm not an internal comms person. I don't have any internal comms background, but I do obviously speak to internal communicators every day. And I spend a lot of time thinking about, you know, how we can improve the professional development opportunities for them.

And so I think all of the things that you've mentioned in terms of measurement strategy, are definitely the things that I hear members talking about, as well as you know, non members, and I think they would agree that those

are the things that they need to, to upskill. So definitely measurement, I think is something that should still be high on the agenda and kind of the ability to generate data and insights which really support their decision making but also enables them to influence and kind of push back a little bit and really establish themselves as experts in the organisation and obviously, a lot of that comes from great listening skills and the ability to develop great relationships, like you say, stakeholder management and really empathising with people and having a great understanding of people and what drives people and what motivates people.

As you said, internal comms has really come to the fore. And I think there's such a great opportunity for internal communicators, to start using those really distinct skills to have some really great internal influence. And I think with all of that stuff comes the ability to really clearly articulate the value of internal communication and kind of increase other people's understanding of what internal communication is there to do and what good practice looks like. And then I think on top of that, I think, as the IoIC, we also have a lot of work to do, in terms of kind of promoting internal communication more widely, and talking about the work of internal communication professionals and kind of getting our opinions out there a lot more in terms of what good practice looks like, amongst the general population, I suppose, who might not necessarily have an understanding of what internal communication is, or even an awareness that internal communication exists.

And I think that the kind of question of whether internal comms should be something that people are even aware of is quite an interesting one, I saw people talking about this the other day, in terms of is good internal communication always invisible? So you don't even realise it's happening to you, because it's just so embedded in the culture of the organisation that, you know, it's just, of course, I know what's going on, of course, people keep me updated. But I do think that it probably would be beneficial for the profession, for people to have more of an awareness of the fact that there is actually a person or a function within the organisation who is responsible for doing that. And who makes that happen, you know, just maybe just increasing the appreciation of that, or the understanding of that. I feel like you just described the perfect virtuous circle of IC, though, you know, the way that it can do so much good, if you put those little steps in place.

### **Elle Bradley-Cox**

Well, I guess it brings me on to my last question. It's just a bit of fun, but it's something that I asked all of my guests. So thinking about the people making the biggest impact in the world of work right now, who would you nominate as your 2021 World Changer?

### **Sarah Magee**

I was thinking about this for a while and kind of really trying to pinpoint one particular person, but I think I would just generally have to really nominate teachers, because I think teachers are incredible at the best of times, but to persist throughout all of the various lockdowns and, you know, local school closures, and kind of really continue to advocate for young people in the way that they have done, especially when there was that fiasco with GCSE and a level results potentially being calculated by an algorithm rather than teachers, I think, to keep pushing on behalf of young people, is just so important and so admirable.

And obviously, you know, the teachers are the people who are really preparing the next generation of World Changers and kind of really doing their best to empower them and equip them with the knowledge and skills that they need. And I think one of the biggest things that I took away from the research that I was doing for my dissertation was the fact that a lot of teachers are really disillusioned with the education system in exactly the

same way that I saw the issues with the education system, they're very much aware of them, probably a lot more so but they continue to persist and push through because they're just so passionate about really wanting to affect the change in terms of changing young people's lives and giving young people better opportunities, which I just think is such a noble thing to do. So, yeah, I think I'd have to nominate teachers.

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 38:34

I mean, what a perfect ending to our Bad Education episode. Great shout. Sarah Magee, thank you so much for joining me on wealth changes. A pleasure to have you.

**Sarah Magee** 38:46

Thank you

**Elle Bradley-Cox** 38:48

Our huge thanks to our contributors. If this episode inspired you to look at learning, do come and chat to us over on Twitter @scarlettabbot, or drop us an email at Hello@scarlettabbott.co.uk. And do check out the wonderful resources on the IoIC website where they share comms career stories. We'll see you next time for another dive into World Changers 2021 World Changers is a podcast by employee engagement consultancy scarlettabbott hosted by Elle Bradley-Cox. Find out more at [www.scarlettabbott.co.uk](http://www.scarlettabbott.co.uk)