

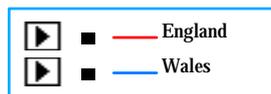
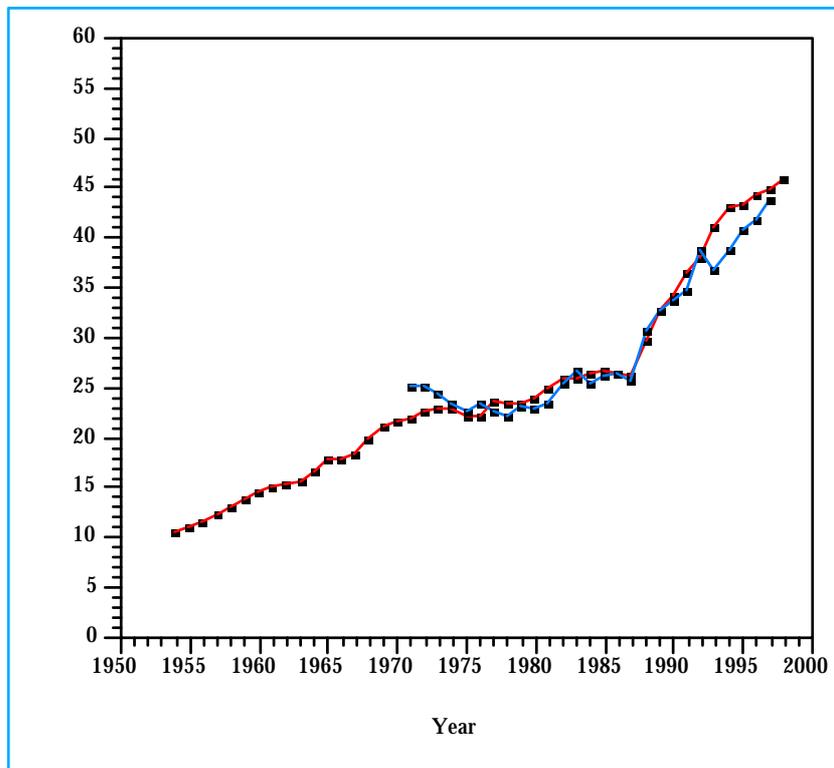
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The Betrayed Generations

Standards in British Schools 1950-2000

JOHN MARKS

Proportion of good GCSE marks in England and Wales, 1955 - 1998



The graph shows that the proportion of the age group in England gaining good 16+ results rose steadily during the 1950s and 1960s, levelled off in the 1970s, rose again a little in the early 1980s and then levelled off until 1987; after which there began a very sharp rise. In the next seven years – from 1987 to 1994 – the proportion rose more than it had in the previous 30 years and by six times as much as in the previous 15 years. But is this an accurate picture of what has happened in our schools over the last 50 years?

THE AUTHOR

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SUMMARY

Where are we now?

1. **Average standards:** standards in education in the UK are far too low. Standards vary enormously between schools in all parts of the country. Even the standards of the most basic of basics need to be raised considerably. Some of the worst results are in poorer areas of the country often with high levels of social deprivation. Opportunities are probably more dependent on social class and where you live than they were 40 years ago before the changeover to comprehensive schools.
2. **Age variations:** the shortfall between actual standards and expected standards increases for older pupils. At the age of 7 years old, pupils are a little ahead of expected standards, but by 11 they are about one year behind and by 14 two years behind. The spread between the standards of different schools of the same type in the same locality increases from about 2.5 years at age 7 (6 to 8.5 years) to nearly 4 years at age 11 (8.25 to 11.75 years) to 5 years or more at age 14 (9 to 14 years).
3. **GCSE results:** at 16+ , grammar schools do well (%5A*C above 90%) and independent schools do nearly as well. Results for comprehensive and secondary modern schools vary widely with some having five or six times as many pupils obtaining good GCSEs as others even in the same area. About 700 comprehensive schools – a quarter of the total – perform less well than the average for secondary modern schools.
4. **Comprehensive schools:** pupils in comprehensive schools make up 85% of the age group but obtain only about 75% of good GCSE passes. At A level their proportion of passes falls to about 65% and to about 50% for A grades. Results for selective schools taken together (grammar and secondary moderns) are about 35% better than for comprehensive schools which indicates substantial under achievement by many comprehensive schools and maybe a further 60,000 pupils achieving good GCSEs if we had a selective system.
5. **Selective schools:** pupils in the selective system in Northern Ireland are 18 months ahead of pupils in England at 14 in both English and Mathematics and achieve GCSE results which are about 10% better absolutely and 25% better relatively than for pupils in England. These results indicate that selection is better for all pupils – those at the widely under-rated secondary modern schools as well as those at grammar schools.

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How do we know where we are now?

6. **Objective data:** we know where we are in England now because we do have objective information about standards at various ages, school by school, for the whole country. However, this detailed information has only become readily available since 1992 for GCSE & A level and since 1995 for children at 7, 11 and 14 years old. The data – especially the enormous variations from school to school – show that average standards and expectations are not high enough and that pupils could be achieving much more at all ages.

How did we get here?

7. **Standards over time:** in England, the percentage of children gaining good 16+ results rose steadily during the 1950s & 1960s and levelled off in the 1970s & 1980s. From 1987 to 1993 the percentage rose more than it had in the previous 30 years and by six times as much as in the previous 15 years; from 1993 the rapid rise slowed somewhat.
8. **Northern Ireland:** in Northern Ireland, results at 16+ were lower than for England in the 1960s but overtook England in about 1970 and continued to rise rapidly until they are now 10% absolutely and about 25% relatively above those for England.
9. **The expected outcome of ‘comprehensivisation’:** a DES projection for England, made in 1968, follows the pattern of actual 16+ results in Northern Ireland rather than what happened in England. At A level the pattern of results – for England, Northern Ireland and the 1968 DES projection – is in all cases very similar to that at 16+.
10. **The actual outcome of ‘comprehensivisation’:** the data suggest that the changeover to comprehensive schools has led to the following shortfall in England:
 - about 60,000 16 year olds each year who would otherwise do well are failing to achieve five or more higher grade passes at 16+ ;
 - about 80,000 18 year olds each year who would otherwise do well are failing to achieve 2 or more A levels.

The increase in access to universities for working class students up to 1960, primarily due to grammar schools, may have gone into reverse with the spread of comprehensive education.

11. **Lower GCSE Standards:** the Standards over Time enquiry listed many factors which have lowered standards and expectations in both GCSE and A level. This conclusion is strongly supported by the data given here which show extremely rapid rises in pass rates after 1987, when no coursework limits existed, and a slowing down in the rise following the decision to limit coursework in 1991 and to introduce mandatory Codes of Practice for GCSE Examination Boards in 1992.

SUMMARY

How can we put things right?

12. **Standards and choice:** standards are so low that the first priority must be to leave existing good schools alone – whether they be independent or state schools of whatever type – and to continue to inform parents about standards in all types of school so that they may choose the school which they think is best for their children.
13. **A new philosophy:** the fundamental principle is and must be to set and monitor standards throughout education; to publish information about standards each year, school by school or college by college; and to ensure that any educational policy should be related as directly as possible to the standards achieved.
14. **New national performance tables:** these are needed at 7 and 14 as well as those at 11 and for GCSE and A level. All performance tables should include three extra columns for:
 - average class sizes and costs per pupil alongside each school's National Curriculum and GCSE results so that policies can be evaluated by everybody;
 - average standards of pupils on entry to the school so that proper progress can be seen to take place.

How can we keep things right?

15. **A new comprehensive policy:** the old comprehensive policy is a fraud. Variations in standards are so large that many pupils are condemned to suffer in inadequate schools thus damaging their life chances for many years or even forever. A more diverse selective system can achieve more for all and not just for those who are selected for academic schools. A new comprehensive policy must ensure higher standards for all and must recognise the major contributions to higher national standards made over the years by grammar and secondary modern schools and by independent schools.
16. **Monitoring standards:** whenever major changes in education take place, as in the 1960s and again in the 1980s, the impact on standards must be monitored and published. The priority should be to devise policies which contain their own in-built mechanisms for evaluation.
17. **Quality for all:** if standards become central to everything we do, it will become impossible for about 40% of pupils, as now, to enter secondary school unable to read well enough to cope with the National Curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

On the education of the people of this country, the future of this country depends.

Benjamin Disraeli, House of Commons, June 15, 1874

OVER THE LAST 30 YEARS education has risen up the political agenda in Britain primarily because of widespread concern about low standards.

There are enormous variations in standards from school to school – even with schools of the same type in similar areas. This is true at all ages for which we have national information:

- at 7, 11 and 14 in National Curriculum tests;
- at 16 in public examination results for GCSE and vocational qualifications;
- at 18 in A level and GNVQ results and in access to higher education.

As pupils get older, the variations in standards increase. There are great differences in achievements and opportunities for pupils from different backgrounds and areas.

Even in the most basic elements of education – the ability to read and to calculate – standards in Britain are far too low.

Even in the most basic elements of education – the ability to read and to calculate – standards in Britain are far too low.¹ And all this despite:

- much more money in real terms being spent than ever before;
- a substantial fall in class sizes;
- the raising of the school-leaving age to 16 and more people staying in education after that age than ever before.

There is little agreement either about the purposes of education or on what is meant by standards. Fundamental conflict has bedevilled education policy for decades – conflict between those who believe that education is the transmission of knowledge and culture from one generation to the next and those who think the teacher's primary role is to help pupils discover the world for themselves. Every subject on the curriculum has been a battleground. This lack of consensus continually frustrates attempts to raise standards.

This paper surveys measurable standards in all kinds of schools for the whole country. It covers both state and independent schools. While standards are analysed in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, most data is reported for England because more national information is available there.

¹ See recent reputable international comparisons such as the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and detailed reports from the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED).

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The emphasis is on raw or unadjusted results of National Curriculum tests and public examinations. Unadjusted results have a reality beyond that of any adjusted figures. They provide an independent external yardstick for the standards reached in schools. And it is these results which individual pupils take with them as passports to careers or to college or university.²

This paper lays out irrefutable evidence on how low educational standards are in the whole country.

The aim is to present evidence about standards for the whole country which cannot be seriously doubted.³ If evidence does not exist when public accountability requires it, the paper asks why and concludes that quantitative measures of standards should shape and determine present and future policies for education. The paper is divided into the following five chapters:

Chapter 1 *Where are we now?*

This Chapter reviews current standards in major subjects for all schools in England; gives evidence on vocational qualifications and current access to higher education; and compares standards within the UK and internationally.

Chapter 2 *How do we know where we are now?*

This Chapter explains why so much information is now available; illustrates current standards by giving examples (primarily from mathematics); and asks whether current standards are high enough.

Chapter 3 *How did we get here?*

This Chapter reviews official data on public examinations, vocational qualifications and access to universities in the UK over the last 50 years; analyses possible causes for the trends revealed; and analyses the effect on standards of the change from a selective to a comprehensive system of schools in the 1960s; the introduction of the GCSE in 1987; and the lack of published information about standards over most of the period.

Chapter 4 *How can we put things right?*

This Chapter proposes publishing more information about standards; setting higher standards in National Curriculum tests, public examinations and vocational qualifications; and changing the National Curriculum so as to emphasise the basics in primary schools and to provide a specific vocational pathway in secondary schools.

Chapter 5 *How can we keep things right?*

This Chapter explains the failure of centrally imposed policies – such as the Government's pledge to reduce class sizes in infant schools – and the success of decentralising policies – such as national performance tables, parental choice and grant maintained schools. The paper concludes by advocating a more open and comprehensive approach to the necessary virtues of élitism and excellence.

² Moreover there is no agreement as to how any adjustment should be made for prior attainment, social class, economic deprivation or any of the other factors which might be thought to affect educational standards.

³ Anecdotal evidence is not included except where it illustrates, in as graphic a way as possible, the actual standards which are being achieved.

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

...when you cannot express it in numbers, your knowledge is of a meagre and unsatisfactory kind.

Lord Kelvin⁴

This Chapter summarises the available information about current standards in this country.⁵ It includes data for current standards in major subjects for all schools, state and independent, in England.⁶

It includes information on:

- standards in English and Mathematics in primary and secondary schools at the ages of 7, 11 & 14;
- general GCSE results and GCSE results for major subjects at the age of 16;
- some information about A level results at 18 focusing on Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology.

Results for England are compared with those for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland where such data are available.

A brief reference is made to the results in Mathematics in the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

Finally the Chapter discusses the limited available evidence concerning vocational qualifications and current access to higher education for pupils from different social classes.

The focus will be on the easily measurable and so, of necessity, much of the information will be about the basics of education.

⁴ Lord Kelvin, Lecture to the Institution of Civil Engineers, 3 May 1883.

⁵ The paper can only give a brief summary of the relevant data; full references will be given throughout to further sources.

⁶ It would clearly be useful if comparisons could easily be made between the prior attainment of pupils when they enter schools and the results they achieve when they leave it – for example, by comparing average Key Stage 2 results at 11 with GCSE results in secondary schools or average Key Stage 1 results at 7 with Key Stage 2 results at 11 for primary schools. Such prior attainment data could easily be collected annually from every school, using form 7 which is completed by each school in January each year and sent to the DfEE, and published in national performance tables alongside the results of pupils as they leave the school. The result would be that the current unreliable indicator used by the DfEE, QCA and OFSTED to differentiate between the intake of pupils in different schools – the proportion of pupils either eligible for, or taking up, free school meals – could be abandoned. This would be highly desirable; the free school meals indicator is unreliable because the data are collected in different ways in different schools and LEAs and is, in any case, much less highly correlated with standards and achievement than is prior attainment.

THE BETRAYED GENERATIONS

1.1 CURRENT STANDARDS AT KEY STAGES 1, 2 & 3

Figures 1.1 to 1.4 are distribution charts which show the standards reached by pupils at the ages of 7 (Key Stage 1), 11 (Key Stage 2) and 14 (Key Stage 3).

For example the first chart in Figure 1.1 shows the standards reached in Reading, derived from National Curriculum tests, by 7 year old pupils at all primary schools in England.⁷

The horizontal axis shows the average 'subject age' for Reading for individual schools; the vertical axis shows the number of schools.⁸ The dark vertical line on such charts indicates the average real chronological age of the pupils.

Thus, for example, there are about 2,000 state schools whose 7 year old pupils have average 'Reading ages' between 7 years and 7 years 3 months but only about 600 state schools whose 7 year old pupils have average 'Reading ages' between 8 years 3 months and 8 years 6 months.⁹

The shortfall between actual and expected standards increases as children get older. At the age of 7 they are, on average, a little ahead of expected standards but by 11 they are about a year behind. By 14, they are two years behind.

Figure 1.1 shows standards in Reading/English and Figure 1.2 standards in Mathematics in state primary schools at the ages of 7 and 11 and in state comprehensive schools at 14.

Summary of National Standards

Overall standards are low; the average standard achieved by pupils at 11 and 14 is significantly below the standard they should reach for their ages.

The shortfall between actual standards and expected standards increases for older pupils. At the age of 7 they are, on average, a little ahead of expected standards but by 11 they are about a year behind and by 14 two years behind.

⁷ Most of the National Curriculum and GCSE results given in this Chapter are for 1997; this does not detract from the importance of this data because the characteristics of any modern education system do not change much from one year to the next or even over a five year period.

⁸ 'Subject Ages' are calculated from the average National Curriculum Level for each school using the relationship 'Age' = (3 + 2 x average Level). The expected level for 11 year olds is Level 4; if all pupils were at this level, the 'subject age' would be (3 + 2 x 4) = 11. National Curriculum levels, and the related government targets for various ages, are not arbitrary; they are based on a National Curriculum which was arrived at after wide consultation and on the input of many experienced HMI and other experts. National Curriculum tests go through many stages of development in which teachers and other subject experts are consulted – see, for example *Weighing the Baby, The report of the Independent Scrutiny Panel on the 1999 Key Stage 2 National Curriculum tests in English and mathematics*, July 1999, DfEE.

⁹ For more detail on the data in Chapters 1.1 & 1.2 see J Marks, *An Anatomy of Failure: Standards in English Schools for 1997*, Social Market Foundation, 1998.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

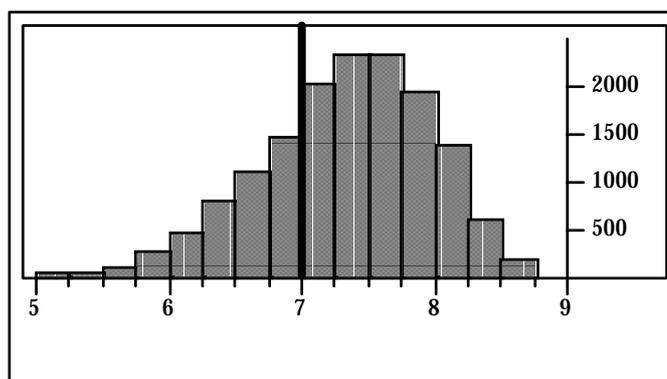
The spread between the standards of different schools of the same type is very large indeed. It increases from about 2.5 years at age 7 (the range of 'subject ages' is from about 6 to 8.5 years) to nearly four years at age 11 (from about 8.25 to 11.75 years) to five years or more at age 14 (from about 9 or less to 14 or more years).

The results for Reading/English & for Mathematics are very similar at all ages with average standards being marginally higher in Mathematics.

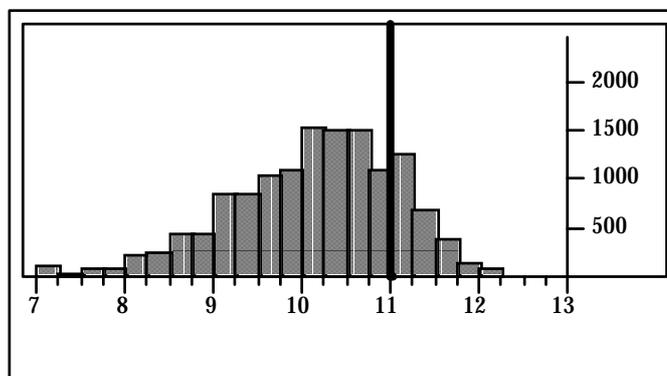
Figure 1.1

Average Reading/English 'Subject Age' of 7, 11 & 14 year old pupils in individual schools in England

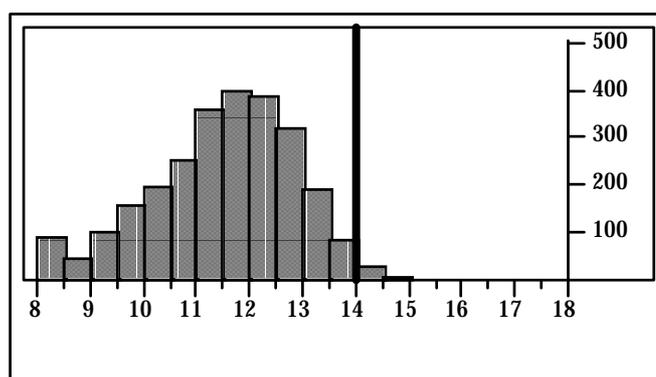
Age 7 (KS1) – State Primary Schools: Reading



Age 11 (KS 2) – State Primary Schools: English



Age 14 (KS 3) – Comprehensive Schools: English

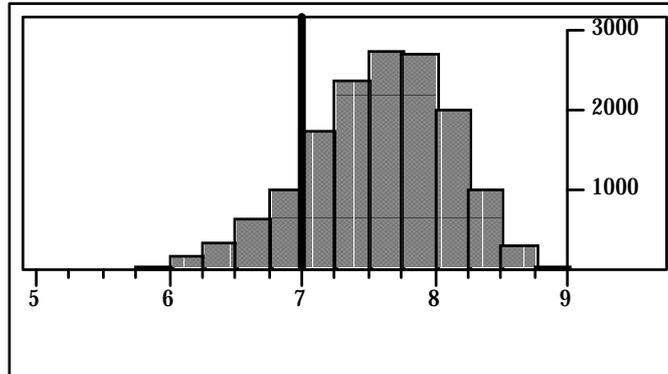


THE BETRAYED GENERATIONS

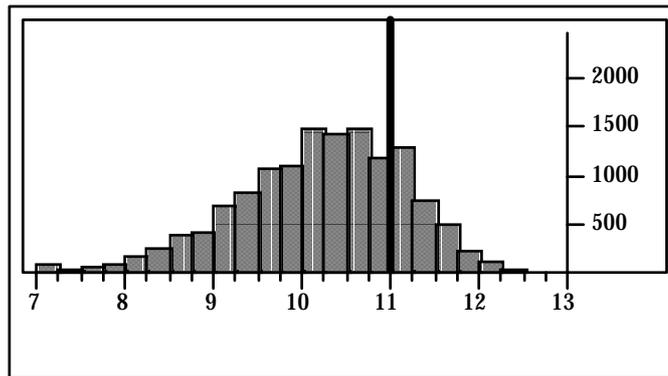
Figure 1.2

Average Mathematics 'Subject Age' of 7, 11 & 14 year old pupils in individual schools in England

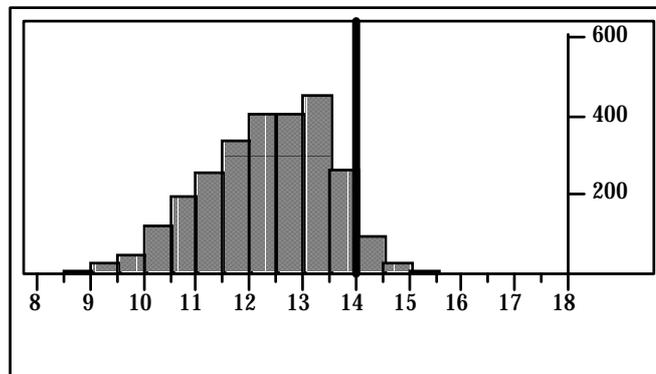
Age 7 (KS 1) – State Primary Schools: Mathematics



Age 11 (KS 2) – State Primary Schools: Mathematics



Age 14 (KS 3) – Comprehensive Schools: Mathematics



WHERE ARE WE NOW?

It is disturbing that, even at the age of 7, so many children are so far behind the standards that they are expected to reach, particularly since the expected standard at this age is relatively undemanding (see Chapter 2.1 below). By the age of 11, even more children have fallen still further behind, and by 14 there is a very large number of schools where pupils are four or more years behind in English and there or more years behind in Mathematics.

By 14, pupils at many schools are four or more years behind in English and three or more years behind in Mathematics.

Local Standards in Birmingham at 7, 11 & 14

Birmingham is an important case study. Not only is it a major conurbation – the second largest city in England – but it has also been the focus of much attention since it tried to refashion its education system from 1994 using policies similar to those favoured by the current Government.

Overall standards in Birmingham state schools are low, with the average standard of pupils well below the average national standard and even further below the standard they are expected to reach for their ages. For older pupils, standards are particularly poor. For 11 year old pupils, very few schools exceed the expected standard. For 14 year old pupils, no schools exceed the expected standard. Many are three or four years behind.

Local and National Standards

Three LEAs in addition to Birmingham have been studied in detail – Barnsley, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes.¹⁰ In all cases the variations between one school and another are very large – in Buckinghamshire, where average standards are high, and in Barnsley where they are very low.

Results from these four LEAs are similar to many others up and down the country. Buckinghamshire is often near the top of LEA performance tables. Birmingham, Barnsley and Milton Keynes are much lower down the LEA national performance tables. But they are not at or even near the bottom. Typically they are about two-thirds to three-quarters of the way down the list. There are many LEAs which perform less well than these three particularly from inner London and from other substantial conurbations such as Manchester, Bradford and Newcastle.

There are also substantial variations in standards at ages 7 and 11 between schools in the same LEA in nearly every LEA in the country. For example, for 7 year olds in Mathematics, reading and spelling, pupils in the top school in each LEA are on average about 2 years 10 months ahead of pupils in the bottom school.¹¹ For 11 year olds in Mathematics, pupils in the top school in each LEA are on average about 5 years 5 months ahead of pupils in the bottom school; for English, the figure is about 3 years 7 months.¹²

¹⁰ See J Marks, *An Anatomy of Failure*, Ibid.

¹¹ J Marks, *Standards of Reading, Spelling & Maths for 7-year olds in Primary Schools for 1995*, Social Market Foundation, 1997.

¹² J Marks, *Standards of English & Maths in Primary Schools for 1995*, Social Market Foundation, 1996.

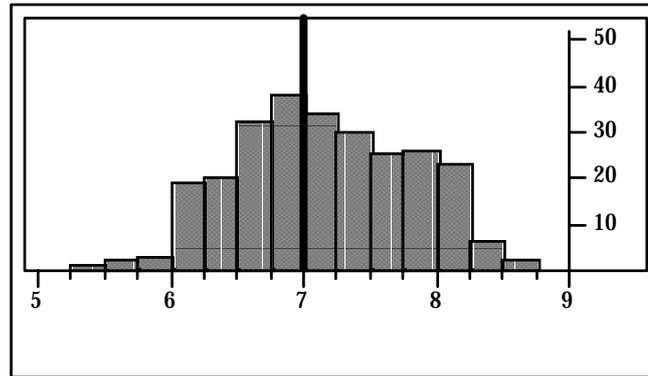
THE BETRAYED GENERATIONS

It is these stark and undisputed facts, set out in Figures 1.1 to 1.4, that justify the description of the picture across the country as a national disaster.

