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# David Lammy must lead the way on access to clean water

The new foreign secretary has promised to put the UK back on the world stage. Water should be at the top of his agenda

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**D**avid Lammy made clear in his first weekend as foreign secretary that he would “begin with three resets - with Europe, on climate and with the global south” - to put Britain “back” on the world stage (“[David Lammy faces a world in turmoil](#)”). But this is impossible without a reset on water.

Lammy is coming into post at a critical moment. The escalating climate crisis, the threat of future health pandemics and global instability threaten Labour’s vision of a world free from poverty on a livable planet. No one can adapt to a world without water, and progress on tackling the climate crisis and rebuilding global relationships will forever be limited without a reset on water.

Globally, one in 10 people lack access to clean water and one in five do not have decent toilets. Climate change is exacerbating this issue on a frightening scale, with increasingly severe and unpredictable floods and droughts fuelling health crises and destroying lives. Yet years of successive cuts to aid funding have meant that the world's most vulnerable are left paying the price for a crisis they've done the least to cause.

It is my hope that, after an extended period of weakened UK global leadership, Lammy brings with him bold action and unwavering commitment to universal access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene. Only then can we solve the most pressing global challenges facing our planet.

**Tim Wainwright**, chief executive, WaterAid UK, London E14

## Doubt over Letby conviction

I note that Martha Gill did not mention the case of Lucia de Berk in the Netherlands, who was convicted of the multiple murder of children and jailed for life (“[Why do we find it hard to believe that the smiling nurse Lucy Letby was a serial killer?](#)”). Her appeals failed, with further convictions added, and the Dutch supreme court upheld her guilt. Despite all this, doubts were raised about her convictions because of an inadequate statistical analysis of the evidence, and after further investigation she was acquitted. I hope that any future public inquiry or police investigations that aim to look at the wider picture of the Letby case will bring statisticians experienced in the field on board. Personally, however, I am struck by the absence of motive. That is why I find it hard to believe in Letby's guilt.

**Miland Joshi**

Birmingham

## Libraries need librarians

As a retired ex-head of libraries, I read Jon Ungood-Thomas's article with dismay (“[End of the librarian? Council cuts and new tech push profession to the brink](#)”). Book lending is of course a core service, but this sits alongside the provision of public computers, and the many and varied events and activities that libraries provide. Libraries are vital community spaces that, when properly and imaginatively managed, bring literature and history alive and provide local access to the arts.

We held Harry Potter days, complete with live owls, Second World War commemorations, Fireman Sam events with the fire service, a project with schools and a local group of carers who taught the children to knit, and many, many more. None of these activities was organised by machines.

The Arts Council is supposed to “develop and advocate for libraries”, which clearly isn't happening. What we need is a clear, evidence-based strategy for the way forward. Self-service should have no part in public libraries; it is expensive to buy and maintain and only addresses book lending. Libraries are bruised and battered

from 14 years of cuts. Surely this is a time to rebuild the network and really make the spaces work for the benefit of all.

**Kathryn Davidson**

Broughty Ferry, Dundee

## France's two-tier society

As a Frenchman living in the south-west of the country, I agree with Andrew Hussey (“[France no longer resembles a divided but tolerant family. It is catastrophically fractured](#)”). For too long, governing parties have ignored the rural and less educated people.

Racism has always been a part of society. The antisemitism of the last century has turned into an anti-Arab and anti-African stance. But the contempt for less educated people, together with an absence of infrastructure (health, education, post offices and shops are all lacking in small towns and the countryside) was the spark that lit the fuse.

**Jean-Luc Vertut**

Pau, France

## Forgiveness set me free

I read Katy Wix's account of being contacted by her childhood bully with deep sadness (“[Could you ever forgive your childhood bully](#)”). I have twice forgiven people who had a hold over me: one a bully who sought forgiveness; the other who didn't, following a campaign of online abuse and physical assault. Both times, the act of forgiveness released me from pain and living in the past. The former is now a friend, the latter an irrelevance. I only hope Katy reconsiders her response, if only for her own wellbeing and future self.

**Name and address supplied**

## Is this TV's death spiral?

Re David Mitchell's article, “[I'm lost in the foothills of a mountain of TV](#)”: I have been directing TV dramas for 30-plus years, learning skills first on BBC soap, and going on a journey through cops'n'docs, thrillers, comedy, kids' dramas, and back to soap. My CV is a reflection of an industry super-confident in its role and status inside our culture.

This year, we're in trouble: Covid, the US writers' strike, AI - all create shocks of feast and famine, and UK linear TV is taking the hit. Viewing figures have tumbled, advertisers evaporated, while the streaming marketplace is ripping the bottom out of the continuing drama (CD) boat, the training ground for writers, directors, actors and crews, pumping skill and ability into the industry. The scary bit is that no one seems to know what will happen, or what to do next - except retreat.

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The BBC has cut *Holby* and *Doctors*, *Casualty* has fewer episodes planned. *Hollyoaks* has lost two episodes a week. This firestorm is spreading. Actors are laid off, crews are struggling to find work, and my colleagues are staring into an abyss. We need to work, not just to pay the bills, but to keep developing the stories and the industry.

When I started I had a fantastic playground that challenged and taught me. Now it's being boarded up. The ignition point for storytelling skills and imagination needs a new crucible.

**Matthew Evans**

Ludlow, Shropshire

## Open government can rebuild trust

Dear prime minister,

We are keen to take up your offer outside 10 Downing Street to support a government of service, to rebuild trust through actions, not words, and return to the foundations of good government.

The UK government was a founding member of the Open Government Partnership - a coalition of 75 countries and 150 local governments (including Scotland, Northern Ireland, Greater Manchester and Glasgow) working to embrace technology and improve transparency, accountability, integrity and participation. At its core is a process of civil servants and civil society working together, which we believe could be expanded to support the delivery of mission-driven government.

There are compelling and immediate opportunities to work together, including the development of a new independent ethics and integrity commission; a cross-departmental anti-corruption strategy to tackle dirty money from abroad and save taxpayers money; an industrial strategy to drive growth via artificial intelligence, open innovation and open data while maintaining necessary safeguards; and best value, transparent, digital and data-driven public commissioning, procurement and spending.

The Post Office scandal, PPE procurement during the pandemic, the opaque mortgage-raising 2022 mini-budget, the impact of corruption on UK growth and democracy and the disregard for public standards and subsequent collapse in trust demonstrate that open government is not peripheral to people's lives: it is central. This is why we welcome the opportunity to work with you to revive this agenda, rebuild trust and support your programme of national renewal.

**Kevin Keith**, chair, UK Open Government Network; **Thom Townsend**, chair, UK Anti-Corruption Coalition; **Amanda Brock**, CEO, Open UK; **Sarah Castell**, CEO, Involve UK; **Gavin Hayman**, executive director, Open Contracting Partnership

## A Benn for all seasons

The Benn lineage stretches back further than you suggest ("10 key election facts"). Every Labour government since 1964 has indeed included a Benn. But in addition, Hilary's grandfather, William Wedgwood Benn, served under Ramsay MacDonald as secretary of state for India and under Clement Attlee as secretary of state for air. Or to put it another way, every Labour prime minister in history has appointed a member of the Benn family to the government.

**Jamie Morris**

Bromsgrove, Worcestershire

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