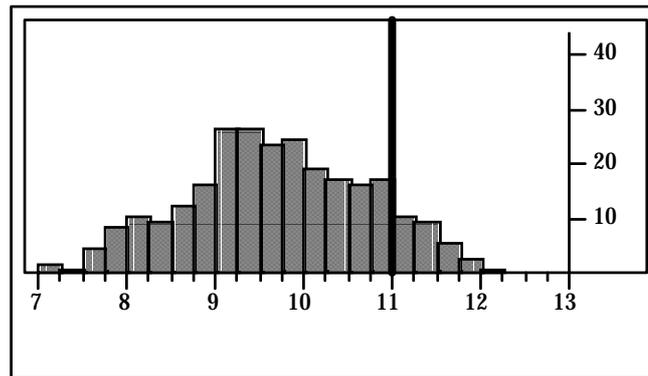
Figure 1.3

Average Reading/English 'Subject Age' of 7, 11 & 14 year old pupils in individual schools in Birmingham

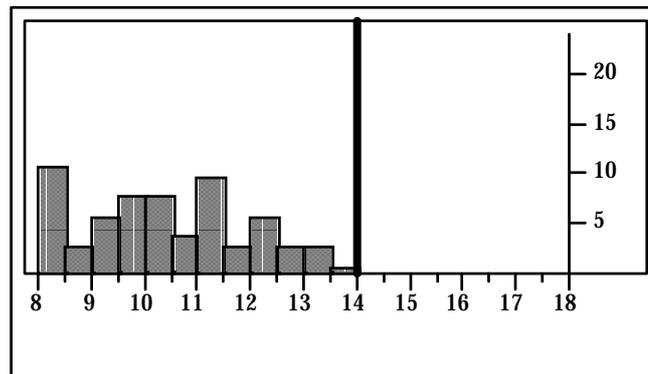
Age 7 (KS 1) – State Primary Schools: Reading



Age 11 (KS 2) – State Primary Schools: English



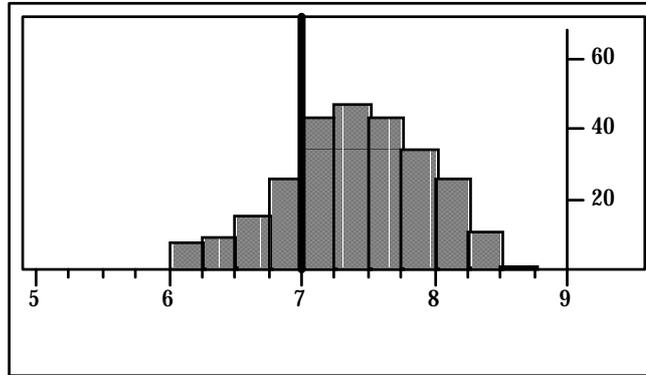
Age 14 (KS 3) – Comprehensive Schools: English



WHERE ARE WE NOW?

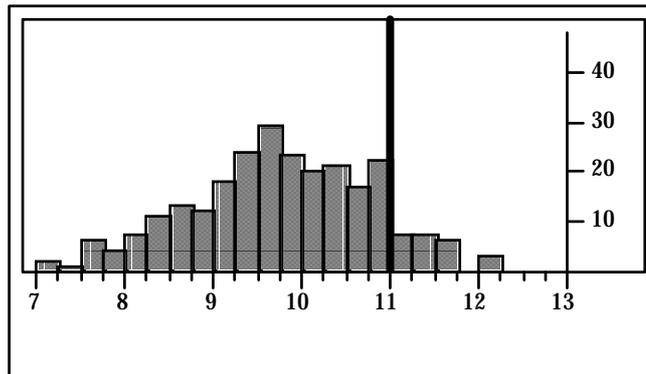
Figure 1.4 Average Mathematics 'Subject Age' of 7, 11 & 14 year old pupils in individual schools in Birmingham

Age 7 (KS 1) – State Primary Schools: Mathematics

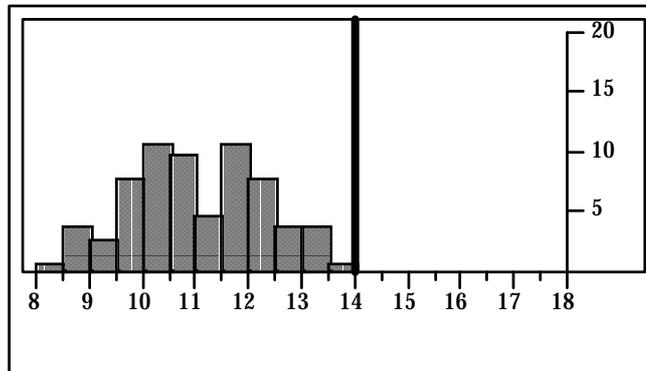


These stark and undisputed facts, set out in Figures 1.1 to 1.4, justify the description of the picture across the country as a national disaster.

Age 11 (KS 2) – State Primary Schools: Mathematics



Age 14 (KS 3) – Comprehensive Schools: Mathematics



THE BETRAYED GENERATIONS

Standards achieved by individual pupils in Arithmetic¹³

What these enormous differences in standards between individual schools mean for individual pupils can be illustrated by results for individual arithmetic questions in an OFSTED study of standards in mathematics.¹⁴

At 7 years old, two of the questions asked were:

- addition of a two digit number and a single digit number without carrying (written question);
- multiplication of two single digit numbers (mental arithmetic).

At 11 years old, two of the questions asked were:

- addition of two simple fractions (written question);
- state two numbers with a given difference (mental arithmetic).

For each of these four questions about 40% of pupils overall gave the right answer but the figures for individual schools varied from about 5% to about 90% of pupils. Such enormous differences are even more alarming since the actual questions are very easy indeed:

It would be difficult to imagine easier examples of the specific types of questions than these. Nevertheless, in some schools the overwhelming majority of pupils got them wrong.

7 year olds

$$(50 + 5) = ?$$

$$(2 \times 5) = ?$$

11 year olds

$$(1/2 + 1/4) = ?$$

Write two numbers which differ by 11.

It would be difficult to imagine easier examples of the specific types of questions than these. Nevertheless, in some schools the overwhelming majority of pupils got them wrong.

Standards achieved by individual pupils in Reading

Low standards in Reading for individual pupils in three LEAs are described in another OFSTED study.¹⁵

13 Further information on standards in arithmetic is given in Chapter 1.8 on international comparisons.

14 *The Teaching of Number in 3 Inner-urban LEAs*, OFSTED, September 1997.

15 *The Teaching of Reading in 45 Inner London Primary Schools – A report by Her Majesty's Inspectors in collaboration with the LEAs of Islington, Southwark and Tower Hamlets*, OFSTED, 1996; the study used standardised tests of reading for 7 and 11 year olds in 45 primary schools.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

7 year olds

The 7-year-old test results showed that only 1 in 5 pupils achieved a reading age at or above their chronological age... 79% were below average and almost 1 in 5 pupils achieved no score at all (after two years at school).

11 year olds

...2 in 5 achieved a reading age at or above their chronological age. About 1 in 3 pupils had reading ages two to four years below their chronological age. White pupils from economically disadvantaged backgrounds consistently performed least well and constituted the largest group of under achievers...

OFSTED concluded:

The wide gulf in pupils' reading performance is serious and unacceptable. Some schools and pupils are doing well against the odds while others in similar circumstances are not. It is clear that it is what individual schools do that makes the difference to their pupils' reading performance.

For both 7 and 11 year olds, OFSTED identified poor and insufficient teaching of phonic skills as a major cause of underachievement. OFSTED also said that:

Underachievement in reading is a major threat to pupils' educational progress in both primary and secondary education.

What this can mean for individual pupils is shown by this extract from a report to the curriculum committee of the governors of a comprehensive school in London in May 1997. The school achieves above the national average and over a third of its sixth form enter higher education. The pupils involved are not statemented or special needs pupils.

The problem is serious and getting more so year by year. To put the issue into sharp focus here are two extracts from the work of two Year 8 pupils. The pupils are not in the least able form in that year. The subject for written work is the Great Plague of London.

a. Houses and cleanness

Most of the House wire dity rat use to come and spread dreases because the town were small andout 1/2 million in London there had no proper toilet there used to frown. it out i n the street neal was hanged and files so so lay egg on it was dity and valing the cathe were and the hooses were bult together so it is a fire happened it spread together to the whole street.

b. houses

In them day the houses did not have a flus sow wene you needing to gow town We have to do it in a back and fring it at of the wend the howses was sowe cows to geur if there was a frirgh the how seet whold ban dowr you get to mete people but were yu w/wen your wast at of the wend you will have sand down your wend and it was noost.

Neither of these pupils is inarticulate, but they can scarcely read. Their capacity to express themselves in writing is negligible. They have no interest in books. Reading for pleasure is quite outside their experience. They scarcely notice their deficiencies and make no effort to improve. They have reached the age of 13 and are educationally crippled.

THE BETRAYED GENERATIONS

We have dozens and dozens of such children. In all reality we should not be attempting to teach them the national curriculum until they have been taught to master the language adequately.

Conclusion

Given this enormous tail of substantial under achievement, it seems likely that many schools in the middle of the distribution – and even those nearer the top – may be somewhat complacent and may not be demanding enough of their pupils. It is important to remember that, of all variables, it is test scores for 7 year olds, and reading scores in particular, that correlate most strongly with later academic performance at GCSE and beyond.

1.2. CURRENT STANDARDS IN GCSE EXAMINATIONS

Figures 1.5 to 1.9 show distributions for the percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more GCSE Grades A* to C (%5A*C) in secondary schools.

The horizontal axis shows %5A*C; the vertical axis shows the number of schools; the dark vertical line indicates the national average for the particular category of school.

Thus, for example, in the middle chart in Figure 1.5 there are nearly 300 comprehensive schools with %5A*C between 40% and 45% and also between 45% and 50% but only about 100 comprehensive schools with %5A*C between 65% and 70%.

Grammar, Comprehensive and Secondary Modern schools

Figure 1.5 shows %5A*C for all grammar, comprehensive and secondary modern schools in the country in 1997.

Nearly all grammar schools achieve very high results with %5A*C of 90% or above. The distribution for all comprehensive schools is very broad – almost uniform between 20% and 60% with many schools both above and below these figures. Many comprehensive schools thus have 5 or 6 times fewer pupils obtaining 5 or more GCSE passes at Grades A*C as other comprehensive schools; more detailed analyses show that differences on this scale exist even for schools in the same or similar areas. The distribution for all secondary modern schools is less broad and the average is lower than for comprehensive schools.

There is, however, a considerable overlap between the results of secondary modern and comprehensive schools. About 700 comprehensive schools – a quarter of the total – perform less well than the average for secondary modern schools.

LEA, Voluntary and Grant Maintained Comprehensive schools

Figure 1.6 shows %5A*C for three different types of comprehensive school – LEA, voluntary or church, and grant-maintained schools.¹⁶

The overall performance of grant-maintained schools is, on average, better than for voluntary or church comprehensive schools which itself is better than that of LEA comprehensive schools.

¹⁶ Grant Maintained status was abolished in the School Standards and Framework Act, 1998; the relevant Section took effect from September, 1999.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

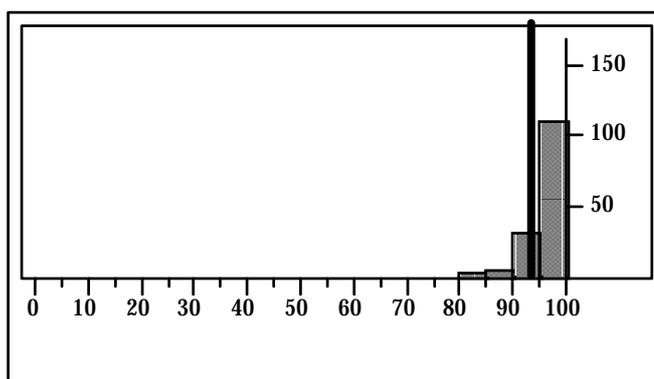
However, the most striking features of Figure 1.6 are the very broad distributions for %5A*C for each type of school, ranging from around 10% in some schools to 80% or 90% in others.

Very similar broad distributions are also found for these different kinds of comprehensive schools for the results of National Curriculum tests in English and Mathematics at the age of 14.

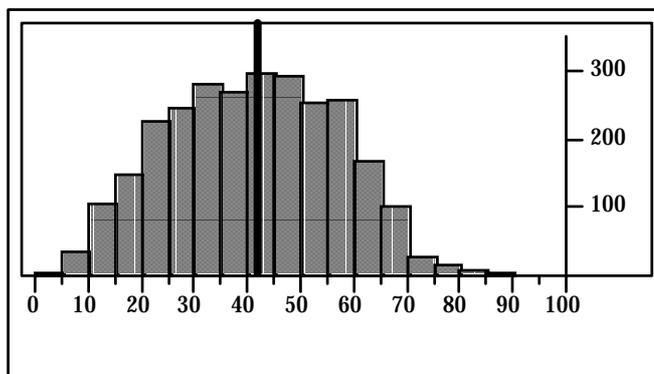
Figure 1.5

%5A*C GCSE in Grammar, Comprehensive & Secondary Modern Schools in England

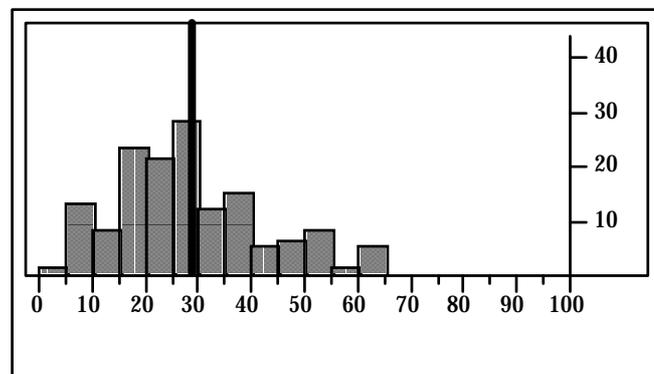
All Grammar Schools



All Comprehensive Schools



All Secondary Modern Schools

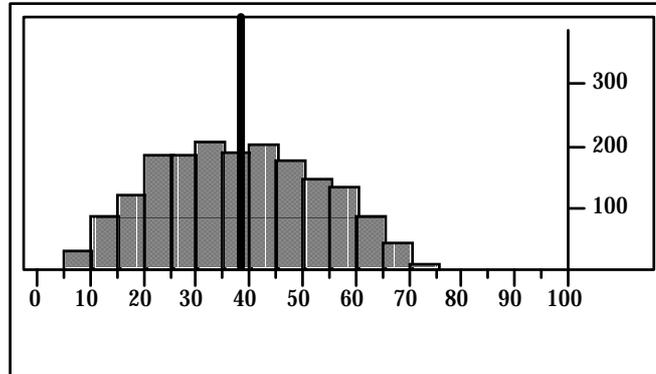


THE BETRAYED GENERATIONS

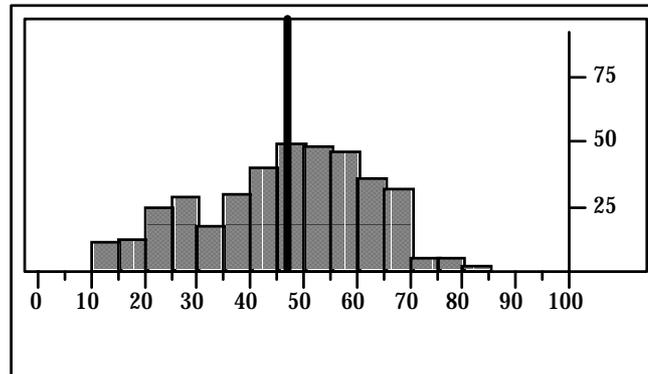
Figure 1.6

%5A*C GCSE in different Types of Comprehensive School; the vertical axis shows the number of schools.

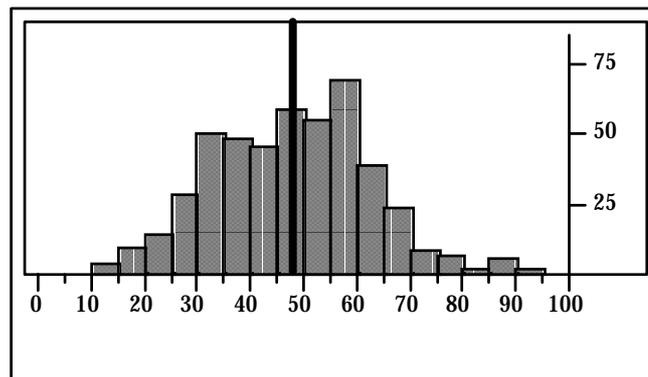
LEA Comprehensive Schools



Voluntary Comprehensive Schools



Grant Maintained Comprehensive Schools



Standards in Birmingham at GCSE

Figure 1.7 shows that the GCSE performance of comprehensive schools in Birmingham is very similar to the GCSE performance of secondary modern schools nationally (see Figure 1.5).

The spread between the standard of different comprehensive schools is very large indeed – as it was for Birmingham primary schools – and is comparable to that found nationally.

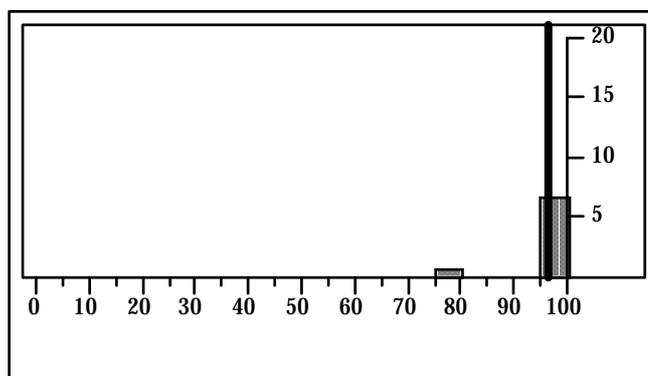
The Birmingham grammar schools are the only state schools in Birmingham which are performing as well as or better than similar schools nationally.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

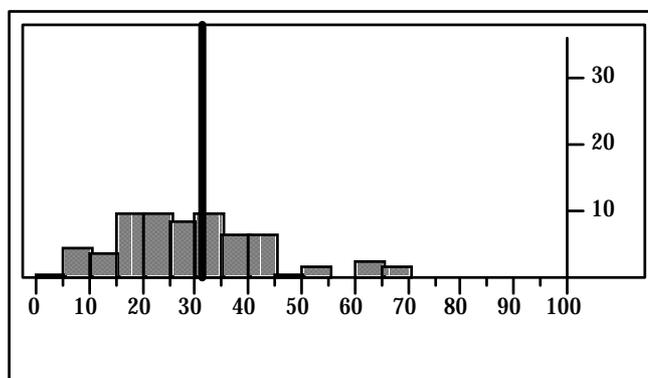
Figure 1.7

%5A*C GCSE in Birmingham Schools

Birmingham Grammar Schools



Birmingham Comprehensive Schools



There are no Secondary Modern schools in Birmingham

GCSE standards in Comprehensive Schools without and with Sixth Forms

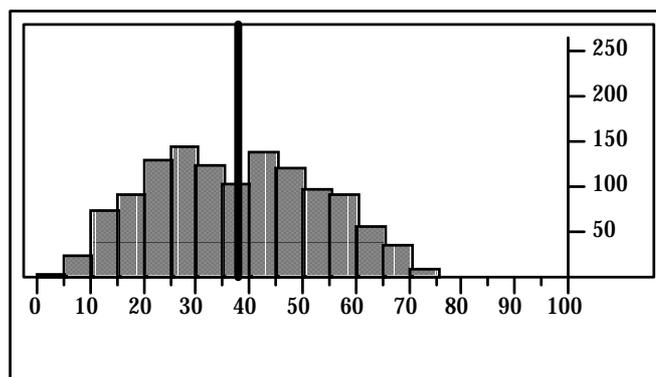
The average GCSE standard for comprehensive schools without sixth forms – %5A*C of 38.3% – is below the standard in all comprehensive schools (41.8%). The average GCSE standard for comprehensive schools with sixth forms – %5A*C of 43.2% – is above the standard in all comprehensive schools (41.8%), and is about 15% better relatively than for comprehensives without sixth forms.

The range of performance in both kinds of school is very large indeed.

Figure 1.8

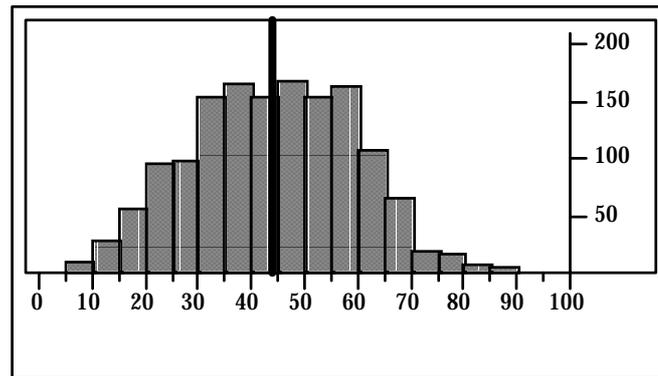
%5A*C GCSE in Comprehensive Schools without & with Sixth Forms

Comprehensive Schools without Sixth Forms



THE BETRAYED GENERATIONS

Comprehensive Schools with Sixth Forms



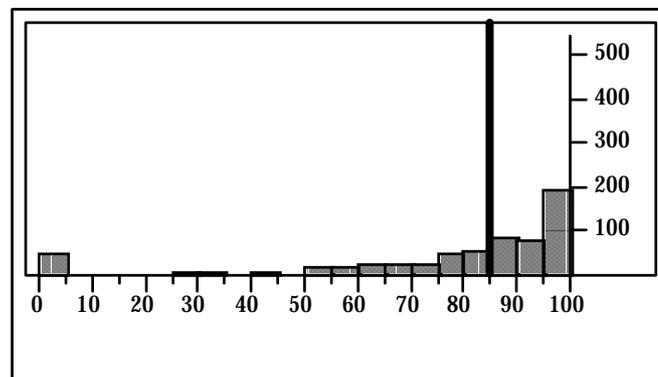
GCSE Standards in Independent, State & All Schools

The average GCSE standard for independent schools – %5A*C around 85% – is high and well above the national average for all schools; the spread is also substantial. The average GCSE standard for all state schools – %5A*C of 42.3% – is slightly above that for all comprehensive schools – %5A*C of 41.8% – because of the contribution of the selective schools (grammar and secondary modern schools taken together). The average GCSE standard for all schools – state and independent together – %5A*C of 46.4% – is over 3% more absolutely and over 7% more relatively than that for all state schools.

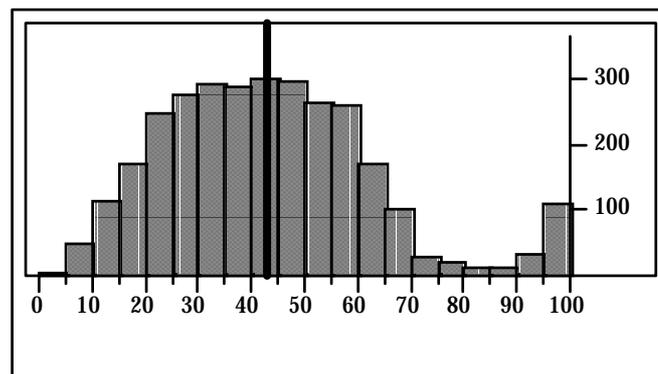
Figure 1.9

%5A*C GCSE in Independent, State & All Schools

Independent Schools

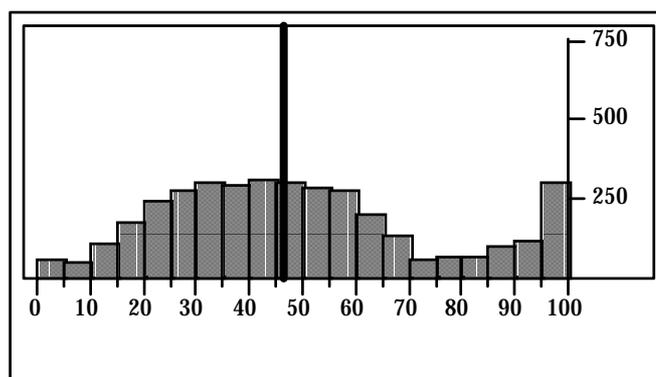


All State Schools



WHERE ARE WE NOW?

All Schools – State & Independent



1.3. GCSE PASSES IN DIFFERENT KINDS OF SCHOOL

GCSE %5A*C & A*C Passes in English, Mathematics and five main subjects in State and Independent Schools

Figure 1.10 shows the percentages of pupils obtaining good GCSE passes in independent schools, all state schools and all schools in:

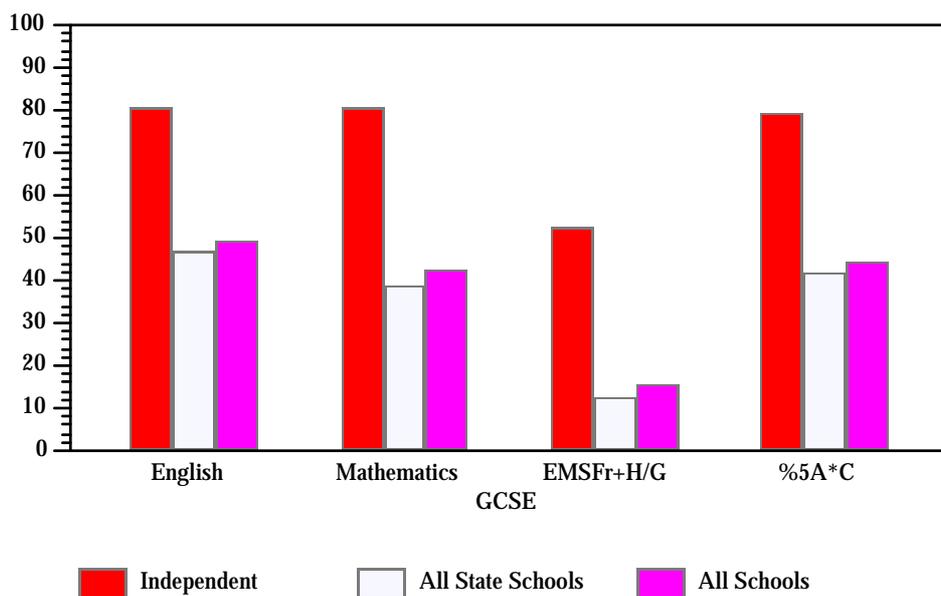
- English;
- Mathematics;
- five main subjects – English, Mathematics, Science, French and either History or Geography;
- and any five subjects.

About 80% of independent school pupils obtain good GCSE passes in English, Mathematics and in any 5 subjects compared with about 40% in state schools.

About 50% of pupils in independent schools obtain good GCSE passes in five main subjects compared with only about 12% in state schools.

Figure 1.10

GCSE A*C Passes in State and Independent Schools in England in 1997



THE BETRAYED GENERATIONS

In England, where the proportion of pupils in independent schools is only about 8%, their average standard is so much higher that they make a significant contribution to raising the national standard as Figure 1.10 shows.¹⁷ In 1997 %5A*C is raised by about 3% by the high figure of 80% for independent schools;¹⁸ similar differences apply to the figures for English and Mathematics. The percentage obtaining five main subjects is most affected – from 13% for state to 16% for all schools – by the high figure of 53% for independent schools.

This shows the need to recognise the contribution of independent schools in raising overall standards for the country as a whole.

It also shows that, in realistically evaluating the performance of state schools, we need to look closely at figures quoted for national standards to make sure they are not misleading because they include figures for independent schools. For example, the national figure of about 46% for %5A*C in 1998 – about 1% up on the figure for 1997 – is potentially misleading for two reasons:

- it includes independent schools – the figure for state schools alone is 43%;
- and, both these figures for 1998 include a small proportion, under 1%, for those achieving GNVQs at 16 – qualifications which were not included in the 1997 figures.

It is also not clear whether the new national target of 50% for %5A*C, set by the Secretary of State, will or should include the approximately 3% boost given to the national figures by the independent schools, particularly since the Secretary of State and the DfEE have no direct responsibility for these schools.

GCSE A*C Passes in Mathematics & English in Independent, Grammar, Secondary Modern and Comprehensive Schools

Figure 1.11 shows the percentages of pupils obtaining GCSE A*C passes in Mathematics and English in:

- independent schools;
- grammar schools;
- secondary modern schools;
- and comprehensive schools.¹⁹

The performance of secondary modern schools is not far behind that for comprehensive schools, especially in English.

Grammar school standards are high as would be expected given their selective intake.

Independent schools also perform well but not as well as grammar schools probably because independent schools differ widely: some are highly selective academically and their results reflect this, whilst others have a much broader spread of abilities and attainments, as Figure 1.9 shows.

17 In Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, the proportion of pupils in independent schools is so small that their generally better performance has very little effect on average national standards.

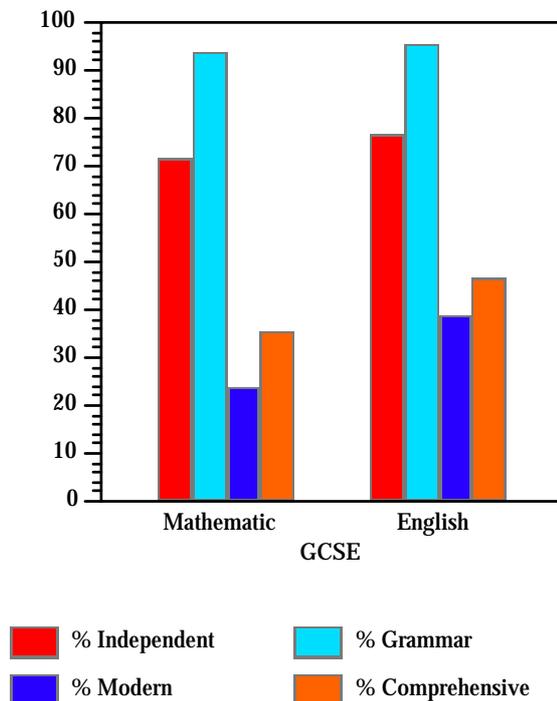
18 From about 42% for state schools to 45% for all schools.

19 These figures are for 1994 but are very little different in later years.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Figure 1.11

GCSE A*C Passes in Different Types of School



GCSE A*C Passes in Independent, Selective and Comprehensive Schools in Six Major Subjects

Comparisons in the early 1980s indicated that selective schools – grammar and secondary modern schools taken together – obtain public examination results at 16+ for their pupils which are typically about 15% to 20% better than the average for comprehensives.²⁰ More recent data for GCSE examination passes at grades A*C show similar substantial advantages for selective schools, taken together, compared with comprehensive schools.

Figure 1.12 shows the percentages of pupils obtaining good GCSE passes in six main subjects – Mathematics, English, Science, History, Geography and French – in:

- independent schools;
- grammar schools;
- secondary modern schools;
- comprehensive schools;
- and in selective schools.

The figures for selective schools are projections calculated as if all pupils were in selective schools in the same proportion as they are in Northern Ireland today (36% in grammar schools).²¹

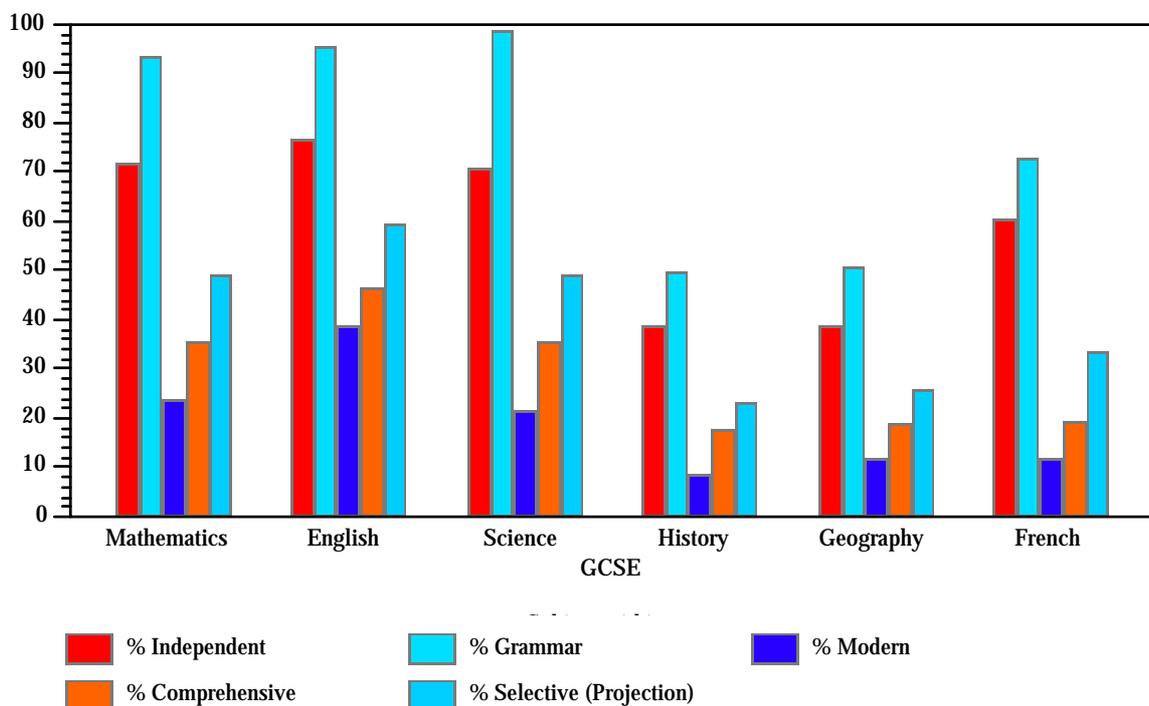
²⁰ J Marks, C Cox and M Pomian-Srzednicki, *Standards in English Schools*, NCES, 1983.

²¹ GCSE results are so high for grammar schools that they may show a ceiling effect; a more discriminating indicator, perhaps the proportion of pupils obtaining A* and A grades, would make a fairer and, almost certainly, a more favourable comparison.

THE BETRAYED GENERATIONS

Figure 1.12

GCSE A*C Passes in 6 main subjects in Independent, Selective and Comprehensive Schools



Selective schools taken together, compared with comprehensive schools, perform:

- 37% better in Mathematics;
- 27% better in English Language;
- 28% better overall in all the Science subjects;
- 32% better in History;
- 37% better in Geography;
- and no less than 70% better in French.²²

Averaging over all the main subjects, the advantage is about 35% in favour of the selective schools, taken together, as compared with comprehensive schools. These figures may indicate substantial under achievement by many pupils in comprehensive schools, and by many comprehensive schools themselves.

To put it another way, if comprehensive schools across the country were achieving for their pupils results which are as good as those for pupils of all abilities – both high and low – in selective schools, the overall GCSE results for the country would be about 30% higher than they currently are or about another 60,000 pupils²³ would be achieving 5 or more grades A* to C at GCSE or grades A* to C in English and Mathematics (see further discussion in Chapter 3).

²² % selective = (0.36*% grammar + 0.64*% modern); these are the current proportions for Northern Ireland.

²³ About 12% of pupils – 52% compared with about 40% – in a cohort of about 600,000 gives at least 60,000 extra pupils.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

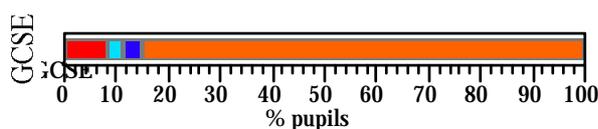
Proportion of total GCSE A*C Passes in individual subjects for Independent, Grammar, Secondary Modern and Comprehensive Schools

Figure 1.13 shows the percentage of all pupils attending, respectively: independent, grammar, secondary modern and comprehensive schools together with the percentages of all GCSE A*C passes obtained by pupils at these different kinds of school in six main subjects.

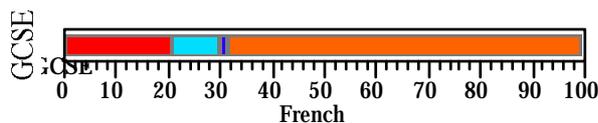
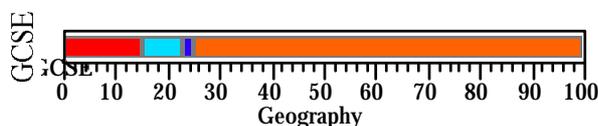
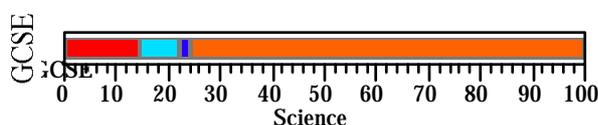
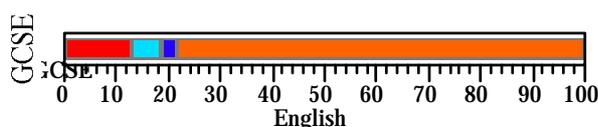
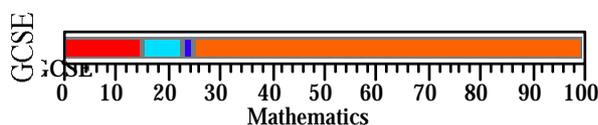
Figure 1.13

% of the total number of GCSE A*C Passes obtained by pupils at Independent, Grammar, Secondary Modern and Comprehensive Schools

% of Total Pupils



% of Total A*C passes



THE BETRAYED GENERATIONS

1.4. MATHEMATICS, PHYSICS, CHEMISTRY AND BIOLOGY – PROBLEM SUBJECTS AT GCSE & A LEVEL

There has been much concern about the teaching of Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology in schools ever since 1993 when the Secretary of State for Education, John Patten, asked the DfE and OFSTED to investigate the teaching of these subjects following disappointing A level results in that and earlier years. Overall, both the numbers and the proportion of the age group achieving A levels in all these subjects have fallen substantially over the last 20 years.

More recently, a report by the London Mathematical Society²⁴ drew attention to problems in the teaching of Mathematics and produced substantial evidence to show that the number of those passing Mathematics had fallen – and that the standards achieved for comparable grades were lower than in earlier years.

Mathematics at GCSE & A level

Figure 1.13 shows that while pupils in comprehensive schools make up 85% of the age group, they only obtain about 75% of the GCSE Mathematics passes at Grades A*C.

By contrast pupils at grammar and secondary modern schools make up 6% of all pupils but obtain 9% of all GCSE A*C passes.

Pupils at independent schools make up 8% of the total and achieve about 15% of the A*C Mathematics passes.

Once again there seems to be a considerable shortfall in the results of comprehensive schools in the key subject of Mathematics. Figure 1.13 also indicates similar shortfalls in all the main GCSE subjects – English, Science, History, Geography and, most clearly, in French.

For A level Mathematics Figure 1.14 shows that similar differences exist between independent schools, grammar schools²⁵ and most state schools and colleges (comprehensive schools and FEFC colleges, comprising both Sixth Form and Further Education Colleges, taken together); these differences are substantially greater than for GCSE.

Figure 1.14 shows that pupils at grammar schools make up about 3% of all pupils but obtain about 13% of all Mathematics passes and points at A level and nearly 15% of the A Grades.²⁶

Pupils at independent schools, who make up about 8% of all pupils, achieve about 23% of Mathematics passes at A level, about 26% of A level Mathematics points and almost a third of the A Grades.

By contrast, pupils at most state schools and colleges (comprehensives and FEFC colleges) obtain decreasing proportions of A level passes (65%), points (61%) and A Grades (53%) compared with their proportion of pupils in the age group (85%).

²⁴ *Tackling the Mathematics Problem*, London Mathematical Society, November 1995; a report produced by a working group chaired by Professor Geoffrey Howson.

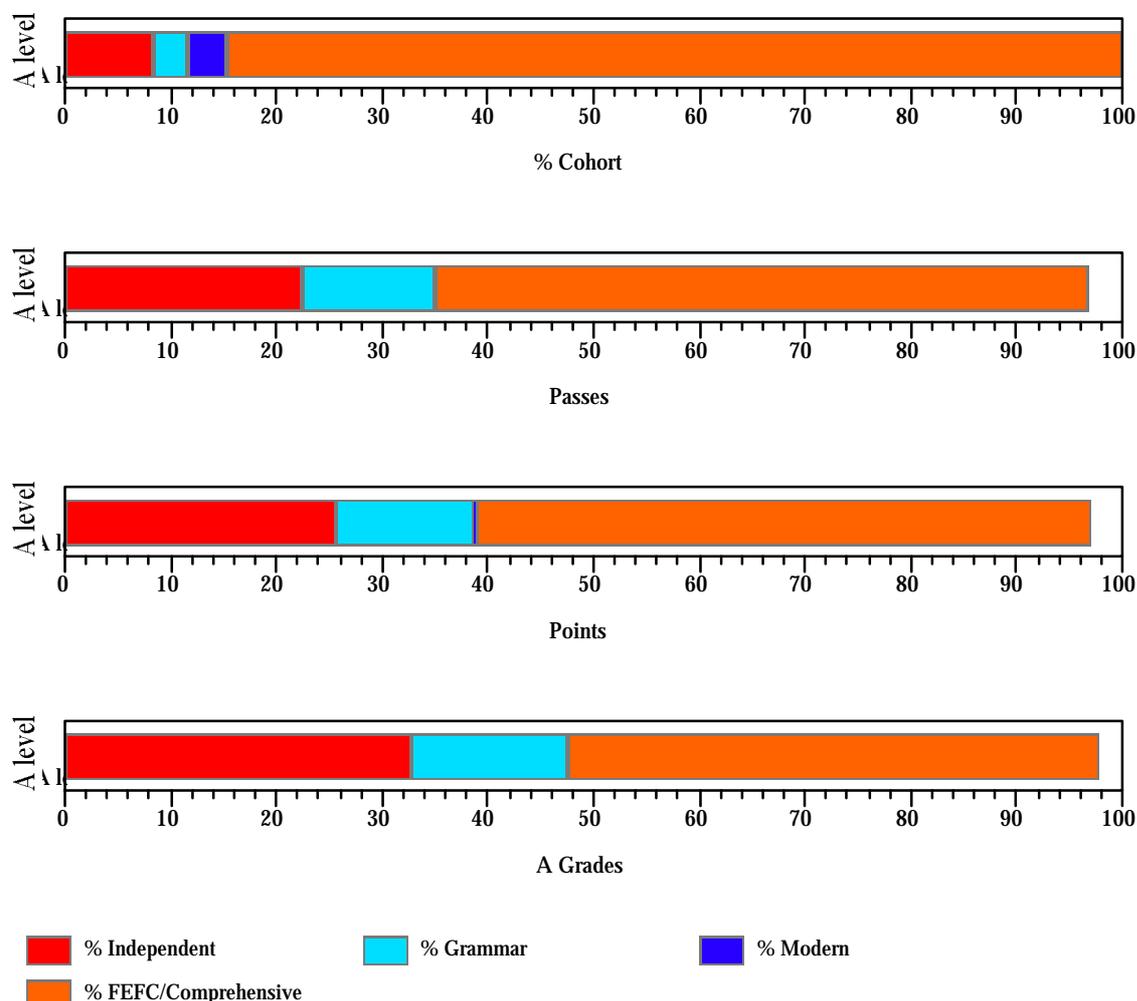
²⁵ Relatively few secondary modern schools enter pupils for A level so their contribution is hard to see on the scale of the diagram.

²⁶ A level points are calculated by allocating 10 points to an A, 8 points to a B, 6 points to a C, 4 points to a D and 2 points to an E; a higher average points score therefore means a larger share of the higher grades.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Figure 1.14

A level Mathematics: percentages of Passes, Points and A Grades in Independent, Grammar, Secondary Modern and Other State Schools/Colleges



Physics, Chemistry and Biology at GCSE and A level

For too long, both in the National Curriculum and in many schools, the separate and significantly different sciences of Physics, Chemistry and Biology have not been referred to directly by name until pupils encounter these subjects as possible A level choices.

Research from 1993 onwards has shown that pupils in all kinds of schools perform less well in A level Physics, Chemistry and Biology if they study Double Award Science at GCSE than if they study the separate sciences of Physics, Chemistry and Biology²⁷ even when they achieve the same GCSE

²⁷ J Marks, *Data concerning Separate Science (Biology, Chemistry or Physics) and Double Award Science GCSE/16+ Examinations as a preparation for A level/18+ Examinations in Biology, Chemistry or Physics*, May 1995; *Data concerning Separate Science (Biology, Chemistry or Physics) and Double Award Science GCSE/16+ Examinations as a preparation for A level/18+ Examinations in Biology, Chemistry or Physics*, May 1997; internal unpublished SCAA documents; see also the Appendices of The Dearing Review of 16 to 19 Qualifications, 1996.

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Science grades. In 1993 the advantage was about half a grade on average for each A level subject for those taking Physics, Chemistry and Biology separately at GCSE; in more recent years the advantage has risen to about three quarters of an A level grade. This could add as much as four or five A level points to a student's total – enough to make a major impact on university entry.

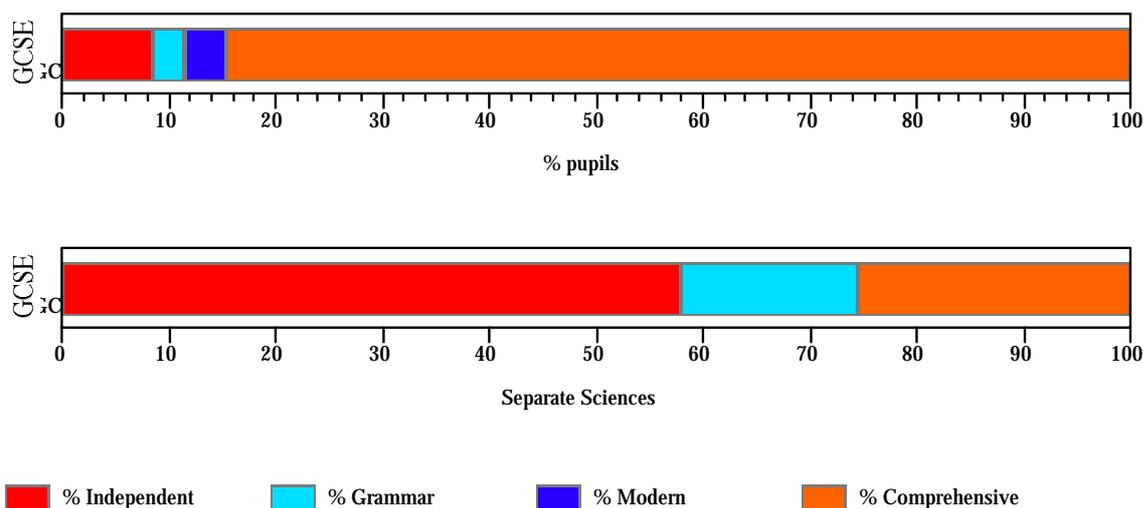
Physics, Chemistry and Biology at GCSE

Figure 1.15 shows that for the separate subjects of Physics, Chemistry and Biology at GCSE, independent school pupils obtain about 58% of the A*C passes, grammar school pupils achieve around 17% and comprehensive school pupils achieve only about 25% of the passes.²⁸

It is therefore clear that pupils in grammar and independent schools are being given a substantially better preparation for A level study in Physics, Chemistry and Biology than are pupils in most comprehensive schools.

Figure 1.15

Physics, Chemistry and Biology: percentages of GCSE A*C Passes in Independent, Grammar, Secondary Modern and Comprehensive Schools



A level Standards in Physics, Chemistry and Biology

There are similar but even more pronounced differences between different types of school or college in A level results for Physics, Chemistry and Biology as there are for Mathematics (see Figure 1.13).

Figure 1.16 shows the data for Chemistry; the differences are very similar for both Physics and Biology.²⁹

Pupils at independent schools make up about 8% of the age group but obtain about 24% of the Chemistry passes, 27% of all A level Chemistry points, and 36% of the A Grades. Pupils at grammar schools make up about 3% of the age group but obtain around 13% of all Chemistry passes, 14% of all points and more than 15% of the A Grades. Pupils at independent and grammar schools, taken together, make up about 11% of the age group but obtain over 40% of A level points and about 52% of the A Grades in Chemistry.

²⁸ Once again, these figures are for 1994 but are very little different in later years.

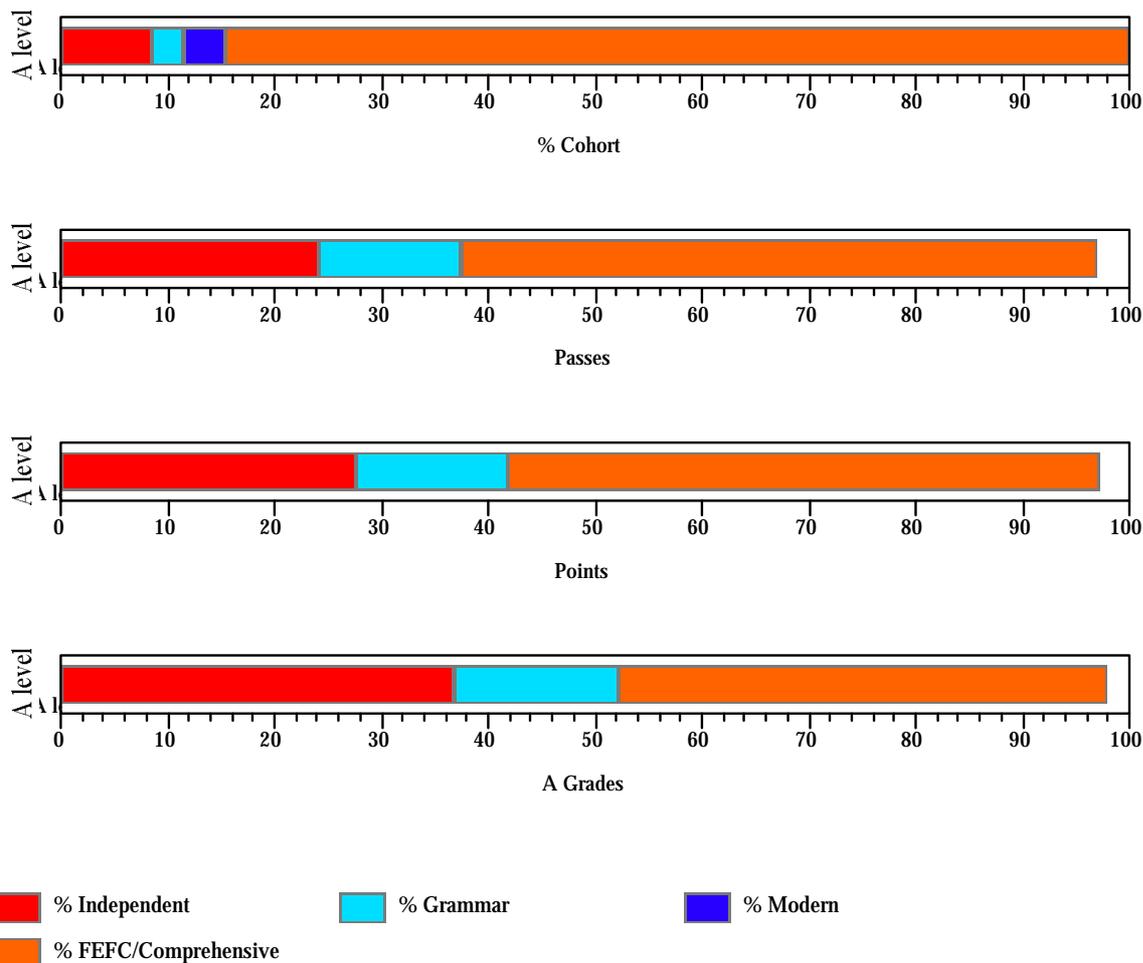
²⁹ Similar trends exist for the main Arts subjects at A level but the disproportions are not quite so large.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

By contrast, pupils at most state schools and colleges (comprehensives and FEFC colleges) obtain decreasing proportions of A level passes (63%), points (58%) and A Grades (48%) compared with their proportion of pupils in the age group (85%).

Figure 1.16

A level Chemistry: percentages of total Passes, Points and A Grades in Independent, Grammar, Secondary Modern and Other State Schools/Colleges



Value Added from GCSE to A level

If value-added results for all schools at A level were available it would be possible to make a comprehensive analysis to see whether different kinds of schools were teaching A levels more or less effectively or whether better results were due to students having better GCSE results.

This is not yet possible but three studies have been carried out by the DfEE.

The first study in 1994 is based on an analysis of GCSE to A level scores for different kinds of schools and colleges.³⁰ It shows that, on most indices, grammar schools do better than comprehensive schools although independent schools do considerably better than any state schools or colleges.

30 DfEE Statistical Bulletin 9/94.

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The second study in 1996 shows that students in grammar schools make on average 2 A level points more progress than those in comprehensive schools.³¹

The third DfEE study in 1998 shows that pupils at independent schools and at grammar schools make greater progress at A level than pupils at comprehensive schools or FE colleges, even when they have the same GCSE scores; the advantage to the independent and grammar schools is greater for pupils with poorer GCSE results than it is for those who do well at GCSE.³²

These results are interesting because it might have been assumed, from the results given in this and earlier chapters, that since independent and grammar school pupils had already reached high standards at GCSE, there was relatively little more that could be added by good A level teaching.

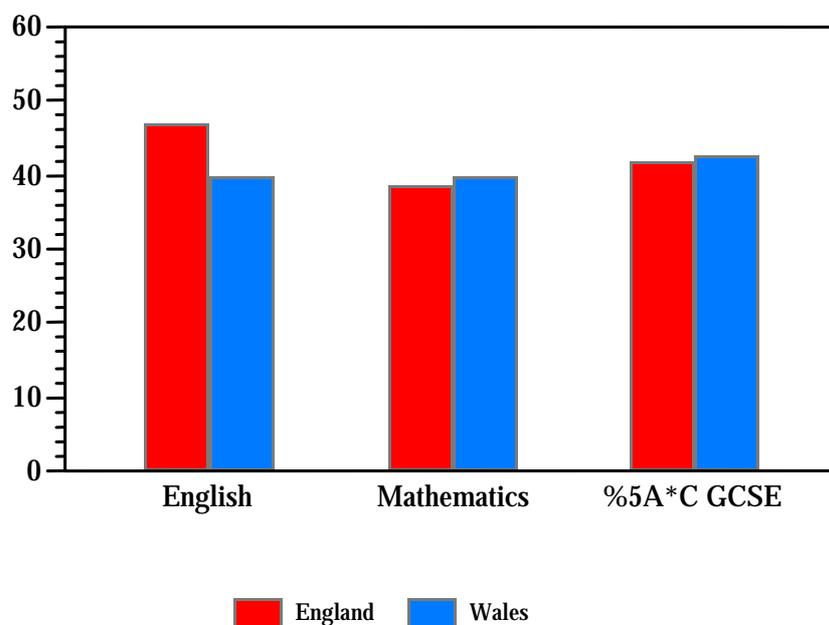
1.5 NATIONAL COMPARISONS WITHIN THE UNITED KINGDOM

England & Wales

All state secondary schools in Wales are comprehensive schools; there are now no grammar or secondary modern schools. It may therefore not be surprising that the overall results in Wales are very similar to those for state schools in England. Figure 1.17 compares GCSE A*C results for state schools in England and Wales for English, Mathematics and %5A*C. The results overall are very similar, especially in Mathematics and for %5A*C, but England is somewhat ahead in English. Results for National Curriculum tests at all Key Stages (at 7, 11 and 14) are also very similar in England and in Wales.

Figure 1.17

GCSE A*C passes in state schools in Wales compared with comprehensive schools in England



31 O'Donohue et al, *1996 Study on Value Added for 16-18 year olds*, Research Study 52, DfEE, 1997.

32 Statistical Bulletins 1/97 & 3/98, DfEE.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

England and Scotland

As in Wales, all state secondary schools in Scotland are comprehensive schools; there are now no grammar or secondary modern schools.

It is difficult to make any clear cut comparison between standards at 16+ in England and Scotland because the two countries have significantly different examination systems at that age.

It is also not possible to compare results for tests at earlier Key Stages because there has been no systematic National Curriculum testing in Scotland; moreover, the results of the relatively few National Curriculum tests which have taken place there have not been collected and published.

A confidential report on a small sample of schools concerning National Curriculum testing in Scotland showed that:

- relatively little testing has taken place;
- such testing as did occur was carried out later than the recommended time and was mainly at the basic rather than the higher levels;
- on average, boys did significantly less well than girls.³³

It is therefore difficult to test the common assumption that educational standards in Scotland are superior to those in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Nevertheless a number of recent official reports – four from the Assessment of Achievement Programme (AAP) for Scotland, three from Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) for Scotland and one from TIMSS (see above) – suggest that there may be more cause for concern about standards of attainment in Scotland than is usually acknowledged.³⁴

These concerns centre on two main areas which are at the heart of education:

- standards achieved in basic subjects like arithmetic, reading and writing;
- the widespread use of ineffective methods of teaching;

and one more specialised topic:

- the use and misuse of calculators.

In summary, these official reports show:

- substantial weaknesses and falling standards in basic subjects such as simple arithmetic, reading and writing;
- a serious lack of effective whole-class teaching;
- a lack of teaching of mental methods of arithmetical calculation which when combined with easy access to calculators from an early age has a detrimental effect on pupils' skill in arithmetical computation.

England and Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has retained an almost wholly selective system of secondary education similar to that which used to exist before 1970 in the rest of the United Kingdom; almost all pupils are either in grammar schools or in the

³³ Private communication.

³⁴ These reports are listed in Appendix 1.

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equivalent of secondary modern schools – there are almost no comprehensive schools in Northern Ireland. However the schools and the school system in Northern Ireland have continued to change and develop over the years as would also have been the case if the selective system had continued in England. In particular, funding per pupil is now roughly comparable, age for age, in different kinds of schools; selection procedures have been reviewed and revised several times; and the proportion of pupils attending grammar schools has now risen to about 36%.³⁵

Key Stage 3 National Curriculum Test Results and GCSE results in England & Northern Ireland

Figures 1.18 to 1.20 show, for different kinds of schools in England and Northern Ireland data on Key Stage 3 and GCSE results.

Figures 1.18 and 1.19 show, respectively, data on Key Stage 3 results in English and in Mathematics – the average ‘English ages’ and ‘Mathematics ages’ for 14 year olds – in grammar, secondary modern, comprehensive and all state schools.

Figure 1.18

Mean ‘English Ages’ for 14 year-olds (Key Stage 3) in England and in Northern Ireland for different types of school

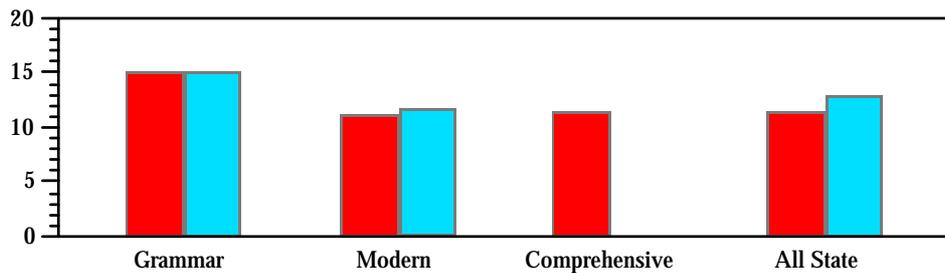
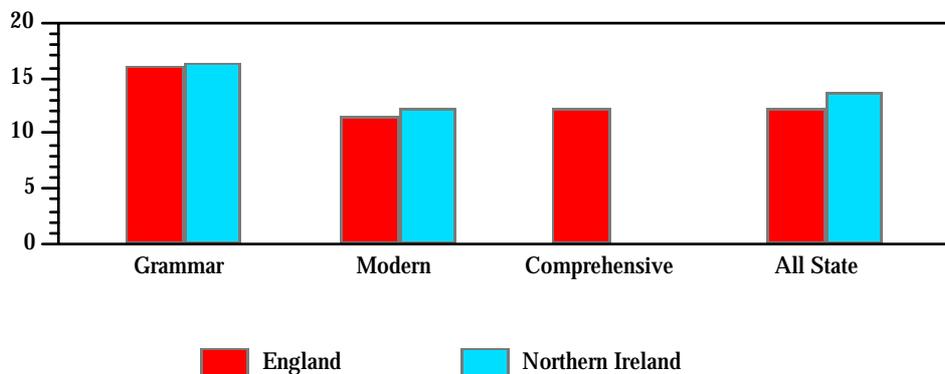


Figure 1.19

Mean ‘Mathematics Ages’ for 14 year-olds (Key Stage 3) in England and in Northern Ireland for different types of school



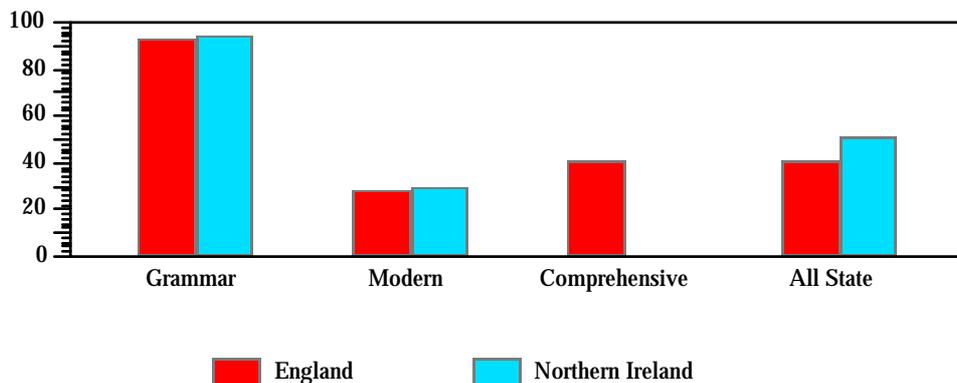
³⁵ This is also largely true for the remaining selective schools in England and for the Gymnasias in Germany.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Figure 1.20 shows the percentages of pupils obtaining GCSE passes at Grades A*C in any 5 subjects (%5A*C) for grammar, secondary modern, comprehensive and all state schools.

Figure 1.20

%5A*C GCSE Passes in England and in Northern Ireland for different types of school



Grammar school pupils and secondary modern school pupils in both England and Northern Ireland achieve very similar results both at Key Stage 3 and GCSE.

Secondary modern school pupils in England achieve Key Stage 3 results which are only a little below those for comprehensive school pupils; the differences are particularly small for the average standard reached in both English and Mathematics – about 2 months of progress in English and 7 months of progress in Mathematics. Secondary modern school pupils in England also achieve GCSE results which are a little below those for comprehensive school pupils; once again, their results are particularly good for English and Mathematics, where they are, on average, better than those for about 900 comprehensive schools, a third of the total. For %5A*C, secondary modern schools' results are, on average, better than those for 700 comprehensive schools, a quarter of the total.

Pupils in Northern Ireland (which enjoys a totally selective system of education) are, at Key Stage 3, ahead of pupils in England in both English and Mathematics by about 18 months.

The average performance of all pupils in Northern Ireland, with its virtually 100% selective system, is substantially better than for England, with about 90% comprehensive schools, for both Key Stage 3 and GCSE results. At Key Stage 3 pupils in Northern Ireland are ahead of pupils in England in both English and Mathematics by about 18 months of progress or 20%; for high achieving pupils – those achieving Level 6 or better – pupils in Northern Ireland outperform those in England by 40% or more.

%5A*C for all state schools in Northern Ireland is, at 52%, substantially greater than the figure of 42% for pupils at all state schools in England. Pupils in Northern Ireland are therefore achieving GCSE results which are 10% better absolutely and almost 25% better relatively than pupils in England.

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Key Stage 3 and GCSE Standards in England and in Northern Ireland in 1997 plus Selective Projection for England

Figures 1.21 and 1.22 compare the performance of pupils in England and Northern Ireland in 1997 with projections for the possible performance of pupils in a fully selective system in England.

Figure 1.21

Mean English and Mathematics 'Ages' for 14 year-olds in England and Northern Ireland plus Selective Projection for England

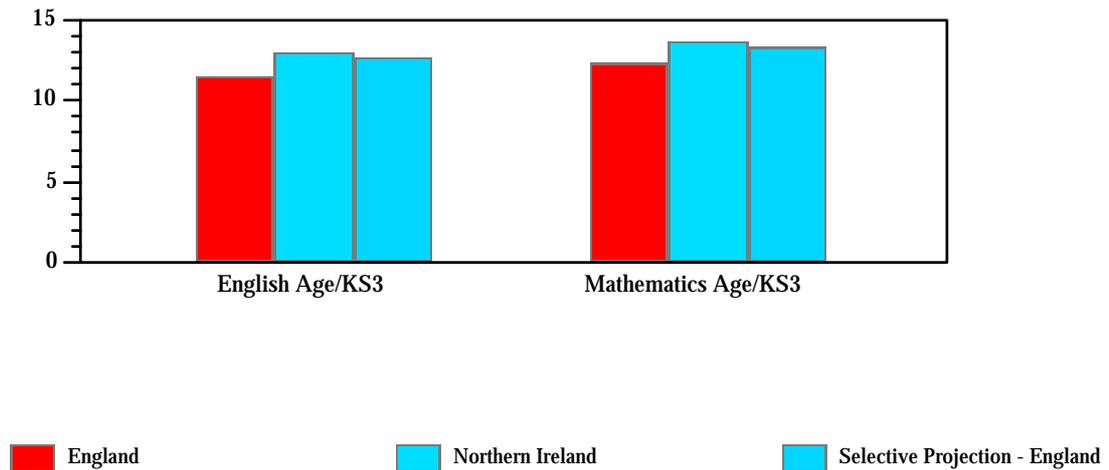
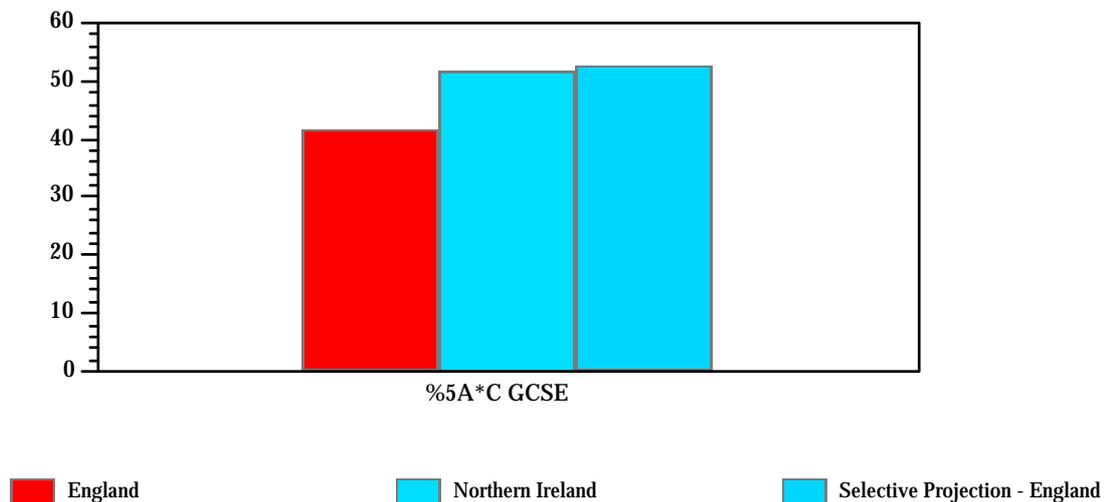


Figure 1.22

%5A*C GCSE Passes in England and in Northern Ireland plus Selective Projection for England



The projected performance, at both Key Stage 3 and GCSE, of all pupils in a fully selective system in England, if such were to exist, is similar to that for the existing fully selective system in Northern Ireland. It is also considerably better than that for the existing almost wholly comprehensive system in England. For English and Mathematics, the projected performance is even more in favour of a wholly selective system. These differences are not new. Similar differences have been apparent from the early 1970s onwards (see Chapter 3).

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GCSE Standards & Selection in Local Education Authorities in England & Northern Ireland

1. Individual Local Education Authorities & Library Boards

Table 1 in Appendix 2 shows the GCSE results for 148 local authorities in England, together with the five Library Boards in Northern Ireland (Library Boards in Northern Ireland are the nearest equivalent to LEAs in the rest of the UK). The table shows the percentage of pupils obtaining five or more grade A* to C at GCSE in 1998 together with the percentage of 16 year old pupils in each local authority who attend grammar schools. For the English LEAs the table also shows the average GCSE points per pupil for each LEA (8 points for an A*; 7 points for an A; down to 2 points for an F; and 1 point for a grade G). The LEAs are arranged in order of attainment for 5 or more grades A* to C.

It is clear from the table that there is a positive correlation between the percentage of pupils in grammar schools and good GCSE results. In the top third of the table, there are 24 LEAs with grammar schools and 27 which are wholly comprehensive; in the middle third of the table there are 12 LEAs with grammar schools and 39 that are wholly comprehensive; while in the bottom third of the table there are 6 LEAs with grammar schools and 45 that are wholly comprehensive. Moreover, most of the areas with a high proportion of pupils at grammar schools are in the top third of the table. The five Library Boards from Northern Ireland are all in the top third of the table with placings ranging from 7th to 32nd. This suggests that one of the factors leading to higher GCSE results may well be the existence of selective schools in an area.

2. Groups of Local Education Authorities in England

The table below shows average GCSE points per pupil, the percentage of pupils with five or more grades A* to C (%5A*C) and the percentage of pupils with no GCSEs at any grade (%NoA*G) for 1998 for 4 groups of LEAs in England:

- Group A – LEAs with a wholly selective system;
- Group B – LEAs with groups of grammar schools;
- Group C – LEAs with individual or stand-alone grammar schools;
- Group D – LEAs with no grammar schools – i.e. wholly comprehensive LEAs.

The first three groups are the LEAs which are listed in the DfEE Guide to Grammar Schools Ballots as containing grammar schools.

Table 2 GCSE Results for Groups of LEAs

LEA Group	GCSE Points per Pupil	%5A*C GCSE	%NoA*G GCSE
A	39.6	51.5	3.86
B	38.4	47.8	4.29
C	37.1	45.7	4.64
D	36.3	43.5	5.07

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The table shows average GCSE points per pupil, the percentage of pupils with 5 or more grades A* to C (%5A*C) and the percentage of pupils with no GCSEs at any grade (%NoA*G) for each of the groups of LEAs.

It is clear that the GCSE results are best for Group A and worst for Group D. Groups B and C are intermediate between the two.

For Group D – the wholly comprehensive group – the percentage of pupils with 5 or more grades A* to C is 43.5% rising to 45.7% for Group C, 47.8% for Group B, and 51.5% for Group A. The latter figure is very close to the figure for the wholly selective system in Northern Ireland. The average GCSE points per pupil show a similar progression.

The percentage of pupils with no GCSEs is greatest for Group D at 5.1% and least for Group A at 3.9%. These figures do not bear out the common assertion that the selective system leads to a greater number of pupils achieving no qualifications.

These results indicate that selection is better for all pupils and not just those selected to attend grammar schools.

Conclusion

These results indicate that selection is better for all pupils and not just those selected to attend grammar schools. The average advantage is about 25% for GCSE, and more for basic subjects like English and Mathematics, and about 20% or 18 months of progress at the age of 14. The good overall performance of a selective system is, in part, due to the good performance of pupils at the widely under-rated secondary modern schools.

1.6 INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS – THIRD INTERNATIONAL MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE STUDY (TIMSS)

The results in mathematics for both England and Scotland³⁶ in the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in 1995, left a lot to be desired. In a comparison with 10 other major industrialised countries – Singapore, Japan, Switzerland, Hungary, France, Canada, Germany, Sweden, England, the United States & Scotland – most of the results were in the order just listed with England, the United States & Scotland coming at or near the bottom.³⁷ Despite this poor performance in mathematics, and in arithmetic in particular, there was one aspect of TIMSS in which English pupils were ranked very highly. This was when they were asked whether they thought they were good at mathematics. Here they ranked at the top of the list, even though their actual performance did not confirm this high self-esteem. For Japanese pupils, it was the other way around; they ranked very highly on performance but low on self-esteem.

36 See the separate national reports for England and for Scotland; Wales and Northern Ireland did not take part.

37 The performance of English pupils in science was considerably better but this may be because most other countries do not explicitly teach much science in primary schools or in the early years of secondary education.

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This may help to explain why 13 year old pupils in England performed very badly on one very basic question³⁸ in arithmetic:

$$\begin{array}{r} 6000 \\ - 2369 \\ \hline \text{????} \end{array}$$

It was a multiple choice question with four possible answers, one of which was to be ticked:

- A 4369
- B 3742
- C 3631
- D 3531

It was not a test in mental arithmetic but a written question which was set out in the test paper vertically so that it could be calculated in the ordinary written way. It must, therefore, surely be regarded as an adequate test of competence in basic arithmetic.

Despite this poor performance, there was one aspect in which English pupils were ranked very highly. This was when they were asked whether they thought they were good at mathematics. Here they ranked at the top of the list, even though their actual performance did not confirm this high self-esteem.

Of 13 year-olds in the five major Western European countries listed, 92% answered this question correctly: Switzerland and Belgium were the highest with 96%. In Germany 93% answered correctly; and even in the United States 88% answered correctly. In England only 59% did so. Of the 41 countries included in the survey, average scores lower than England's were recorded only by Colombia and South Africa (both with 57% correct). Scotland's overall scores in mathematics were generally a little below England's, yet on this basic question Scottish pupils did better – with 75% answering correctly; even so, Scotland was among the lowest four of the 40 participating countries for which results for this question were reported.

By the age of 14 the percentage of English secondary pupils answering this question correctly had risen to 65%. This rate of progress means that English pupils are unlikely to reach West European standards before they reach the school leaving age and that about a third of English youngsters will reach school-leaving age unable to carry out such a basic sum, compared with under one in ten in Western Europe.

³⁸ S Prais, *How did English Schools and Pupils Really Perform in the 1995 International Comparisons in Mathematics?*, Note 13.

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1.7 VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

In Britain today, nobody knows precisely how many 18 or 19 year olds are taking, completing, dropping out from or failing vocational qualifications.

Such figures as are available suggest that, since the new National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) system took hold, the proportion of 19 year olds achieving good craft qualifications (NVQs at level 3) has been falling rather than rising towards the German or Swiss figures of more than 40% as had been confidently expected.

Moreover, about five times as many people appear to be obtaining the traditional vocational qualifications which NVQs were supposed to replace compared with those achieving NVQs.³⁹

This is in complete contrast to what happens in other industrialised countries like Germany. Accurate statistics are compiled within one month of the start of each training year for the numbers of new apprenticeships on offer, and the number taken up, for each approved occupation right across the country. The Federal Government can then see whether supply and demand are in balance and act to keep it so. Data for qualifications gained by each cohort are also collected and published annually.

A similar detailed system of data collection should be instituted at once in this country.

This lack of information about vocational qualifications reflects the low status of vocational education in this country compared with countries like Germany.

Moreover as the recent Skills Task force report⁴⁰ has shown there are significant weaknesses in basic vocational skills amongst adults in this country:

Basic Skills

Seven million adults in Britain – one in five – are functionally illiterate. This means one in five adults, if given the alphabetical index to the Yellow Pages, cannot locate the page reference for ‘plumbers’. Problems with numeracy skills are believed to be even worse with some researchers estimating that nearly half of all adults in Britain have numeracy skills below the level expected for an 11 year old. One in four cannot calculate the change they should get from £2 when they buy one item for 68p and two more at 45p. The International Adult Literacy Survey carried out in 1997 found that Britain came tenth out of the twelve participating countries in terms of the numbers of people with inadequate levels of literacy and numeracy.

Mathematics

The root of the problem is that the UK does not produce a sufficient pool of young people with good mathematics skills. We start from a shallow pool at a young age – just 45% of young people gain a grade C in mathematics at age 15. Our supply of people who choose to develop mathematics skills beyond this modest level is very much smaller – less than 10% of 18 year olds gained A level mathematics in 1998. While international comparisons are difficult due to the variety of qualifications systems which are used in different countries, there is

39 J Marks, *Vocational Education, Training and Qualifications in Britain*, Institute of Economic Affairs, 1996.

40 *Skills for All: Proposals for a National Skills Agenda – Final Report of the National Skills Task Force*, DfEE, July 2000.

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evidence that this compares poorly internationally. In the latest years for which data is available 16% of young people in France and 27% in Germany gained levels of mathematics skills equivalent to A level. Our shortage of mathematics skills is underpinned by the low levels of numeracy of 25% of young people and adults highlighted in the earlier section on basic skills.

It is not surprising therefore that at the highest levels there are problems in filling courses which demand a good knowledge of mathematics. There are only as many new entrants to HE (Higher Education) engineering courses now as there were in 1985 despite the rapid expansion in HE provision in this period. Only just over 1% of those gaining a first degree in 1998 gained a degree in mathematics – nearly twice as many graduated in history. This leaves us with a very limited pool of people with the technical skills demanded in a wide range of essential jobs in the economy.⁴¹

Similar data are given in the Moser report⁴² discussed in Chapter 3.1 below.

Not to know whether students are succeeding or failing is negligent. And not to take the trouble to find out whether they can read or calculate is the antithesis of that accountability which belongs at the heart of true professionalism.

1.8 ACCESS TO UNIVERSITIES AND HIGHER EDUCATION

The disturbing evidence about differential achievement at A levels in different kinds of schools and colleges (see Chapter 1.4) is particularly serious given its implications for access to higher education. As we have seen, pupils from comprehensive schools do much less well in public examinations than those from independent and grammar schools – they make up about 85% of the cohort but obtain about 75 % of good GCSE passes, about two thirds of A level passes and around half the A grades.

In 1993 Alan Smithers and Pamela Robinson found that 40% of those with 3 A levels come from independent and grammar schools which have only 11% of the cohort. The authors commented that while:

...the comprehensives include a number of first class, quite academic ex-grammar schools which do well with A levels, there are *very few* A level pupils (relatively speaking) spread among all the others. For many of the school population therefore, A levels is *very much* a minority sport and for them... there is virtually no mainstream post-16 education.⁴³

Access to higher education, particularly for 18 year-olds, depends very much on the grades achieved at A level. It is therefore not surprising that the proportions of pupils from independent schools and from grammar schools obtaining entry into the better universities such as Oxford and Cambridge and the Russell Group of leading research universities is considerably more than their strict proportion in the age group. A brief review of the data suggests that entry to our most highly regarded universities reflects reasonably well the A level

41 Ibid., pp 22, 25.

42 *Improving Literacy and Numeracy: A Fresh Start – Report of a working party chaired by Sir Claus Moser*, DfEE, March 1999.

43 A Smithers & P Robinson, *Beyond Compulsory Schooling: A numerical Picture*, CIHE, 1993; emphases in original.

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scores of pupils from different kinds of school. Such universities have, relatively, many more students from independent schools and from grammar schools not because of bias in their admissions procedures but because of the limited access to a demanding academic education for many pupils from very many parts of the country where either grammar schools do not exist or where their parents do not, or cannot, have access to independent schools.

As A H Halsey has recently written:

The pattern of admissions to universities closely conforms to A level performances and as such cannot be seriously faulted.⁴⁴

Halsey goes on to say:

The slow advance of state schooling in the first six decades of the century has gone into reverse. Not only has the proportion of children being privately educated risen from 5% to 7%, but the private schools send 88% of their pupils to higher education compared with only 27% of the state school-leavers. Pupils from comprehensive schools make up less than 20% of the intake to Oxford and Cambridge.

But what Halsey fails to point out is the likely major cause of this imbalance – the replacement of a selective by a comprehensive system of schools across much of the country. This possibility is given further support by some recent data on current access to universities for pupils from different social classes.

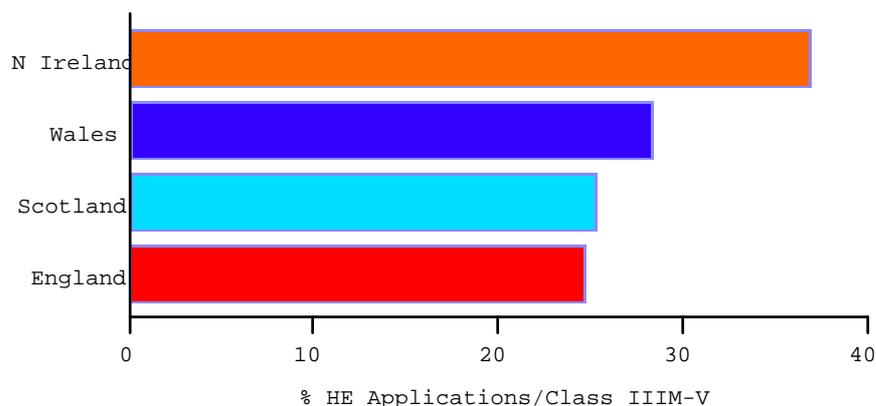
Access to Higher Education from the Different Countries of the UK

Figures 1.25 to 1.27 show recent data for each of the countries of the UK for the percentages of pupils in different social classes entering higher education.⁴⁵

Figure 1.25 shows the percentage of *applications* to higher education for students from social classes IIIM-V (using the Registrar General's classification – I, II, IIINM (non-manual) IIIM (manual), IV & V). Figure 1.26 shows the percentage of students *accepted* into higher education from classes IIIM to V. Figure 1.27 shows the percentage of the whole population in classes IIIM to V.

Figure 1.25

Percentage of Applications to Higher Education from Social Classes IIIM – V



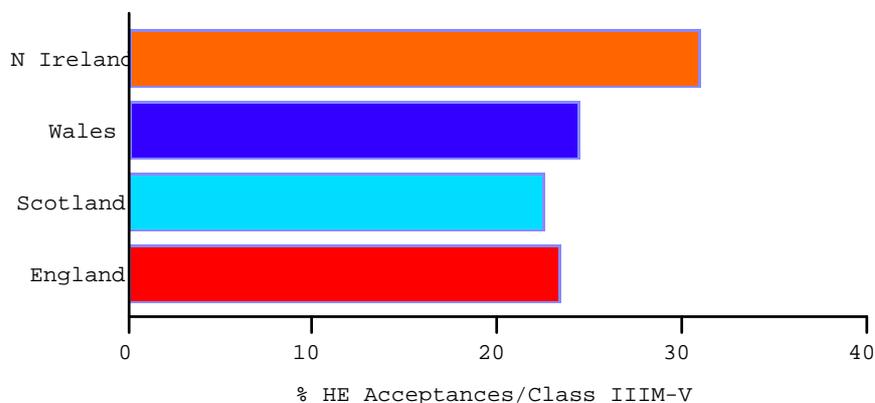
⁴⁴ A Halsey, *Leagues Apart*, Times Higher, February 6, 1998.

⁴⁵ R Osborne, *Wider Access in Scotland?*, Scottish Affairs, No 26, Winter, 1999, pp 36-46; the figures are for 1997-8.

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Figure 1.26

Percentage of Acceptances into Higher Education from Social Classes IIIM - V

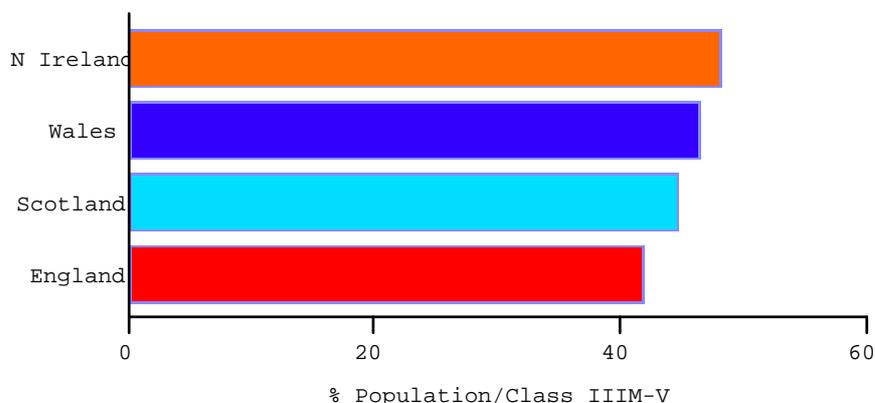


It is clear from Figure 1.25 and 1.26 that Northern Ireland has a substantially higher proportion of students from the lower social classes who both apply for higher education (about 37%) and who succeed in entering higher education (31%) than is the case in Scotland and England (both about 25 % and about 23% respectively).

As can be seen from Figure 1.27, Northern Ireland does have a higher proportion of its population in classes IIIM to V than the other countries in the United Kingdom. But, these differences are smaller than the differences in application to and acceptance into higher education shown in Figures 1.25 and 1.26.

It is sometimes argued that a higher proportion of pupils from the lower social classes is likely to be linked with lower educational attainment. However, the opposite seems to be the case in Northern Ireland where the selective system of schools appears to be enabling pupils from the lower social classes to achieve better GCSE and A level results and to obtain more places in higher education than in the rest of the United Kingdom.⁴⁶

Fig 1.27 Percentage of Population from Social Classes IIIM - V



⁴⁶ See Chapter 3.6 for further discussion of University entry and social class over time.

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1.9 CONCLUSIONS ON CURRENT STANDARDS

Using current data to review standards – as has been done in this chapter – depends on the standards set in National Curriculum tests and public examinations staying reasonably constant. This may be valid over a short period but possibly not over longer periods of time – a topic to which we will return in Chapter 3.

Moreover, the attempt to survey standards may be partially confounded by lack of agreement about the meaning and purpose of education.

But, overall, the position is clear. Average standards are far too low. In all parts of the country there are enormous variations between schools in the standards which are achieved even in schools of the same type in similar areas. Even the standards of the most basic of basics need to be raised considerably.

Nor is it true that better standards are achieved where more money is spent on education.⁴⁷

Carrying out this overview or census of current standards in schools has been, in large part, to describe an anatomy of failure. It is not an overstatement to describe the current situation as a national disaster.

Some of the worst results, both absolutely and in terms of variations between similar schools, are in poorer areas of the country often with high levels of social deprivation.

It may well be that it is children from the less prosperous strata of society and regions of the country – what used to be described as the working class – who suffer the most in the current situation. This is certainly true relatively and it may even be that the standards and the opportunities available to working class pupils in many areas have declined absolutely.

And this has happened despite it being the explicit aim of policy over several decades to improve the educational standards and opportunities of those very people.

⁴⁷ J Marks, *Value for Money in LEA schools*, Centre for Policy Studies, 1998. This study uses data from the Audit Commission to show that, contrary to both general opinion and government policy, spending more on education and reducing class sizes in LEA schools are linked, on average, with lower rather than higher standards.

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Box 1

Standards, subjects and the lack of consensus

Since the mid 1960s widely differing views have emerged on the nature of education, on teaching and on the prime purpose of schools.

Underlying any discussion of standards must be an understanding of the conflict in teaching methods which has been raging in the UK for the last 40 years or so. On the one hand, traditionalists believe that education is primarily a transmission of knowledge and culture from one generation to the next; on the other are those who think that the individual pupil is the prime mover with a rate of learning mainly determined by his or her individual development. They see the role of teachers as being to help pupils to discover the world for themselves, as facilitators rather than initiators of the educational process.⁴⁸

This conflict is reflected in different methods of classroom organisation. The dominant method is teacher-centred whole-class instruction for the transmission model, and pupil-centred individual or group situations for the developmental approach. The consequences of these differences have been graphically described by Melanie Phillips in her book *All Must have Prizes* in which she characterises the developmental approach as a retreat from teaching.⁴⁹

These conflicts make the assessment of standards of education much more difficult: some of those who advocate the developmental approach also have very different ideas as to what it means to measure “standards” or to teach traditional subjects or even to teach in the traditional sense at all – even though they continue to use the traditional subject names and to talk of standards. It is these kinds of views which stimulate that hostility to knowledge and its acquisition, and the related hostility to testing whether or not that knowledge has been successfully acquired by pupils, which is such a puzzle to the layman.

Nearly every subject on the curriculum is now a battle ground. In this section we will briefly discuss the main subjects one by one.⁵⁰

English

The teaching of English in the traditional sense is now frequently not only just not done but actively deprecated. Teaching of grammar, punctuation or spelling is strongly discouraged, as are attempts to correct pupils’ writing or speech. It is even sometimes suggested that any language, dialect or form of speech is as good as any other for any purpose.⁵¹

48 J Chall, *The Academic Achievement Challenge: What really works in the classroom*, Guilford Press, 2000 gives an authoritative account of the parallel controversy in the United States. See also J E Stone, *Developmentalism: An Obscure but Pervasive Restriction on Educational Improvement*, Education Policy Analysis Archives, Vol 4, No 8, April 1996 which analyses “developmentalism” – one of the main causes of the retreat from teaching identified so persuasively by Melanie Phillips in schools in this country.

49 M Phillips, *All Must have Prizes*, Little Brown, 1997.

50 References and documentation for all the subjects mentioned are available but are too lengthy to include.

51 J Honey, *The Language Trap: race, class and the ‘standard English’ issue in British schools*, National Council for Educational Standards, 1983; J Honey, *Language is Power: The Story of Standard English and its Enemies*, Penguin, 1998.

THE BETRAYED GENERATIONS

Such an approach clearly implies substantial hostility to written examinations and underpins the desire for public assessment of standards in English to be made solely by coursework marked by pupils' own teachers. It also underpins the drift towards open-book public examinations and the circulation of pre-release materials, containing information about the questions to be asked, some weeks before examinations.

In English Literature, this "philosophy" suggests, or sometimes requires, that any text is as good or as valid as any other. It follows that any emphasis on a traditional canon of literature, to which all pupils are entitled to be introduced, is strongly discouraged and deprecated.⁵²

Mathematics

In Mathematics, there have been strong moves away from traditional methods of teaching, including the learning of tables and the development of skills in mental arithmetic. In English schools, electronic calculators have been readily available from the early primary years onwards. Emphasis has been placed on pupils' own efforts to create what is sometimes referred to as "their mathematics" and to the setting of tasks for pupils in which they investigate the mathematical world for themselves as a major means by which they learn and are assessed.

The result, if not the intention, has been the loss of the idea that mathematical relationships are exact; very little emphasis on the concept of proof which underpins nearly all serious mathematics; and virtually no emphasis on developing the skills needed for the correct manipulation of either numbers or symbols.

Tests or examinations have been more durable in mathematics than in English but pupils' performance is now frequently facilitated by the availability in tests and examinations of calculators of all kinds and even by the provision of substantial lists of formulae, including many of the most elementary kind.⁵³

Science

In Science, similar trends have been apparent. There has been a conscious aversion, both in the National Curriculum and in many schools, to teaching or even naming the separate and significantly different sciences of physics, chemistry and biology.

Instead of the separate sciences, there has been an emphasis on "general science" courses in which the content is frequently learnt and assessed by means of "scientific investigations" conducted by the pupils themselves, even sometimes by the very youngest. These "investigations" are not experiments set up for illustrative purposes, but are meant to simulate the sort of scientific methods used by researchers. They have proved to be extremely time-consuming and unproductive as pupils sought to re-discover for themselves a tiny part of what had been discovered by so many outstanding individuals over innumerable centuries.

⁵² See the letter signed by 500 professors and lecturers in English in the THES when the National Curriculum for English was being revised in 1993.

⁵³ Some non-calculator papers, or sometimes non-calculator questions, are now part of National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations but there are not yet enough tests of this kind. Similarly some progress has been made in reducing the size of formulae lists but more still needs to be done.

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One result has been the stripping from the teaching of physics and chemistry of much of the content which requires any demanding mathematics and, sometimes, an emphasis on discussing in “science” courses the social or environmental aspects of science without pupils knowing anything important about the sciences themselves.

History

In History, the “new history” has down-played the knowledge of facts or of chronology and has also explicitly reduced the importance of political history. The focus has changed to the cultivation of empathy with those who lived in the past and to the evaluation of historical source materials but **without** giving pupils the background knowledge needed to empathise or to make such evaluations with any hope of validity. It is, once again, as if the methods of the historical researcher were being transplanted into schools, even into primary schools.

One near casualty of these trends has been the historical essay, which is now seldom required and which pupils frequently have neither the command of English nor the historical knowledge to undertake.

French and other modern foreign languages

The tendencies discussed for English also apply to French and other modern foreign languages. The teaching of grammar, and its correction, are not now emphasised. Another near casualty has been the skills of translation from English into French (or any other language). The “authentic” way of learning French is to speak it and to acquire it as a native Frenchman would do but, of course, pupils cannot have the total immersion in the language over many years and from an early age that native Frenchmen themselves experience. Assessing standards has also been substantially changed with the use of dictionaries in examinations now commonplace.

Conclusion

The various tendencies discussed for each of the traditional subjects can be seen to have a number of factors in common – a hostility to knowledge, a belief in the capacity of pupils to learn or even to discover things, however complex, for themselves, and the substantial down-playing of both testing and examinations and even of teaching itself in the traditional sense of that term. Much of what has been advocated over many years by educationalists – and which is now accepted by thousands of teachers up and down the country – amounts to a retreat from teaching but not one that has been accepted by most parents of the children affected.

These changes in what many educators mean by education are an important part of the context in which the results discussed in this chapter should be seen and which needs to be borne in mind in the rest of this paper.

CHAPTER TWO

HOW DO WE KNOW WHERE WE ARE NOW?

IT IS NOW POSSIBLE to carry out a census of standards, and their variations from school to school, and to use this data to ask questions about the effectiveness of methods of teaching and of organising schools and about value for money because we have objective information about standards at various ages, school by school, for the whole country.⁵⁴

But this wealth of detailed information has only become available very recently due to the efforts of previous Conservative Governments over the decade from 1987 to 1997. This breakthrough in public accountability was achieved laboriously and painfully and only in the teeth of opposition from most of the educational establishment, including the teacher unions, and from the then opposition parties.

Some data about public examinations at 16 and 18 for individual schools has been in the public domain since 1981⁵⁵ but it is only since 1992 in England that the government has published detailed GCSE and A level results, school by school, in national performance tables.

Detailed data for earlier ages is even more recent. The National Curriculum, and the tests accompanying it, were opposed by many in the world of education. Yet it is only by means of National Curriculum tests that we now do have national performance tables, school by school, for primary schools at the age of 11. And this has only been so since 1995.

Information is also available for primary schools at the age of 7 and for secondary schools at the age of 14 but as yet it is not published in national performance tables, school by school, although it can be used for research if the names of the schools involved are not made public.

This Chapter will look in more detail into the kind of information we now have, using standards in mathematics as the main example together with some discussion of standards of reading at the age of 7, and will then ask the question: Are the standards now expected high enough?

2.1 WHAT DO NATIONAL CURRICULUM TESTS ACTUALLY CONTAIN?

This section will briefly review some key aspects of the content, standards and administration of the National Curriculum tests through which we now have information about all state schools in England.

54 This information is most complete for England, but less so for Wales and Northern Ireland, and even less so for Scotland.

55 Publication was required by the 1980 Education Act.

HOW DO WE KNOW WHERE WE ARE NOW?

7 year olds (Key Stage 1)

Mathematics

For Mathematics, levels 2 and 3 were awarded in 1995, the first full year of National Curriculum testing, using a test containing 30 items; level 2 required 8 correct answers and level 3 required 20 correct answers.⁵⁶ The first eight items required simple counting and one and two digit calculations of which the most difficult was probably $22 + 9 = ?$. This seems a relatively undemanding requirement after two years of compulsory schooling. Even so very many children failed to achieve it.⁵⁷

*The most difficult question for 7 year olds was probably $22 + 9 = ?$
This seems undemanding after two years of compulsory schooling.
Even so, at least 21% of children failed to get it right.*

Reading

In 1995 both levels 1 & 2 could be achieved with very little competence in the basic abilities needed for subsequent skilled reading – the recognition and decoding of unfamiliar letters and words. Level 1 could be achieved by recognising one very familiar word and only three letters; level 2 by making a good, but not necessarily accurate, attempt at reading a passage which may well have been read before. This means that the data for reading at levels 1 and 2 in 1995 should be treated with some scepticism as indicators of pupils' abilities in the essential skills of independent reading.⁵⁸ In 1996 a much more satisfactory optional Reading comprehension test was included which became compulsory from 1997 onwards.

The Key Stage 1 Reading test should be a simple unseen standardised group test which can and should be given to the whole class at the same set time and which would yield more precise information about the capacity for independent reading of each individual pupil. It should be used to produce reading ages or other age standardised scores in the way that simple reading comprehension tests, which are widely used by schools and in research, have been capable of doing for many decades.⁵⁹

56 National Curriculum tests give results on an 8-level scale spanning all three Key Stages: level 2 is the level expected to be reached by an average 7 year old, level 3 by an average 9 year old and so on at the rate of one level every two years.

57 The requirements for level 3 are more satisfactory so these results are likely to provide useful information about pupils' progress in Mathematics although they could still be improved by rather more emphasis on arithmetic and by the development of standardised scores.

58 This is not true for the reading test for level 3 which is much more satisfactory in these respects.

59 Such a test could easily be developed from the existing and now compulsory Reading comprehension test mentioned above.

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Spelling

In 1995, level 1 required very little in the way of spelling while level 2 could be obtained by accurately completing the last two letters of three three-letter words and the last three letters of four four-letter words. Nevertheless, this minimal achievement does involve some alphabetic and phonic knowledge of the kind required for skilled reading or decoding; it is therefore likely to be a more useful measure of the extent to which pupils are beginning to read than the 1995 reading tests for levels 1 and 2.⁶⁰

Cheating at Key Stage 1

Procedures at Key Stage 1 should be tightened because there is substantial and legitimate cause for concern about opportunities for cheating especially in the statutory reading test, which can be administered to different pupils over a period of several weeks, but also in Mathematics. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) admit that the Mathematics tests:

...are most urgently in need of measures to ensure consistency in their administration. The main issues are as follows:

- the ease with which children can copy;
- the extent to which the teacher observes the children closely during the test;
- the number of prompts, cues and hints given to the children and other 'bending of the rules'.

QCA also state that, during the writing task, teachers were:⁶¹

...allowing children to waste time on searching unsuccessfully for spellings and interacting with one another unproductively.

Why in a standardised National Curriculum test are pupils "interacting" with one another at all?

Given this public admission by QCA of widespread "cheating" in National Curriculum tests, such unfair practices should surely be stopped at once. There is no reason why these tests should not be administered in an unseen way on the same day as, since 1998, is done at Key Stages 2 and 3.

11 year olds (Key Stage 2)

Key Stage 2 tests should be made more demanding as an analysis of the individual test items shows. One example must suffice.

In the main Mathematics test at Key Stage 2 in 1996, the most difficult arithmetical question, for which a calculator was provided, involved, in essence, subtracting 75 from 435 and then dividing the result, 360, by 3. Moreover a SCAA publication⁶² criticised a pupil who tried to devise his own laborious

⁶⁰ The spelling test for level 3 is much more satisfactory and is likely to provide useful information about pupils' progress towards both competent spelling and reading.

⁶¹ *Standards at Key Stage 1 in 1998: English and Mathematics. Report on the 1998 National Curriculum Assessments for 7-year-olds*, QCA, 1998, p 29.

⁶² *Standards at Key Stage 2 English, Mathematics and Science – Report on the 1996 National Curriculum Assessments for 11-year-olds*, SCAA, 1997.

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method but then suggested that he should have used his calculator to find $360/3$ rather than using a pencil and paper or even doing the calculation in his head.

The most difficult arithmetic question for eleven year olds was to subtract 75 from 435 and then divide the result by 3. A calculator was provided.

No wonder OFSTED, in their detailed study of standards in Mathematics in three Inner Urban LEAs suggested that our standards are not high enough:

There is convincing research evidence to show that our primary pupils, in general, do less well in number than many of their counterparts internationally. This suggests that we ought to compare our national expectations for pupils in mathematics with those of other countries where we know standards are higher than ours because, if our national standards are low, then schools scoring close to the national average must also have low standards.⁶³

Even so, according to a recent report by QCA, some secondary schools:

... express reservations that Key Stage 2 results were inflated...⁶⁴

The same report also says that many secondary schools administer tests to Year 7 pupils in the early part of the autumn term so as to gather accurate information on the whole cohort – a further confirmation that secondary schools do not find the Key Stage 2 tests sufficiently informative or reliable.

14 year olds (Key Stage 3)

Standards in Key Stage 3 Mathematics tests are also insufficiently demanding. A recent report by QCA stated that:

...an encouraging 70% of pupils (at Level 4) were able to multiply 37 by 10 correctly...

If the correct mental calculation of such a simple mathematical operation is regarded as “encouraging” when pupils have been at school for 9 years, it shows how much further there is to go in raising standards and expectations.

Furthermore, only 14% of such pupils were able to “write one quarter as a decimal” correctly.

The report also states that in basic arithmetic:

...there was a common type of erroneous response that was found for all four tiers (i.e. for high-achieving as well as low-achieving pupils). This involved the use of totally inappropriate computations, in which pupils combined any or all of the numbers on the page, using a variety of operations.

⁶³ *The Teaching of Number in 3 Inner-urban LEAs*, OFSTED, September 1997, p 6.

⁶⁴ *Standards at Key Stage 3: Mathematics: report on the 1998 National Curriculum Assessments for 14-year-olds*, QCA, 1998, p 25.

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In other words, all students – both those who were good at mathematics and those who were not – frequently just played around with the numbers in the question in the hope of arriving at the right answer.

Is this due to lack of understanding or is it a consequence of the misguided emphasis on “mathematical investigation” which has been such a feature of mathematics education in England since the Cockcroft Report in 1982 and which played such a substantial role in the early years of “National Curriculum Mathematics”?

The report concludes that pupils’ standards in arithmetic – both mental and written – and in algebra need considerable improvement:

- pupils need opportunities to practice using number facts to solve problems;
- pupils need...help...to recognise the difference between, for example, x^2 and $2x$;
- further experience with work with percentages, particularly expressing one value as a percentage of another, would benefit many pupils, even those at the higher level;
- simplification of algebraic expression continues to present difficulties for pupils at all levels;
- expansion of algebraic expressions involving brackets is not well understood even by pupils at the highest level and needs thorough review and practice.

Teachers themselves refer to:

- the need for a greater emphasis on mental arithmetic;
- the need for more formal teaching of algebraic problem-solving and algorithms, and work without calculators.

Once again it seems extraordinary that these basic techniques have not been learnt more satisfactorily after nine years of compulsory schooling.⁶⁵

2.2 PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS AT 16+ & 18+

This section will only touch briefly on this subject taking standards in mathematics as an example. The topic will be considered at greater length in Chapter 3.7 below.

Given the problems described in Chapter 2.1 at the age of 14 in Mathematics, it is perhaps not surprising that standards at GCSE are as low as they are, even for pupils achieving some of the higher grades. For example, in the enquiry into standards required for grade B in GCSE Mathematics in 1994, one of the questions involved asked the pupils to find 15% of 120 *with a calculator*. Moreover, at that time grade B could be achieved without doing any significant amount of algebra; this is still true today.

At A level, also in Mathematics, a submission from University College, London to the Dearing review of higher education⁶⁶ claimed that even the best students were lacking both conceptually and technically:

65 *Standards at Key Stage 3: Mathematics: report on the 1998 National Curriculum Assessments for 14-year-olds*, QCA, 1998, pp 5, 6, 10, 24 & 26.

66 *Preparedness in Mathematics of Students Entering Science and Engineering Undergraduate Degree Programmes*, University College, London; submission to the Dearing review of

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Few students arrive with an understanding of what is meant by proof of a proposition. The concept of progression through a series of logical steps from a defined starting point to a final result is important in all scholarship, and fundamental to mathematics, science and engineering. The idea of proof in the scientific context seems to have been lost to GCSE and A level students with the abandonment of Euclidean geometry...

“The idea of proof in the scientific context seems to have been lost to GCSE and A level students... Overseas students studying in the UK display superior skills... it is difficult to see how the UK can compete successfully as a scientific and technological culture if we deprive ourselves of the very basis on which such a culture rests.”
– from a report by University College, London.

There is reduced ability to apply basic principles taught as “mathematics” to other subject areas...

The most apparent and widespread failing is the lack of fluency in symbolic manipulation. It appears that today’s students do not have the opportunity for sufficient practice in simple algebraic manipulation... (which)... leads to an inability to understand arguments expressed symbolically...

There is some indication that the use of calculators may also contribute to the poor ability to manipulate algebraic expressions.

The submission identifies numerous specific deficiencies and concludes that:

The available pool of students capable of tackling the more mathematical subjects is decreasing.

However:

...overseas students studying in the UK...display superior skills and tend to opt for the more mathematical streams through a degree programme and then go on to fill the available research places. It is difficult to see how the UK can compete successfully as a scientific and technological culture if we deprive ourselves of the very basis on which such a culture rests.

CHAPTER 2.3 VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

In 1986, the former Employment Department set up the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ), a non-statutory body charged with developing both National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and, since 1991, General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs).

higher education. Two detailed and authoritative reports were cited in support: *Mathematics Matters in Engineering*: report of a Working Group under the auspices of seven Professional Institutions of Engineering and Mathematics, May 1995; *Tackling the Mathematics Problem* London Mathematical Society, Institute of Mathematics, Royal Statistical Society, October 1995.

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Unfortunately, this was done in such a way that many of the resulting qualifications did not guarantee reliable national standards.

Standards reached by the “qualified” varied dramatically from college to college and firm to firm. The Employment Department’s own researchers found that there was “huge variety in practice”; and that “no two centres grade in exactly the same way” while Government Inspectors said:

Across the country as a whole, the standard of students’ work and their achievements... varied widely from course to course and from college to college.

NCVQ set up a monopoly system for vocational qualifications, into which all qualifications had to fit. Variations in standards were almost inevitable.

All qualifications had to be defined by a set of “outcomes” which were frequently specified so imprecisely as to be almost meaningless while training programmes or courses had no set content; even their length was not specified. In NVQs there were no compulsory external examinations – written, practical or oral. All assessment could be internal, on-the-job or by projects and coursework.

In GNVQs there were merely a few inadequate multiple choice tests, which were strongly resisted by NCVQ but insisted on by Ministers.

The untried system’s monopoly was to be enforced by providing government funding only for qualifications of the new type. It was even argued that similar flawed principles should control everything vocational in higher education too, all over the country.

In NVQs and GNVQs alike:

- the language used was unclear, imprecise and often incomprehensible;
- assessment was unmanageable, costly and far too variable across the country;
- knowledge was not specified or tested separately;
- essential skills in Mathematics and English were not specified or tested directly.

Moreover the number of 18 or 19 year olds taking and passing NVQs and GNVQs was and remains tiny compared with those obtaining traditional vocational qualifications.

Once again, this is in complete contrast to what happens in other industrialised countries like Germany. There, all aspects of vocational education and training are clearly specified and care is taken to ensure comparability in the qualifications granted across the country, both in small firms and large. Statutory regulations specify for each of around 350 broadly defined professions or occupations:

- all main aspects of course content, including general educational material;
- specific vocational courses plus a well thought out on-the-job training programme in individual firms;
- course structure, including the length of the course and the number of individual lessons in each subject;

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- substantial external assessment involving unseen external written examinations in technical and general subjects and unseen external practical and oral examinations.⁶⁷

Changes to vocational qualifications in England are now being introduced following the incorporation of NCVQ and SCAA into QCA in September 1997 but have not yet had time to take effect.

⁶⁷ See J Marks, *Vocational Education, Training and Qualifications in Britain*, Institute of Economic Affairs, 1996.

CHAPTER THREE

HOW DID WE GET TO WHERE WE ARE NOW?

THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION posed in Chapter 2 – Are standards high enough? – must be “No”, certainly not for 7 or 11 year old children, and probably not for 14 or 16 year olds either.

How has the current disastrous situation has come about?

Looking back over the last 40 years, two things stand out – the paucity of comprehensive data about educational standards for much of that time and the absence of any systematic research into the standards which were being achieved. This is true even when major policy changes took place, changes which often cried out for evaluation. It is as if people did not want to know whether or not their aims were being achieved.

Responsibility for this failure to evaluate what was happening lies with the three publicly funded bodies which ought to have been informing both themselves and the public about what was happening – the Department for Education and Employment,⁶⁸ Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Schools (HMI)⁶⁹ and the university departments of education.

This chapter summarises the available information for those years and will focus on the effect on standards of two major factors:

- the change from a selective to a comprehensive system of schools in the 1960s;
- the introduction of the GCSE in 1987.

3.1 MONITORING STANDARDS IN SCHOOLS

Without reliable data on standards, no systematic research into the effectiveness of education can be seriously attempted. Yet for over 40 years neither the testing nor the research has been done. Much data which was available has not been collected and some available data has been collected but not published.

⁶⁸ Formerly the Department for Education and the Department of Education and Science.

⁶⁹ For example, for their major secondary survey *Aspects of Secondary Education in England*, (HMSO, 1979), HMI collected the full examination results for all fifth year pupils in a 10% sample of secondary schools in England. Yet their report published no information about the examination results of individual schools or of different kinds of schools. Nor did HMI, after their reports were published from 1982 onwards, give any significant information about the attainments of schools or LEAs. In effect HMI, unlike their successor OFSTED which was set up in 1992, did virtually nothing to show schools how to assess their examination performance or to enable the public to do so.

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For example, it is unlikely that the massive levels of underachievement for primary schools, described in Chapter 1, is new. A similar situation may well have existed in the early 1980s when my colleagues and I attempted to do a national census of standards in public examinations at 16+. As long ago as 1981, we found an extremely broad distribution of results at 16+, a broad distribution which is similar to that which exists today (see Figures 1.5 & 1.6). We suspected at the time that this implied considerable underachievement at ages earlier than 16 but no national data for individual schools was then available.⁷⁰

Yet no research was commissioned to investigate this disturbing possibility – a possibility which has now been fully confirmed by the recent study *Improving Literacy and Numeracy: A Fresh Start*, the Report of the Working Group on Adult Literacy and Numeracy chaired by Sir Claus Moser.⁷¹

The Moser Report indicates that the current massive levels of underachievement have been present for many, many years, even though they were not directly monitored when the people involved were in school. For example, the Report shows that roughly one in five adults have low literacy skills. Some of that group can hardly read at all and many others:

...may be able to read a short article from a newspaper to pick out favourite programmes from a TV guide but may read slowly with little understanding.

The Report found that when a sample of adults were given the index of the Yellow Pages and asked where they would find details of plumbers, 22% were unable to answer correctly.

The Moser Report (1999) found that when a sample of adults were given the index of the Yellow Pages and asked where they would find details of plumbers, 22% were unable to answer correctly.

Moreover:

...one in five adults with “low literacy”... are below the standard norm expected of 11 year olds.

Britain has more severe problems than most countries. In 1997, the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) made a standard literacy assessment of 12 countries – eight European countries, Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. Only Poland and Ireland had a higher proportion at the lowest level than Britain.

Problems with numeracy are even more common than with literacy. Some researchers suggest that nearly half of all adults in Britain have numeracy skills below the level expected of an 11 year old. A quarter are estimated to have “very low” numeracy skills, which means that they are unlikely to be able to perform even the simplest calculations.

⁷⁰ Cox, Marks & Pomian-Srednicki, *Standards in English Schools*, National Council for Educational Standards, 1983; it was not until 14 years later that data for individual schools, derived from National Curriculum tests, became available for the ages of 7, 11 and 14.

⁷¹ *Improving Literacy and Numeracy: A Fresh Start – Report of a working party chaired by Sir Claus Moser*, DfEE, March 1999.

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A survey carried out by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS) found that a quarter of respondents could not give the correct answer to the question: "How much change would you get from £2 if you bought one loaf for 68p and two tins of beans at 45p each?" In the same research, when asked to work out the area of a room that was 21 ft by 14 ft, a third of all adults gave the wrong answer, even though calculators were allowed. In comparison with other countries, Britain does rather worse in numeracy than in literacy.

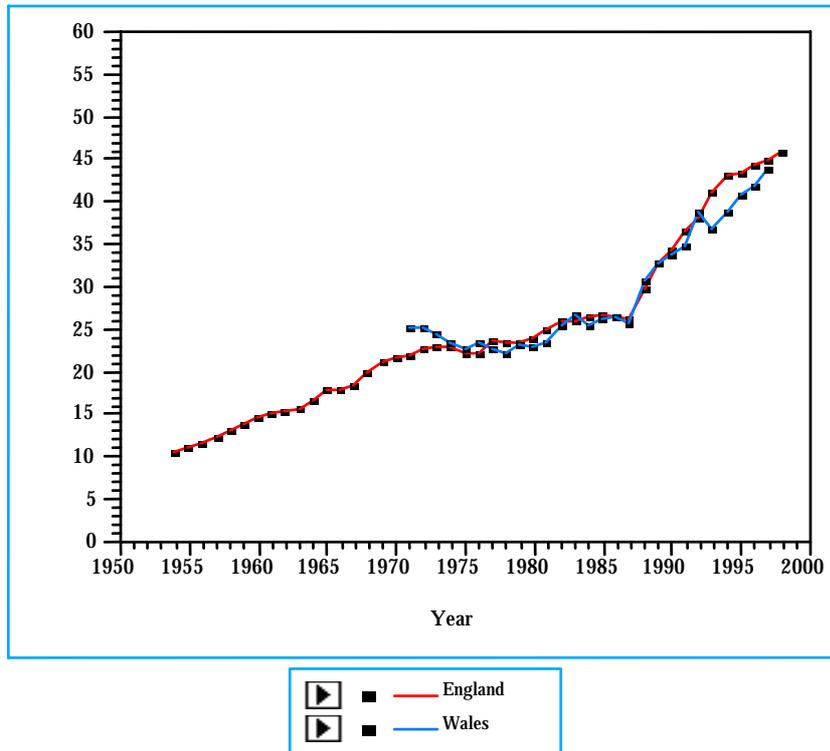
Overall, the Moser Report shows that there are approximately six million adults in this country with very poor attainment in both basic reading and simple arithmetic.

OFFICIAL STATISTICS ON PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS AT 16+ & 18+ FOR 1955-1998

Official statistics for individual years or groups of years are published in a multiplicity of sources⁷² but are seldom brought together in a single publication so that trends over time can be observed. Results for public examinations from about 1955 to 1998 from these numerous sources have been collated and are shown in a series of figures in this chapter. Figures 3.1 and Figures 3.3 to 3.5 show how public examination results have varied in England, in Wales and in Northern Ireland from the mid 1950s up to 1998.⁷³

Figure 3.1

%5+A*C GCSE (or equivalent) for England & for Wales 1955 – 1998



⁷² *Statistics of Education*, DES (annually); *Statistical Bulletins* 1/91, 13/88, 5/88, 4/86, 11/84, 10/82 and 12/81, DES; see also R W Baldwin, *Secondary Schools 1965-1979*, National Council for Educational Standards, 1981.

⁷³ Figures for Wales before 1970 are not readily available.

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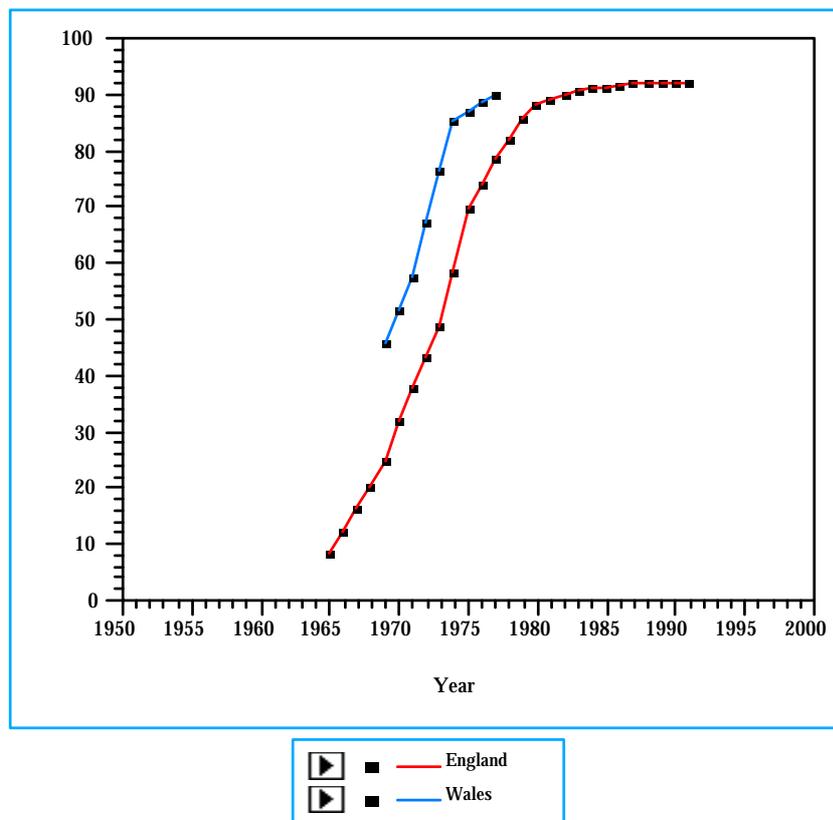
Figure 3.1 shows that the proportion of the age group in England gaining good 16+ results⁷⁴ rose steadily during the 1950s and 1960s, levelled off in the 1970s, rose again a little in the early 1980s and then levelled off until 1987; after which there began a very sharp rise. In the next seven years – from 1987 to 1994 – the proportion rose more than it had in the previous 30 years and by six times as much as in the previous 15 years. From 1993 onwards, the rapid rise slowed somewhat.

From 1987 to 1994, the proportion of children getting good results at the age of 16 rose more than it had in the previous 30 years and by six times as much as in the previous 15 years. Were standards improving – or exams getting easier?

In Wales, the proportion gaining five or more higher Grades was higher than in England in 1970 but fell a little below England during the 1970s and 1980s. From 1987 it rose just as sharply as in England for five years but then fell a little behind in the 1990s.

Change to Comprehensive Schools

Figure 3.2
% of Pupils in Comprehensive Schools in England & in Wales
1955 – 1990



74 Five or more higher Grade passes; a higher grade pass is defined as: grades A to C in GCE 'O' level or grade 1 in CSE; or, from 1988, GCSE grades A to C; or, from 1993, GCSE grades A* to C.

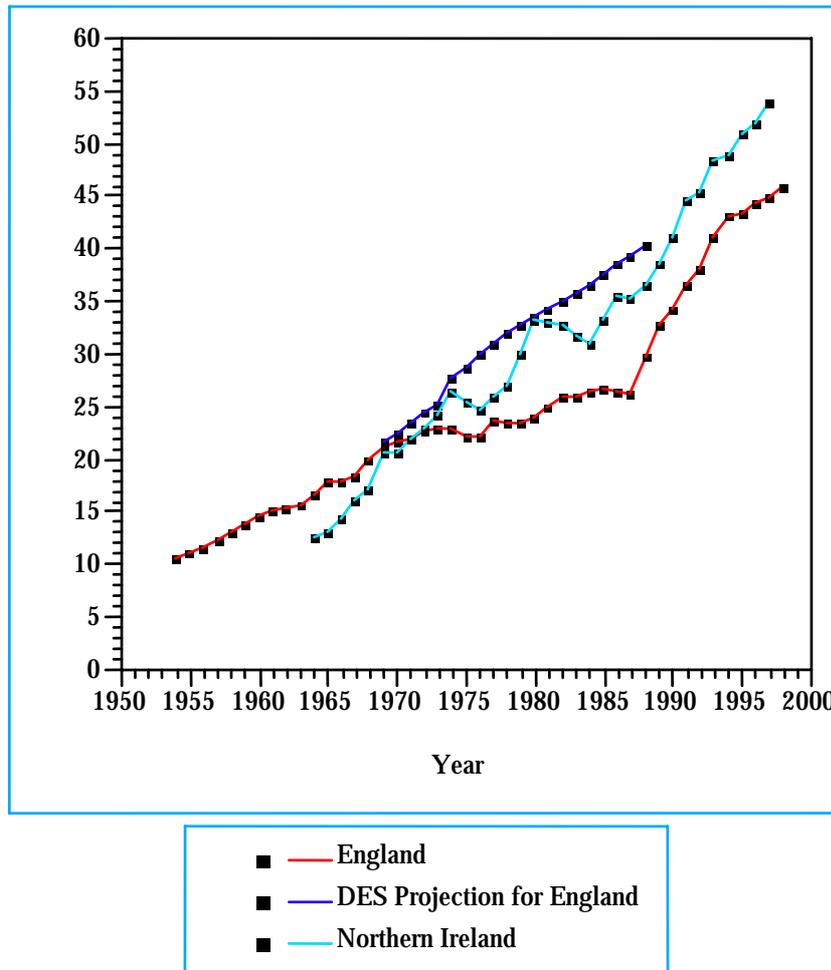
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Figure 3.2 shows that until the late 1960s pupils in state schools in England were mainly in selective schools (grammar and secondary modern schools). From about 1969 to 1976 or so, there was a very rapid change to comprehensive schools so that from about 1980 to the present the overwhelming majority – about 90% – have been in comprehensive schools. In Wales there was a similar pattern but the change over to comprehensives was more rapid – reaching 50% in 1970 compared with 1973 in England – and rising to well over 90% by 1980. In Scotland, the change over also took place faster than in England and at roughly the same pace as in Wales. Northern Ireland, however, decided to retain its selective system both initially in the mid 1960s and again in the late 1970s after the 1976 Education Act tried to abolish the remaining selective schools in England.⁷⁵

16+ Results – England & Northern Ireland plus DES Projection for England

Figure 3.3

%5A*C GCSE (or equivalent) for England & for Northern Ireland plus DES projection for England – 1955 – 1998



75 The 1976 Education Act was repealed in 1979 by the incoming Conservative Government under Margaret Thatcher.

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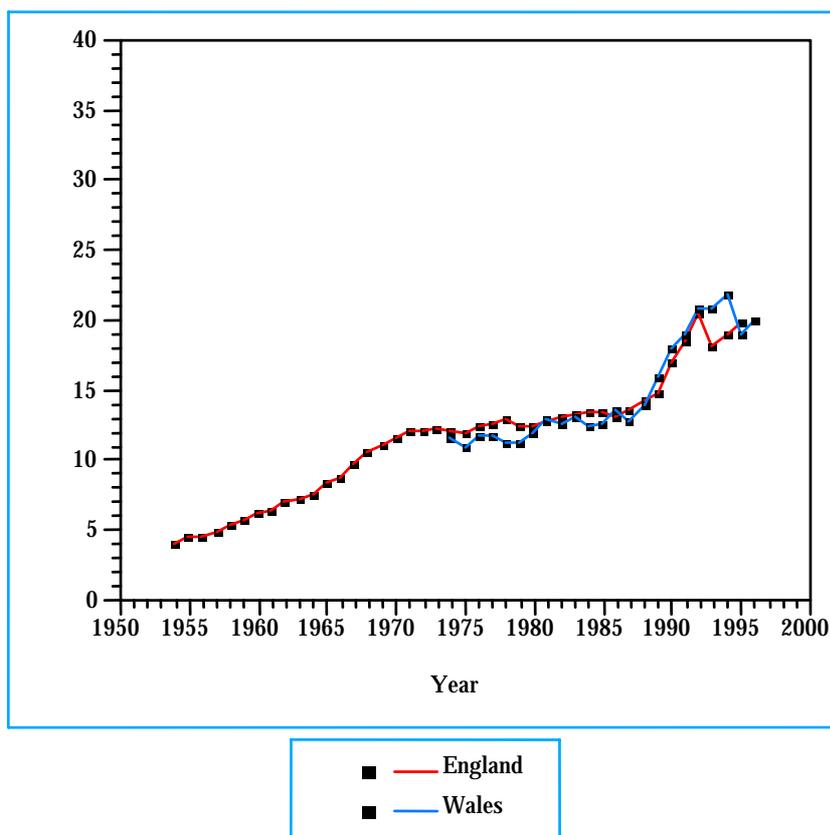
Figure 3.3 shows the same data for five or more higher Grade passes at 16+ for England as had been shown in Figure 3.1 together with similar data for Northern Ireland. Figure 3.3 also shows the projection made in 1968 (and republished in 1970) by the DES for the period up to the mid 1980s.⁷⁶ These projections were revised and published annually until 1968 when they ceased to appear – just as the extremely rapid changeover to comprehensives was getting under way and the figures for 16+ and 18+ results were beginning to level off.⁷⁷

The figures for Northern Ireland start from a lower base than England in the 1960s but rise more rapidly and reach parity with England about 1970. Thereafter they do not level off in the 1970s, as happened in England, but continue to rise rapidly in the late 1970s and early 1980s until 1987 when they are about 10% absolutely and 40% relatively above those for England. After 1987 the figures for Northern Ireland rise rapidly, at about the same rate as for England, and thus maintain their advantage of about 10% over England.

The DES projection continues to follow the rising trend of the 1950s and 1960s into the 1970s and 1980s. By about 1985 it is about 10% or more absolutely and 40% or more relatively above the actual figures for England.

Figure 3.4

Percentage of Age Group Passing 2 or more A levels (%2+A) in England and in Wales from 1955 to 1998



⁷⁶ *Statistics of Education 1968. Vol. 2, School Leavers GCE and CSE*, HMSO, 1968: *Student Numbers in Higher Education in England and Wales*, HMSO, 1970.

⁷⁷ See later for further discussion.

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Overall, the gap between the DES projection and the actual results obtained was, by this time, equivalent to a shortfall of about 10% or more of the age group or about 60,000 pupils each year failing to achieve five or more higher grade passes. It is the results for the selective system in Northern Ireland that most resemble the DES projection rather than the results for the overwhelmingly comprehensive systems in England and in Wales.

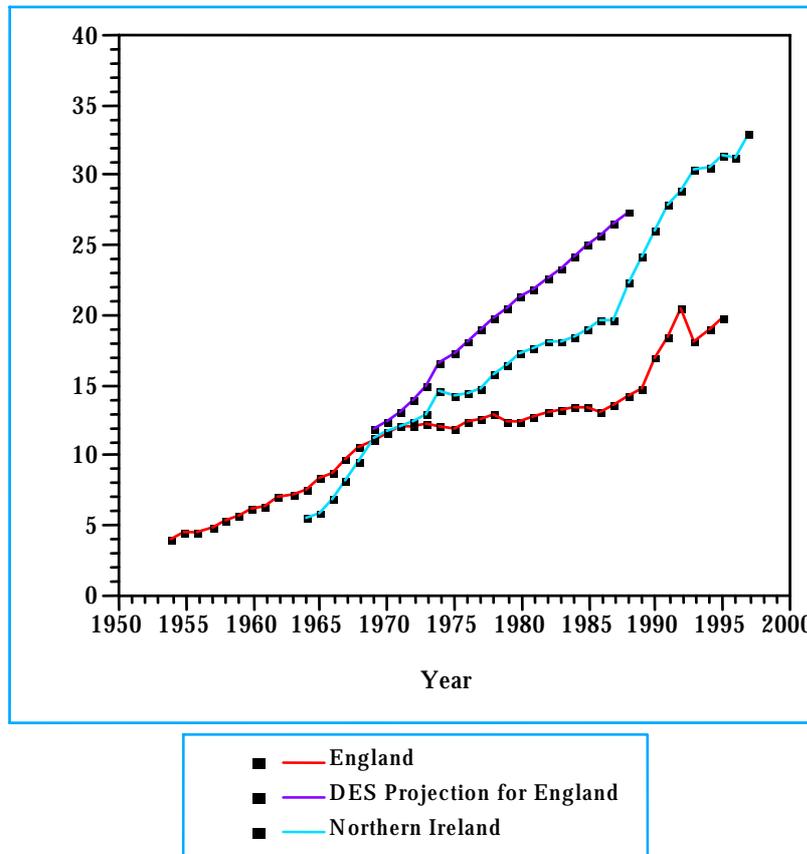
A level Results – England & Wales

Figure 3.4 shows that the trends for good A level results (two or more passes) in England and in Wales are very similar to those for good 16+ results.⁷⁸ The proportion of the age group in England gaining good A level results rose steadily during the 1950s and 1960s and then levelled off in the 1970s and early 1980s. From 1988 there began a very sharp rise. In the next three years – from 1988 to 1991 – the proportion rose by 6% absolutely and 40% relatively – more than it had in the previous 30 years and twice as much as in the previous 15 years. From 1991 onwards, the rapid rise slowed somewhat. In Wales, the proportion gaining two or more A levels was a little below England during the 1970s and 1980s. From 1987 it rose as sharply as in England for 7 years and then fell back a little in the 1990s.

A level Results – England & Northern Ireland and DES Projection for England

Figure 3.5

Percentage of Age Group Passing 2 or more A levels (%2+A) in England and in Northern Ireland plus DES Projection for England – 1955 to 1998



⁷⁸ Similar trends are also shown for the proportions of the age group obtaining one or more and three or more A levels.

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Figure 3.5 shows the same data for two or more A level passes for England as had been shown in Figure 3.4 together with similar data for Northern Ireland. Figure 3.5 also shows the projection made in 1968 (and republished in 1970) by the DES for the period up to the mid 1980s. As at 16+, these projections were revised and published annually until 1968 when they ceased to appear.

The figures for Northern Ireland start from a lower base than England in the 1960s but rise more rapidly and reach parity with England about 1970. Thereafter they do not level off in the 1970s, as happened in England, but continue to rise rapidly throughout the 1970s and early 1980s until 1987 when they are about 7% absolutely and 50% relatively above those for England. After 1987 the figures for Northern Ireland rise rapidly, at a faster rate than for England, and increase their advantage over England to about 12% absolutely and 60% relatively.

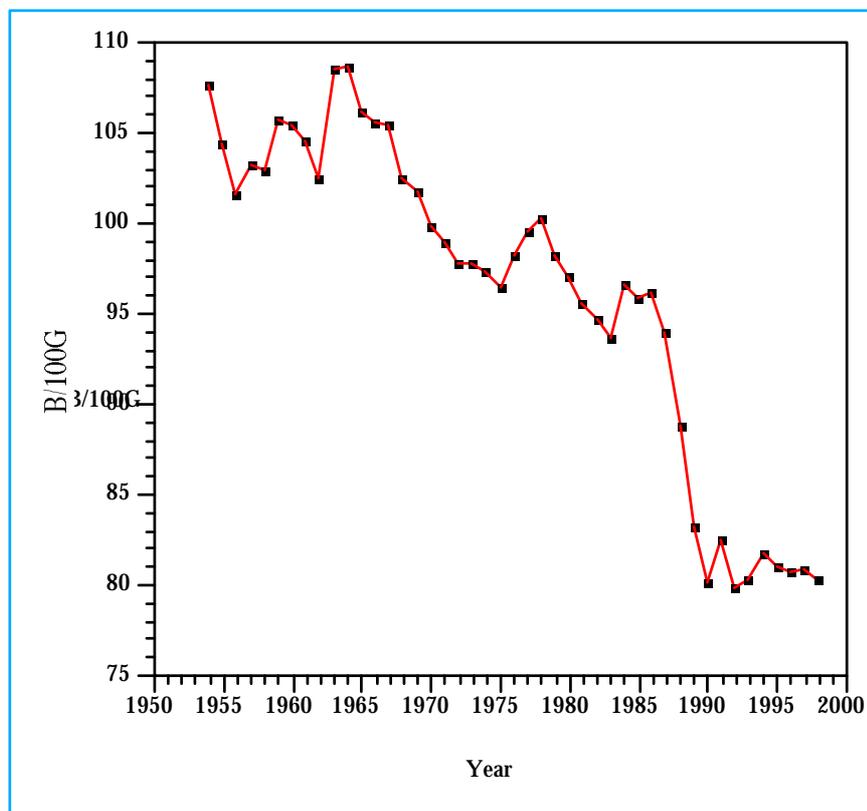
The DES projection continues to follow the rising trend of the 1950s and 1960s into the 1970s and 1980s until by about 1985 it is about 13% absolutely and 100% relatively above the actual figures for England. Overall, the gap between the DES projection and the actual results obtained was, by this time, equivalent to a shortfall of about 13% or more of the age group or about 80,000 pupils each year failing to achieve two or more A level passes.

Again it is the results for the selective system in Northern Ireland that most resemble the DES projection rather than those for the overwhelmingly comprehensive system in England and in Wales.

Examination Results for Boys and for Girls – 1955 to 1998

Figure 3.6

%5A*C GCSE Boys per 100 Girls in England from 1955 to 1998



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Figure 3.6 shows the number of boys per hundred girls in England obtaining five or more higher grade passes at 16+ from 1955 to 1998.⁷⁹ It is clear that from 1955 to about 1968 boys out-perform girls by about 5% but that from about 1970 to 1985 boys and girls performed at roughly the same level. From 1987 onwards boys have only been achieving just over 80% of the higher grade passes achieved by girls.

Similar data, not shown here, for the number of boys per hundred girls obtaining good A level results (%2+A) from 1955 until 1995 shows that at the beginning of the period boys were out-performing girls by about 80% or 90% but the difference gradually dropped to about 20% from 1970 onwards to less than 10% in the 1980s. Girls achieved parity with boys at A level in 1989 and in the 1990s girls were about 10% ahead of boys.

3.3 VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Vocational qualifications have been available for many years but national data have not been collected. This was not done before 1986 when the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) was set up with the duty to collect such data clearly in its remit. Nor has it been done since 1986, either by NCVQ or by the Departments responsible for vocational qualifications.⁸⁰

It is only now that comprehensive data on vocational qualifications are being collected and even so this is only being done nationally rather than school by school or college by college.⁸¹

This is true both for the existing traditional vocational qualifications⁸² and for the new vocational qualifications – National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and later General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) – which the NCVQ was set up to develop.⁸³

Since no comprehensive data for vocational qualifications exist even today, it is not yet possible to analyse them in any systematic quantitative way either currently or over past years.

Once again, this reflects the overall low status attached to vocational education and the resulting low priority given to finding out about it.

3.4 THE PATTERN OF RESULTS IN PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS AND POSSIBLE CAUSES

The overall pattern shown in Chapter 3.2 is that the proportion of the age group in England gaining good A level and good 16+ results rose steadily during the 1950s and 1960s, levelled off around 1970, remained fairly static throughout the 1970s, and rose again a little in the early 1980s. From 1987 for 16+ results, and from a year or so later for A level results, there was a very sharp rise. About five years later, from 1992 onwards, the rapid rise slowed somewhat.

79 This method of presentation was first used in the OFSTED publication *Recent Research on Gender & Educational Performance*, 1998.

80 The Employment Department & the Department for Education and latterly the Department for Education and Employment.

81 Some data on GNVQ are included in national performance tables but not in ways that are readily accessible or easy to compare or collate.

82 Examples include qualifications validated by City and Guilds, BTEC or the Royal Society of Arts (RSA).

83 In other words, the NCVQ did not monitor or evaluate the success of its own programme of work.

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There is thus a strong correlation between the levelling off of good examination results at A level and at 16+ since 1970 and the change over to comprehensive schools which is made more significant because a similar levelling took place in Wales but not in Northern Ireland.

There is also a strong correlation between the rapid rise in both 16+ and 18+ examination results after 1987 and the introduction of the GCSE in that year (and the consequent changes to A levels 2 years later).

But correlation does not equal cause. There are a number of other factors which have changed over this period and which could have been expected to affect public examination results. These include:

- more pupils staying on longer at school, particularly after the raising of the school-leaving age in 1973;
- the rise in the number of girls succeeding in public examinations from a significantly lower base in the 1950s – results for girls now exceed those for boys;
- the growth of the CSE examination, particularly during the 1970s as it gained increasing public acceptance – this growth increased the higher grade passes since a CSE grade 1 was regarded as equivalent to an O-level higher grade pass;
- increasing resources per pupil in real terms – the increase over 30 years has been somewhere between a doubling and a tripling, partly reflected in a substantial reduction in pupil/teacher ratios, especially in the 1970s;
- greater equalisation of resources between pupils of the same age in different kinds of schools;
- since 1980, the requirement on all secondary schools to publish their public examination results, subject by subject and grade by grade;
- since 1992 the publication of National Performance tables for both GCSE and A level results, also school by school.

Some of these factors could reasonably have been expected to lead to an increase – and taken together – to a substantial but gradual increase in the proportion of pupils passing public examinations. None of them should have given rise to the levelling off experienced in England in the 1970s which was totally unexpected as the annual projections published by the DES until 1968 make clear. Nor do any of these factors provide a plausible explanation for the abrupt rise in public examination results which started in 1988.

There are, however, two other possible causes to consider: the effect on standards of the massive changeover to comprehensive schools in the 1970s; and the introduction of the GCSE from 1988 onwards.

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3.5 COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOLS AND STANDARDS

Comprehensive education is a gigantic experiment with the life chances of millions of children – the results will not be known for years.

Julienne Ford, leading British sociologist, 1969⁸⁴

The first detailed analysis of the examination results for individual schools and LEAs was carried out by my colleagues and me and published in 1983 as *Standards in English Schools*.⁸⁵ The study used data, collected from across the country, for public examination results in 1981 which schools were required to make public by the 1980 Education Act.

Standards in English Schools established, for the first time, national benchmarks for pupils in secondary modern, grammar and comprehensive schools and used these data to conclude, *inter alia*, that selective schools taken together obtained substantially better results than comprehensive schools, even after making some allowances for social class differences. A major contribution to this finding was the relatively good examination performance of pupils in secondary modern schools. A second and larger study for 1982 confirmed and extended these results.⁸⁶

The results were also confirmed in a separate study in 1984 by the DES⁸⁷ who estimated the examination performance to be expected of each LEA given its particular social, economic and educational circumstances. In summary, the DES study predicted substantially better examination results from LEAs with selective schools than from LEAs with only comprehensive schools even when other factors including both expenditure, social class and other social variables are held constant. In May 1987 two written Parliamentary answers confirmed these results and their agreement with the findings of *Standards in English Schools*.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ J Ford, *Social Class and the Comprehensive School*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969.

⁸⁵ J Marks, C Cox & M Pomian-Szrednicki, *Standards in English Schools*, National Council for Educational Standards, 1983.

⁸⁶ J Marks and M. Pomian-Szrednicki, *Standards in English Schools: Second Report*, National Council for Educational Standards, 1985. On social class, the analyses showed a performance gradient for all kinds of school when schools were grouped into three bands according to social class but within each band the advantage for selective schools remained.

⁸⁷ *School Standards and Spending: Statistical Analysis*, Statistical Bulletin 13/84, DES, 1984; see also F Naylor and J Marks, *Comprehensives: Counting the Cost*, Centre for Policy Studies, 1985.

⁸⁸ Our early research was widely discussed and criticised by educational researchers – see, for example, a special issue of the *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 10, No 1, 1984, which contains J Marks & C Cox, “Educational Attainment in Secondary Schools”, pp 7-31 – and in the press – see C Cox & J Marks, *The Insolence of Office*, Claridge Press, 1987. Other research summaries include G Walford, *Selection for Secondary Schooling in Briefings for the National Commission on Education*, Heinemann, 1993 and for Scotland J Gray, A McPherson & D Raffe, *Reconstructions of Secondary Education*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983 & A McPherson & J Willms, “Equalisation And Improvement: some effects of comprehensive reorganisation in Scotland” in *Sociology*, Vol. 21, 1987, pp 509-539. See also A Halsey, A Heath & J Ridge, *Origins & Destinations*, Clarendon Press, 1980 which charts the expansion of educational opportunity in Britain over the

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A further study of the data collected for *Standards in English Schools* found that comprehensive schools in the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA)⁸⁹ did less well than comprehensive schools elsewhere in the country, even in other relatively socially deprived areas, and also did less well on average than secondary modern schools in the rest of the country.⁹⁰ Detailed comparisons showed that, on average, pupils in ILEA schools of all levels of ability did much less well than similar pupils elsewhere and that it was the least able pupils who suffered the most.

In the 1970s and 1980s ILEA secondary schools had very poor standards of attainment even though, according to ILEA's own figures, their pupils were up to the national average at the age of 11. ILEA then spent 50% more per pupil than the national average for the next five years with the outcome that their examination results at 16 were 30-40% below the national average.⁹¹

At the time, the response in ILEA, and in other areas with similar problems such as the London Borough of Brent, was to assert that underachievement was due to racism and sexism in schools. This claim was backed by virtually no published evidence about the actual public examination results of different ethnic groups or of boys and girls. When, considerably later, such evidence was published, it failed to support the ideological assertions – showing substantial differences between different ethnic groups; substantial underachievement by many white pupils; and higher standards being achieved over many years by girls compared with boys.⁹²

century and looks to comprehensive schools as the way forward; unfortunately the survey ends in 1972 just as the changeover to comprehensives was well under way; no comparable follow up study has been done.

89 ILEA, and its predecessor the London County Council, had always been in the forefront of those advocating and practising comprehensive reorganisation.

90 J. Marks, C. Cox and M. Pomian-Szrednicki, *Examination Performance of Secondary Schools in the Inner London Education Authority*, National Council for Educational Standards, 1986.

91 For a detailed and devastating criticism of ILEA see the first ever published HMI report *Educational Provision by the Inner London Education Authority*, HMI, DES, 1980.

92 ILEA was set up in 1974 to cover the area formerly administered by the London County Council. It was the largest education authority in Britain until it was abolished following the 1988 Education Reform Act. Figures from the 1991 census show that ethnic minorities make up 45% of Brent's population; the proportion in the school population is almost certainly considerably higher. For more information about education in ILEA and Brent see: *Race, Sex and Class: 1 Achievement in Schools; 2 Multi-ethnic Education in Schools; 3 A Policy for Equality: Race; 4 Anti-Racist Statement and Guidelines*, ILEA, London, 1983; *Ethnic Background and Examination Results 1985 and 1986*, ILEA, London, July 1987; *Opportunities for Achievement: Report of the Advisory panel on Brent's Development Programme for Educational Attainment and Racial Equality*, Home Office, London, May, 1991; this panel was chaired by Baroness Cox; *Report on Brent Education*, HMI, 1987; Sir David Lane, *Brent's Development Programme for Racial Equality: A Report*, Home Office, London, 1988; *The Development Programme for Racial Equality in the London Borough of Brent*, HMI, London, 1988; *Panorama*, BBC1, March 30, 1987; J Marks, 'The New Model Labour Party in Action', in *The Salisbury Review*, London, January, 1987; *The Two Kingdoms*, London Borough of Brent, London,

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One Labour politician did, however, express in public his reservations about what had been happening. Speaking at the 1987 Labour Party Conference Neil Fletcher,⁹³ then Leader of ILEA, admitted that there is some basis for fears:

...that comprehensive education does not stretch and challenge children enough or provide them with the essential skills needed for survival in the modern world.

Fletcher went on to ask:

Has the system sufficiently helped those it was designed to benefit – those who in the old days failed the 11-plus?

Why are working class children still not doing as well as their middle class peers? I am doubtful how far we should take socio-economic background as a determinant excuse.

Has the move away from formal rote learning.. .carried the risk of deskilling a generation, by failing to equip them with the hard-headed basic skills of literacy and numeracy which they need to survive?

Conservative spokesmen at the time were not expressing themselves so clearly, at least not in public, but they did implement the changes – the Educational Reform Act (1988); the National Curriculum; National Curriculum Tests; and the publication of Performance Tables – which has since enabled all of us to see the truth of what Fletcher was saying.

The data suggest that the changeover to a comprehensive system has led, every year, to 60,000 16 year olds failing to achieve five or more higher grade passes at GCSE and 80,000 18 year olds failing to achieve two or more A levels.

In summary, the data in Chapter 3.2 suggest that the changeover to comprehensive schools has led to fewer pupils obtaining good public examination results at 16+ and 18+ than would have been the case if the selective system had been retained and developed. The shortfall in England could be as large as 60,000 16 year olds each year failing to achieve five or more higher grade passes at 16+ and 80,000 18 year olds each year failing to achieve two or more A levels. This conclusion is based both on the DES projection made in 1968 and on the actual achievements of pupils in the selective system in Northern Ireland.⁹⁴

April, 1986; J Marks, 'Educational Policies on Race: A Case Study', in D O'Keeffe (ed), *The Wayward Curriculum: A Cause for Parents' Concern*, Social Affairs Unit, London, 1986.

⁹³ Fletcher is now Education Officer of the Local Government Association.

⁹⁴ See Chapter 1.5 as well as Chapter 3.2.

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3.6 UNIVERSITY ENTRY AND SOCIAL CLASS

Figure 3.7 shows the number of people in social classes I and II and in social classes III-V amongst 18-year olds from 1977 to 1990. The number in social classes III-V rise gradually from 1977 up to 1982 and then decline till 1990; the number in social classes I and II remains roughly constant throughout.

Figure 3.7

Numbers in Social Classes I & II and III-V in 18 year old age group - 1977-1990

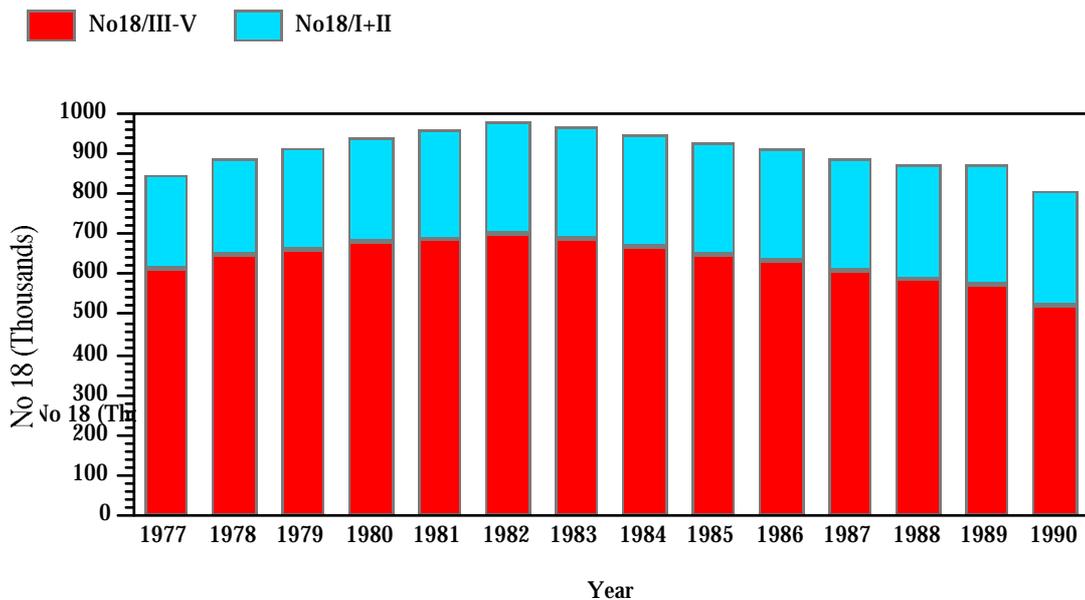
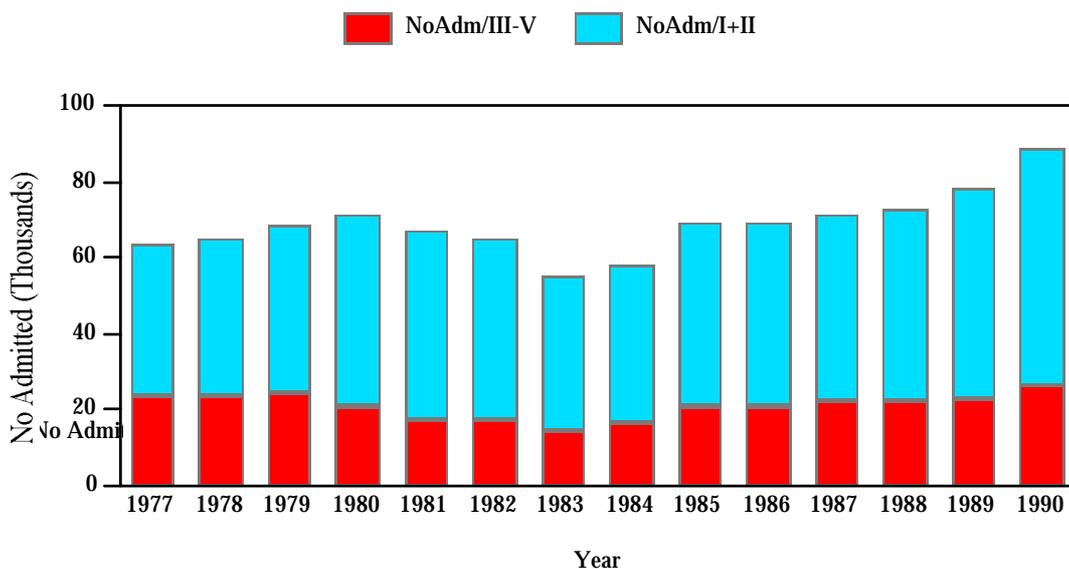


Figure 3.8 shows the numbers in social classes I and II and III-V of the 18-year-old age group entering universities from 1977 to 1990.

Figure 3.8

Numbers in Social Classes I & II and III-V in 18 year old age group entering universities - 1977-1990



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Once again, the number from social classes I and II remains approximately the same throughout the period, showing a slight increase towards the end. However, the number of 18 year olds from social classes III-V entering university declines consistently, both absolutely and relatively, from 1977 to about 1983 and then rises a little up to 1990.

This decline in entry to universities for 18-year olds from social classes III-V from 1977 to 1983 corresponds to the period seven years earlier from 1970 to 1976 when these same pupils were entering secondary school at the age of 11. These age groups are thus those who would have been mainly educated in the new comprehensive schools which were rapidly replacing grammar schools at the time (see Figure 3.2).

It could well be that the shortfall in those achieving good A level results has had a greater effect on those from social classes III-V than on those from social classes I & II. The increase in access to universities for working class students documented by Halsey and his colleagues⁹⁵ in the first six decades of the century, and primarily due to the rise of the grammar schools, may, with the advent of widespread comprehensive education, have gone into reverse.⁹⁶

There are no readily available data, similar to those shown in Figures 3.7 and 3.8 for England, showing for the other countries of the United Kingdom the percentages or the numbers of pupils in the different social classes entering higher education over a number of years.

It is somewhat surprising, given the substantial interest in access to higher education for students from the lower social classes that such data is not readily available so that trends can be studied and comparisons made.

Earlier this year the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, set off a national debate about access to universities for pupils from different social classes when he criticised the way in which one pupil had failed to be accepted to read medicine at Magdalen College, Oxford – criticism which turned out to be both inaccurate and misleading.

Any serious debate about social class and access to higher education requires not dubious assertions about one individual but systematic study of national data on access such as has been presented in this chapter and in Chapter 1.8.⁹⁷

3.7 THE INTRODUCTION OF THE GCSE & STANDARDS OVER TIME

Many defenders of the introduction of the GCSE in 1987, and all the consequent changes in A level examinations, frequently point to the rising numbers of pupils obtaining such qualifications as direct evidence of the success of the GCSE and of the education system. This kind of assertion is unlikely to be true because it is highly implausible that standards should have risen so steeply in three or four years after having remained static for a decade or more. Such concerns led in 1992 to a critical report by HMI⁹⁸ which in turn led to the School Examinations and Assessment Council (SEAC) developing a Mandatory Code of Practice for the GCSE, introduced partially in 1993 and fully in 1994.

⁹⁵ A Halsey, A Heath & J Ridge, *Origins & Destinations*, Clarendon Press, 1980; A Halsey, *Leagues Apart*, Times Higher, February 6, 1998.

⁹⁶ See the data presented for 1997-8 in Chapter 1.7.

⁹⁷ No such national data has been published except that presented here.

⁹⁸ *GCSE Examinations: Quality and Standards, Summer 1992*, A report from HMI, DfE, 1992.

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Moreover, despite considerable opposition from Examination Boards and teacher organisations, the Secretary of State asked OFSTED to carry out more detailed monitoring of the 1993 examinations. The resulting HMI/OFSTED report on the Summer 1993 GCSE examinations⁹⁹ noted the beneficial effects of the Code, but highlighted further concerns about standards and, in particular about central aspects of most main subjects such as:

- standards of vocabulary, spelling, grammar and punctuation in English;
- algebra and proof in Mathematics;
- the periodic table, balancing chemical equations and molar mass calculations in Chemistry;
- the laws of motion and associated calculations in Physics;
- concepts of genetics in Biology;
- similar criticisms about the core of the subjects in History and French.

These concerns led to an official enquiry into *Standards Over Time* which was conducted jointly by OFSTED and SCAA.

The final report of the *Standards Over Time* enquiry¹⁰⁰ has been misrepresented by many in education who have asserted – on the basis of one paragraph which states that

...there is insufficient evidence available to enable firm conclusions to be drawn about some aspects of grade standards going back more than 10 years at 18+ or five years at 16+.

that it shows that standards have been maintained.¹⁰¹ In fact a careful reading of the report shows that there is considerable cause for concern.

Many of the issues raised in the *Standards Over Time* Report have not been resolved satisfactorily.

These include the specific points listed above about the reduced content of each of the three subjects studied – English, Mathematics and Chemistry. In particular:

- in Mathematics – substantially less emphasis on basic arithmetic, algebra, and on proof in algebra and geometry;
- in Chemistry a reduction in the knowledge of chemical reactions and in the construction of balanced chemical equations which is greater in Double Award Science than in separate subject Chemistry;
- in English a research report which found “that candidates awarded a given GCE grade in 1980 were more capable of writing accurately than their counterparts in 1993.”¹⁰²

99 *GCSE Examinations: Quality and Standards, Summer 1993; A report from the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, OFSTED, 1993.*

100 *Standards in Public Examinations 1975-1995: A Report on English Mathematics and Chemistry Examinations Over Time, SCAA and OFSTED, 1996.*

101 This lack of evidence was due to the extraordinary failure of the Examination Boards to keep scripts even over the changeover period from O-level/CSE to GCSE.

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The report also comments on:

- the need for restrictions on the use of calculators, formulae sheets and other external aids, such as open book examinations and pre-release materials, in examinations;
- the reduction in the standard and demand of questions especially in Mathematics and Chemistry by dividing multi-step questions into parts and giving hints on how to solve problems;
- the possibility of grade drift from year to year leading, over a number of years, to significant grade inflation.

In addition at A level there are some further concerns:

- the comparability of linear and modular A levels, particularly now that linear A levels in their traditional form are unlikely to continue to exist;
- the specific issue of modular grade review which prevents the whole of a borderline candidate's work from being considered;
- serious concerns about the standard and demand of questions, which was also stressed by an unpublished Question Paper Review conducted by SCAA in 1996;
- problems with the A level Code of Practice which in 1997 did not correspond with what the Boards were actually doing.

All these factors operate in the same direction – towards a lowering of standards.

All of these factors operate in the same direction – towards a lowering of standards over time – and, if they are not tackled vigorously, are likely to continue to lower expectations in an unacceptable way.

The overall conclusion to which nearly all the evidence points is that in a number of significant respects standards have not been maintained either at 16+ or at 18+ in all the subjects which have been considered. This conclusion is strongly supported by the data given in Chapter 3.2 which show the rapid rise in pass rates after 1987, when no coursework limits existed, and the slowing down in the rise following the decision to limit coursework in 1991 and to introduce a mandatory Code of Practice in 1992.

There is still much more that needs to be done and could be done. For example, a proper comparison between GCSE and A level standards with Overseas O-level and A level standards – set by the same boards – has yet to be made. Nevertheless a survey of the materials which are available gives the strong impression that standards may be significantly higher in what the Boards are marketing internationally as O levels and A levels rather than in what is now on offer in this country as GCSE higher grades and A levels.¹⁰³

102 A Massey and G Elliott, *Aspects of Writing in 16+ English Examinations between 1980 and 1994*, University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, Cambridge, 1996.

103 J Marks, *Public Examinations at 16+ and 18+ available internationally from English Examination Boards*, Internal unpublished SCAA document, April 1996.

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Some of these international syllabuses could easily be used by schools in this country without any further development. Examples include:

- existing syllabuses in Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology which appear to be more demanding than those that are currently available under the GCSE.
- syllabuses such as Additional Mathematics or AO Mathematics or similar syllabuses in the Sciences which have a considerably extended subject coverage compared with existing GCSE syllabuses.

Given the widely acknowledged need for such syllabuses, there is a strong case for making these long-established and well-developed syllabuses and examinations available to state schools in this country.¹⁰⁴

3.8 LACK OF INFORMATION ON STANDARDS

No checks on primary school standards

The changeover to a system of comprehensive secondary schools had a major indirect influence in primary education in addition to the effect on standards in secondary schools described above. For the changeover eliminated the 11+ examination from most of the country. This meant that there was no local education authority-wide standard measure available for estimating the standards reached in different primary schools from the late 1960s onwards. It was not until National Curriculum tests were introduced in the early 1990s that any hard information on primary school standards became publicly available. Some local authorities did administer tests of reading but when, in the early 1990s, the Schools Examination and Assessment Council (SEAC) was asked by the Secretary of State to report to him on reading standards, only about a quarter of local education authorities were able to supply SEAC with any data. And even then, such data was not in the public domain – not for named local education authorities as a whole and not for named individual schools.

Just as the changeover to comprehensive education was getting under way, the DES severely restricted the availability of information which might establish whether or not that change was being successfully implemented.

Availability of data on public examinations

In the early 1960s a considerable amount of information was published annually by the DES about GCSE O-Level and CSE examinations. This included, for example, data on performance of different kinds of schools and projections of the expected future performance of the education system in the years ahead; it even included some data on standards reached in the 11-plus examination in different kinds of schools in different parts of the country.

At the end of the 1960s this situation changed. Much less information was published each year and, as we have seen in this Chapter, the DES ceased to publish their projections of future achievements. Thus, just as the massive changeover to comprehensive education was getting under way – the biggest

¹⁰⁴ Independent schools already can and do use some of these qualifications.

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change in public policy in education since 1902 – the DES severely restricted the availability of information which might establish whether or not that change was being successfully implemented.

The same thing happened with the introduction of the GCSE in 1987. Repeated public assurances had been given that standards would be maintained, especially those of the top three grades A-C which were intended to be equivalent to the higher grade passes A-C of GCE O-level.¹⁰⁵

However, no serious study, paying attention to different modes of examination such as the proportions of terminal examinations and coursework, was conducted by the Secondary Examinations Council (SEC), the DES, HMI or the Examination Boards of the numbers of passes, grade by grade, for the last few years of the GCE O-level and CSE and the first few years of the GCSE. That this was not done is a matter of concern. It is made worse by the incompleteness of the statistics published at the time by the DES and the GCSE Boards.

The situation for vocational qualifications is even less satisfactory in that virtually no systematic information has been published until very recently. Nevertheless there are indications that many of the more traditional vocational qualifications are of a higher standard and have a better reputation amongst both employers and students than the newer NVQs.

Lead Times, Policy Changes & Standards

Changes in education take place over very long timescales. For example, those pupils whose GCSE results were discussed in Chapter 1 were 16 years old in 1997. This means that they had started compulsory education 11 years earlier in 1986, before the GCSE had been implemented or the National Curriculum existed or any of the other changes in the 1988 Education Reform Act had taken place.

It follows that attempts to assess cause and effect in education are made more difficult by the very long lead times between changes in policy and the effects that they have on standards. Moreover, changes which are introduced with the aim of raising standards may in fact be effective even if this is not immediately apparent. They may, for example, have slowed a steeper decline that was under way and would have taken place if they had not been introduced.

Where does the responsibility lie?

Two major questions need an answer: who was responsible for such large-scale under achievement? How is the situation to be put right?

It seems inconceivable that those in a position to know what standards were being achieved – teachers, LEA advisers, HMI, teacher trainers and civil servants – were unaware that standards were being undermined on such a dramatic scale. (See Box 2, *Another Part of the Problem*).

This willful ignorance may help to explain the long lasting hostility to the publication of information about standards, especially for individual schools, and the lack of any culture of evaluation amongst policy makers. It is not very likely therefore that LEAs will be able to put right, in the foreseeable future, what has been going so badly wrong for so long.

¹⁰⁵ These public assurances make it even less easy to understand why the Boards failed to produce scripts for the period before 1987 when the *Standards over Time* enquiry was set up in 1995.

Box 2

Another Part of the Problem

These important statements or comments were made in the course of a single meeting¹⁰⁶ of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) in September 1996:

- Mathematics is a disaster area – not only for the best A level students but right the way down the age range;
- The questions quoted in the report on GCSE Mathematics were very easy for a paper on which C and even B grades could be awarded – one was 15% of 120 with a calculator – and were at the level which might be expected of an 11 year old;
- Everybody agrees that the standard of Mathematics reached by GNVQ students is quite inadequate as a preparation for Mathematics based university courses;
- We should move the primary National Curriculum in the direction of more emphasis on tables and sums and less on more advanced mathematical topics – the subject should not be called Mathematics at primary level but something different which reflects this;
- We all know, everybody knows, that pupils these days, even the most able, emerge from many years of schooling knowing very little about grammar and punctuation in Modern Languages;
- This is also true in English – the Chairman asked the Chief Executive to report on many able students' poor command of English at a Classics seminar in the previous summer.

Many of these statements or comments were made or endorsed by the Chairman¹⁰⁷ and were not challenged by members. But they did not find their way into the minutes of meetings or into public comments or reports from SCAA or even into confidential reports to ministers.

This public silence about how the state education system has failed so many for so long now needs to be broken.

106 24/9/96; see letter from JM to Sir Ron Dearing, 25/9/96.

107 Sir Ron Dearing, now Lord Dearing.

CHAPTER FOUR

HOW CAN WE PUT THINGS RIGHT?

THE CHALLENGES NOW FOR EDUCATION are to reduce the current massive underachievement and to raise average national standards to the levels which the new knowledge-intensive societies of the future are likely to require. Adoption of the following three principles – none of which are anything other than standard practice in any other walk of life – would do much to rectify the current situation.

1. Publish standards annually

The first principle must be to set standards at all levels of education, to evaluate continually so as to monitor standards systematically and effectively and, most important, to publish that information each year, school by school, or institution by institution.

2. Link policies to standards

The second key principle is that any educational policy should be related to the standards achieved, preferably by collecting hard information about such standards, and that all policies, either existing or proposed, should be evaluated in terms of improved standards.

Such evaluation will mean collecting, analysing, and publishing at public expense, considerably greater amounts of information than ever before. The means to do so are now available. What is lacking, all too often, is the will.

3. Link money spent to standards

Evaluation of standards achieved is particularly important when discussing education spending. It is easy to assume that spending more on education is automatically desirable. But this begs the important question of how effectively money is being used. In the language of the economist, investing in education is one thing but making that investment productive is quite another.

Value for money therefore needs to play a much greater part in evaluating educational policies in future.

4.1 WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE NOW?

Raise expectations

The massive underachievement by so many schools may have led to complacency in those schools which are achieving at or above the national average. In this connection, the existence of higher standards in independent and grammar schools, of which many parents are aware, is capable of having a major influence on the standards which are reached in state schools, both primary and secondary. Expectations and standards therefore need to be raised as quickly as possible and from as early as possible in a pupil's school career.

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Basic Reading & Arithmetic

The main priority must be the initial teaching of reading and arithmetic from the age of five onwards. The current Government is trying to focus on these topics, with the introduction into primary schools of the non-statutory Literacy hour in 1998, followed by the Numeracy hour in 1999 – each building upon the pilot Literacy and Numeracy projects in 24 LEAs pioneered in 1996 by the previous Government.

This Government has failed to introduce rigorous reading and arithmetic tests for 7 year olds. It should do so – and publish the results for each school so that parents can know which schools are performing adequately.

But the Government has failed to introduce objective and adequately demanding standardised tests of reading and arithmetic at the age of seven. Nor does it publish the results school by school in National Performance Tables. It is the publication of these results – the informing of parents directly as to how the schools which they might choose are actually performing – which is the key to giving all our children a sound start to their education.

This is all the more vital given recent American research which documents the enormous variations in the number of words read each year by 10 year olds – from about 8,000 words for the bottom 10% to nearly 2 million words for the top 10%. The research also shows that, with other factors including both general ability and reading ability held constant, those who read more make better educational progress and build up a greater stock of general knowledge at an early age which gives them a flying start in later more specialised studies.¹⁰⁸

Key Stages 1 & 2

OFSTED have recently commented on low expectations at both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

It may well be that the Key Stage 1 test results produce too optimistic a picture of pupil progress. Take reading: level 2 is the national expectation for seven year olds; level 2 covers a broad range of attainment and is subdivided into three grades. Four-fifths of pupils reach grade 2C which is the least demanding, about three-fifths reach grade 2B and only about two-fifths reach the most demanding grade 2A. If, as many believe, grade 2C is pitched too low, then the test does not represent a proper stepping-stone to Key Stage 2 and may be depressing teacher and pupil expectation.¹⁰⁹

It has now been publicly acknowledged that Level 2C is too easy for most 7 year olds. In a letter to schools in the autumn of 1998, QCA told them that, if

¹⁰⁸ A Cunningham & K Stanovich, *What Reading Does for the Mind* in *The American Educator*, Spring/Summer 1998 (the journal of the American Federation of Teachers); the article also stresses the much greater range of vocabulary in reading materials compared with speech. It is difficult to imagine a teachers' union in Britain publishing anything like the series of forthright and well researched articles in this issue.

¹⁰⁹ *The Annual Report of HMCI for 1996-97*, The Stationery Office, February 1998, p 13.

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they were to achieve the Government's targets¹¹⁰ in Mathematics and English at Key Stage 2, they should expect their pupils to achieve level 2B or 2A rather than Level 2C. This was based on a simple comparison of the proportions of pupils obtaining the relevant Levels at the ages of 7 and 11 respectively. However, although schools have been informed of this, it has not led to any significant change in what is happening in National Curriculum Assessment at Key Stage 1 at the age of 7. The clear implications of the QCA letter is that the current standards for Level 2 at the age of 7 are not high enough. The Government and the DfEE should say this publicly at once in such a way that everybody is aware of it. In addition, the National Curriculum tests should be modified accordingly.¹¹¹

For Key Stage 2, OFSTED said:

The proportion of correct responses from pupils in the national sample provides a national norm, but these results themselves highlight significant weaknesses in number. For example 24% of Year 6 pupils could not multiply a two-digit number by 2, 56% could not subtract two sums of money, and 86% could not find a given percentage of 300 metres. Meeting the national norm set by pupils in the national standardisation sample does not necessarily signal high or even satisfactory achievement in number.¹¹²

It is the combination of testing and national publication that has enabled the audit of national standards, summarised in Chapter 2, to be made and has caused a change of direction in the educational thinking of the Government. Given the conflicts between the very different approaches to education which are currently endemic in the world of education, nothing less than the publication of results is likely to enable expectations to be raised significantly and more soundly-based teaching strategies to become re-established.

Urgent Remedial Action for 11 year olds

A second major priority is the need for some kind of "crash-course" for those pupils at the age of 11 who have been the main victims of the current situation – that is, those who arrive at secondary school with a reading age of about 8 or 9. This substantial underachievement of many pupils – and especially their inability to read easily – means that they are not capable of being taught and of learning the main content of the National Curriculum subjects. What such pupils need is a special intensive reading programme as soon as they enter secondary school.

More & Better National Performance Tables

The National Performance Tables should continue to be published, school by school, for results at 11. In addition, they should now start being published for results at the age of 14, too, where the need is, if anything, greater than at 11 because the spread of attainment has increased considerably by this age.

All such tables, including those for seven year olds should include three extra columns:

110 80% of 11 year olds to reach level 4 in English and 75% to reach level 4 in Mathematics by 2002.

111 See further discussion in Chapter 4.2.

112 *The Teaching of Number in 3 Inner-urban LEAs*, OFSTED, September 1997, p 56.

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- columns for average class sizes and expenditures per pupil alongside each school's National Curriculum and GCSE results so that policies can be evaluated by everybody;
- a measure of the average standards reached by pupils when they enter the school so that proper progress can be seen to take place.

The crucial factor for individual pupils is not their social background, but their educational potential and their attainments.

It is time to stop using inadequate social indicators such as the up-take of, or entitlement to, free school meals or even direct measures of social class or parental education.¹¹³ The key factor for individual pupils is not their origins or social background, but their educational potential and attainments.

4.2 STANDARDS IN NATIONAL CURRICULUM TESTS & PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS

National Curriculum Tests and Public Examinations are the key to setting and maintaining national standards in schools. It is therefore vital that standards in these tests and examinations are maintained and, where detailed analyses show that current standards are too low, expectations are increased.

The standard and demand of individual questions and test items in current National Curriculum tests needs to be improved: it is often only by looking at the individual questions that the current low levels of demand may be clearly identified. In this connection there are two practices which need to be curtailed – trialling, and the influence of teachers' panels. Trialling can prevent standards being raised from existing low norms if items 'with low facility values' – in other words, items which pupils find difficult – are systematically removed even if they might reasonably be included on the basis of the relevant programme of study or of comparisons with pupil performance in other countries.¹¹⁴ Teachers' panels can also lead to the removal of difficult or demanding questions and test items; this is possibly most relevant at GCSE and

¹¹³ It is not a pupil's social class that is important but his or her inherent ability and prior attainment. Once prior attainment is included in analyses of pupil performance, the contribution of social class to indices of academic performance drops appreciably. In any case there are no national data, published school by school, for social class so it is not possible to include this factor in school by school analyses of the type mainly presented here. The use of eligibility for or take-up of free school meals is unsatisfactory since there are no national criteria for eligibility; they vary from LEA to LEA. It is argued above (see footnote 8 in Chapter 1) that prior attainment, school by school, should be included as a matter of routine in all performance tables – collected on the annual Form 7 return completed by every school. Then we could all do the sort of analyses which are suggested and many others too. Everybody could then make what allowances they thought appropriate for this factor when they considered the actual results of schools.

¹¹⁴ S Chandler, *A Comparison of Public Expectation of Achievement in Mathematics in England & Wales and Bavaria*, in *Teaching Mathematics and its Applications*, Vol. 16, No 1, 1997; S Prais, *How did English schools really perform in the 1995 International Comparisons in Mathematics*, NIESR, July 1997.

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maybe at A level where the weeding out of more demanding questions on syllabus topics in the papers of one board can lead in subsequent years to a similar lowering of expectations in other boards; it may however also be a problem in National Curriculum tests if test agencies give too much weight to teacher opinion.

In mathematics, the use of calculators should be restricted severely. Formulae sheets in all National Curriculum Tests and Public Examinations should also be rarely allowed. Similar policies are needed in other subjects concerning the use of additional aids such as pre-release materials or the use of books and other texts or the prefiguring of questions in what are supposed to be unseen written examinations. For calculators of all kinds the principle to be observed is simple – no calculators should be allowed in any mathematics examination in order to ensure that pupils develop the requisite mathematical ability underlying the use of calculators. If the specific skills of calculator use need to be developed and tested, this should be done in separate tests or tasks specifically designed to assess these skills.

Comparisons should also be made between National Curriculum standards (at Key Stage 2 as well as Key Stage 3) compared with standards in independent schools as exemplified by the syllabuses and papers for Common Entrance examinations at 11, 12 and 13.

National Curriculum Tests

The introduction of externally set National Curriculum tests – and the publication each year of the results, school by school, in National Performance tables – was a major achievement of the Conservative Government in the 1980s and 1990s. Now we need to review those tests, to improve their precision and to raise standards where necessary so as to meet the requirements of all pupils in the 2000s.

The current eight level scale is largely indefensible; level descriptors are too vague, it is virtually impossible to have, for example, the same level 3 at the ages of 7 and 14 while the levels themselves are too broad and therefore imprecise – especially at KS1. The scale therefore needs to be replaced by something more defensible and rational.

The statutory Level Descriptors are still extraordinarily imprecise and even vacuous. The question to be asked is “Will they pass the ‘card shuffle’ test?” In this test, the level descriptions are put on cards which are shuffled and ‘experts’, teachers and others are asked to put them in order. This test was failed by many during the last National Curriculum revision in 1994 – Sir Ron Dearing refused to try it. The abolition of Statutory Teacher Assessment would make level descriptors unnecessary and would save teachers much time.

The lack of precision is particularly acute at 7 (Key Stage 1) where, both by design and in practice, about two thirds of all pupils are at level 2. In order to increase the discrimination of the tests, level 2 was split into three sub-levels in 1994 with roughly equal numbers in Level 2A (the highest), Level 2B and Level 2C. This was done without any statutory authority. Levels 2A, 2B and 2C are supposed to be reported to governors and parents but are seldom used in official reports or compilations of data. In autumn 1998, QCA wrote to all schools, at the instigation of the DfEE Standards and Effectiveness Unit, to tell them that while 80% of pupils achieved Level 2 at 7, only about 60% achieved Level 4 at 11 and that this same figure, about 60%, achieved Level 2B or better at 7. So, if schools

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were to achieve the Government's target of about 80% at Level 4 at 11, they should be getting 80% to reach Level 2B or better at 7. In other words Level 2C is too low to be meaningful.

These changes in Levels and aspirations have now been written into leaflets for parents and governors and into QCA reports for schools but have not been formally incorporated into the revision of the National Curriculum.

The National Curriculum now needs to be revised so that proper standardised tests of reading and arithmetic can be given to every 7 year old and the results in terms of finely calibrated reading and arithmetic 'ages' can be given to every pupil and to every school. Then everybody – parents, governors, the public, LEAs and MPs – will be able to see easily and precisely what results are being achieved in every school in the country.

At Key Stages 2 and 3, the eight level scale should be superseded by tests with say five or seven grades A-E or A-G at each stage – i.e. separate grades at 11 and at 14.

Independent Review

Many people – parents, employers, universities and many teachers – believe that in a number of significant respects standards and rigour in public examinations in the major subjects of the curriculum have not been maintained. They suspect that substantial grade inflation has taken place both at 16+ in GCSE and at 18+ in A levels, especially since the introduction of the GCSE in 1988. There is much evidence which supports this conclusion some of which was summarised in Chapters 3.2 and 3.7.

A small Independent Standing Commission on Public Examinations should be set up with the responsibility to investigate standards in all kinds of public examinations and in National Curriculum tests and where possible to ensure that they compare favourably with international standards. The Commission should have the authority to make recommendations which would restore standards and improve them. The Commission should include subject specialists and must be independent of the existing examination boards and other awarding bodies and of the QCA and the DfEE.

Coursework

Coursework in public examinations should be strictly limited and kept to a minimum. Where possible it should be externally set and externally assessed and every effort should be made to ensure that it is the unaided work of the individual student or pupil. Grades for Coursework should be reported separately from Grades in externally set written examinations.

A Broader Core Curriculum

Pupils and schools should be encouraged to broaden the curriculum in basic subjects by the introduction of a new certificate for those who obtain five GCSE passes at grades A* to C in five designated subjects – say English, Mathematics, a Science, a modern Language and History or Geography; the percentage of the cohort obtaining this certificate would be shown in a separate column in National Performance tables.

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4.3 NATIONAL CURRICULUM CHANGES

The main priority must be to retain and enhance standards in the core subjects so that the data from the associated National Curriculum tests can continue to be available school by school across the country.¹¹⁵

The primary focus at Key Stage 1 needs to be on the foundations of reading, including phonics and blending from the start, and arithmetic with the emphasis on plenty of drilled practice in counting, mental calculations including single and two digit numbers, and simple systematic written calculations. A small amount of descriptive and observational general science should be included.

At Key Stage 2, the main foci in English should be wide reading of all kinds; expansion of vocabulary; and the development of writing emphasising the basics of Standard English, including grammar, punctuation and spelling. Arithmetical calculations should be taught with plenty of drilled practice and should include mental calculations, systematic written calculations, the learning of tables, and calculations derived from problems described verbally.¹¹⁶ Some descriptive general science should be specified including observations and some simple quantitative experiments. Other subjects can be grouped together possibly by developing an English version of the cultural literacy approach now being implemented in the core knowledge schools in the USA.¹¹⁷

At Key Stage 3, the statutory English tests should retain the Shakespeare test, which has done more to develop the reading of Shakespeare in all schools than any other initiative as well as being popular with pupils, and should continue to include the effective testing of grammar, spelling & punctuation. In mathematics, arithmetic, algebra & geometry should be specified as separate areas of study and should continue into Key Stage 4. In Science, Physics, Chemistry & Biology should be specified as separate areas of study and should each include the current relevant content from both Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 together with appropriate experimental work. A sound foundation for all in Mathematics and the separate sciences would mean that technology could be dropped as a mandatory requirement.

115 This is much more important than attempting to teach explicitly about citizenship or Personal and Social Education.

116 H Bierhoff, *Laying the Foundations of Numeracy: a comparison of primary school textbooks in Britain, Germany and Switzerland*, Discussion Paper no. 90, National Institute for Educational and Social Research (NIESR), January 1996.

117 This programme specifies, year by year in a sequential way, the core knowledge – drawn from traditional curricula in literature, geography, history and fine arts – which is taken for granted by competent educated writers and speakers. Pupils therefore need to acquire this core knowledge both to understand such writers and speakers and also to provide the necessary foundation for the higher-order reading, writing and thinking skills essential for subsequent academic and vocational success. Such a programme could start in a limited way in Key Stage 1 and develop further in Key Stage 2. See E D Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy*, Vintage Books, 1988 together with E D Hirsch (ed), *The Core Knowledge Series*, Doubleday, 1991-96; the US version also includes our core subjects – English language, mathematics and the natural sciences – under core knowledge.

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At GCSE/Key Stage 4, the existing emphasis on Double Award Science needs to be reduced particularly given the very substantial evidence of the superiority of separate science subjects in preparing pupils for A levels in Physics, Chemistry and Biology (see Chapter 1.4). As in Scotland, pupils should be allowed to take Physics and/or Chemistry and/or Biology or Double Award Science or Single Award Science. They should not be required to take all three separate sciences, as at present, if they do not take Double Award or Single Award Science. The current policy is severely handicapping many pupils in state schools and thus, indirectly, giving advantages to many pupils in independent schools who are not subject to this requirement.

Technology (or Design and Technology) should cease to be a compulsory National Curriculum subject. It would be much better to enhance the potential of all pupils to understand and use technology by raising expectations and standards in Mathematics, together with greater flexibility in the National Curriculum science requirements, as suggested above, and by introducing specific technical and vocational options either via separate specific pathways or separate schools or both. (See below).

Information and Communication Technology

The current detailed specifications for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) should be severely pruned. Pupils and students should have some familiarity with ICT but it is not essential that this should be carried out throughout each year of schooling or that teaching or instruction using such technology should be an integral part of the teaching of every subject or even of the more technically oriented subjects such as the sciences and mathematics.

Each pupil or student should be familiar with some of the essential skills required in using information and communications technology such as the ability:

- to touch-type;
- to use a word processor;
- to manipulate a spread sheet and a data-base;
- to develop the maturity and judgement to enable them to adapt to and to use the world of modern information technology without being overwhelmed or dominated by it – a process which a sound grounding in traditional subjects should be able to provide.

Differentiation after 14

After the age of 14, the existing academic pathway should continue to be available, as discussed above, with public examinations at 16 and 18 but with rather more flexibility in subject choice than is currently available.

Alongside the academic pathway, a specific technical and vocational pathway should be introduced for 14 to 19-year-olds. This would require substantial development and considerable additional capital resources. These changes should follow the principles of the successful technical and vocational education systems in the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland and should have the following features:

- (a) Qualifications and training programmes should be designed with the needs of young people (14-19 year olds) primarily in mind; different

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arrangements, including different ways of achieving the same qualifications should be developed for older people.

- (b) Qualifications should be capable of being achieved either by a part-time or a full-time route. As much emphasis as possible should be given to developing qualifications involving time spent both in a working environment and in a college or training school similar to the dual system in many Continental countries.
- (c) Syllabuses or programmes of study should be prescribed. They need to be consistently up-dated; professional input is required in a continuing way in this process and in the processes of assessment.
- (d) The length of time which it is expected for the completion of such qualifications should be specified. It may also be desirable to specify how much time should be spent on each aspect of the syllabuses.
- (e) Syllabuses should contain sections which deal with the specific craft or skills relevant to the profession involved and should also contain general educational requirements specified with a content and at a standard appropriate to the particular craft, vocation or profession.
- (f) Such core skills as can be clearly identified – number (mathematics), communication (English), other languages, information technology – should be separately specified and assessed in a way that is independent of the particular area of application; where appropriate, part of the assessment could be done in ways which integrate the particular core skill with specific areas of professional expertise.
- (g) Assessment should be credible, cost-effective and reliable. It should involve the following three components:
 1. External written and unseen examinations and tests. These would sample the syllabuses and ensure that students would need to cover the majority of what is specified.
 2. External practical and/or oral tests.
 3. Internal continuous course work or work-place assessments which would involve some kind of model assessments in addition to reports on the competencies and effectiveness of students in their professional areas.

Such a programme would be cost-effective, would free teachers to teach and skilled professionals and craftsmen to pass on their skills and knowledge and could be implemented effectively, kept up-to-date and in close contact with developing practice, even in fast developing professional areas.¹¹⁸

4.3 VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Once the basic quality of initial education has been significantly improved – especially in reading, arithmetic and training in systematic work habits, Level 1

118 Some steps in this direction are set out in *Skills for All: Proposals for a National Skills Agenda* – Final Report of the National Skills Task Force, DfEE, July 2000 but much more needs to be done.

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vocational qualifications could be phased out and expectations and standards raised for the other levels.¹¹⁹

Existing vocational GCSEs should be maintained and developed. New vocational qualifications, which are externally set and assessed, should also be developed as an integral part of the specific technical and vocational pathways for 14-19-year-olds (see above). In due course these new qualifications should replace existing GNVQs and NVQs. In the interim GNVQs and NVQs should continue to be reformed and improved.

More generally the priorities should be:

- to collect and publish each year, promptly and regularly, data on the numbers of individuals in each annual cohort achieving each vocational qualification by level; these data must be able to distinguish individuals who obtain more than one qualification and not to count them more than once.
- to develop an analogue of the continental 'dual system' of vocational education and training – involving *both* organised and coherent on-the-job training *and* well specified educational courses, which include both specifically vocational courses, theoretical and practical, and general educational courses, which must include English and Mathematics;
- to make a substantial element of unseen external assessment a requirement for all parts – written theoretical, practical, oral or on-the-job – of any publicly funded and nationally recognised qualifications;
- to retain and update the surviving traditional vocational qualifications which meet these criteria;
- to concentrate primarily on vocational qualifications for 16-19 year olds – or even 14-19 year olds – via a technical and vocational pathway in schools.¹²⁰

Once this core framework has been satisfactorily achieved, arrangements for older students, adults, lifelong learners and the accreditation of prior learning can and should be incorporated.

119 J Marks, *Value for Money in Education: Opportunity Costs & the Relationship between Standards and Resources*, Campaign for Real Education, June 1992; S J Prais, *Productivity, Education and Training: An International Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, 1995; H Bierhoff & S Prais, *From School to Productive Work: Britain & Switzerland Compared*, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

120 J Marks, *Vocational Education, Training and Qualifications in Britain*, Institute of Economic Affairs, July 1996.

CHAPTER FIVE

HOW CAN WE KEEP THINGS RIGHT?

...does political sensitivity in any way justify failure to monitor the most important reform in secondary education since 1902? The answer must surely be No. Neither empirically or morally. Empirically it remains unjustifiable because without adequate up-to-date information we can only discuss the issue in terms of prejudice... Morally unjustifiable also, because, without such enquiries and information, we are, in effect, asking parents to endorse our convictions, beliefs and prejudices either for or against comprehensive education, without the opportunity of making their own judgement on the development of the national system.

Guy Neave, Educational Researcher, 1979.¹²¹

THE PRINCIPLES SET OUT IN CHAPTER 4 – that standards and expectations need to be monitored and raised right across the board, and that policies should be evaluated in terms of the standards achieved – should be obvious and almost commonsensical. Surely such fundamentals do not need to be spelt out?

But this is far from true. The quotation above shows that these principles were not followed in 1969 – in the context of comprehensive reorganisation. Its lessons were not learnt then and they are still not being learnt now in 2000.

Consider, for example, what the Government is doing in trying to implement one of the five early pledges given during the 1997 General Election campaign – the commitment to reduce class sizes for 5 to 7 year-olds to 30 or under. This pledge runs counter to almost all existing evidence concerning standards and is being implemented in a way which is both massively bureaucratic and extremely expensive. And, at present, it is not being evaluated to see whether standards improve as a result which presumably is why the pledge was made.

Not only does the pledge to reduce class sizes run counter to all existing evidence on standards. In addition, its impact is not being monitored. No one will know whether standards will improve as a result of a massively bureaucratic and expensive political initiative.

This Chapter will outline why centrally imposed policies such as the class size pledge fail while decentralising policies – such as national performance tables, enhanced parental choice, and devolving power to schools such as grant maintained schools – succeed.

¹²¹ G Neave, *Sense and Sensitivity: The Case of Comprehensive Education*, in *Quantitative Sociology Newsletter*, 21, 1979.

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It will then examine some of the broader issues underlying current policies concerning selective schools and the extension of educational opportunities to all with particular emphasis on those who come from poorer or disadvantaged backgrounds.

Finally it will suggest a new, more inclusive and open approach to élitism and excellence and a broader understanding of what a truly comprehensive education system entails.

5.1 HOW NOT TO DO IT: THE INFANT SCHOOL CLASS SIZE PLEDGE

The two major problems with the infant school class size pledge are:

- there is virtually no evidence that reducing class sizes from say 32 to 30 will have any effect on standards;
- there are major practical problems in implementing the pledge.

Class Size & Standards

The study that is usually quoted, the STAR study in Tennessee,¹²² showed a very small improvement, which did not last more than two to three years, for a reduction in class size from about 25 to 15 – something which is not on offer because it would cost far too much. Moreover a recent US review¹²³ of the evidence showed no correlation between class size and standards while, in this country, Audit Commission¹²⁴ data for 1997 show a positive correlation between higher LEA standards at 11 and more primary school pupils in classes over 30.

Class Size – the practical problems

The pledge is vastly expensive and is having many unforeseen side-effects. It is also having a harmful effect on standards primarily because of all the money and energy that is being consumed in trying to make it happen. Moreover the statutory implementation of the pledge shows how complex and bureaucratic statutory arrangements have to be to implement what seems to be a simple government policy.

Under the first four sections of the School Standards and Framework Act (1998), the Secretary of State has taken powers not only to prescribe maximum class sizes, but also:

- to prescribe the dates when the maximum limits must be met;
- to put an obligation on governors and the LEA to comply with these limits;
- to put an obligation on the LEA to state how they will comply and to carry out a consultation;
- to determine the composition of these statements and the consultation process by issuing guidance;
- to oblige numerous other prescribed bodies and people to provide information to the LEA for the preparation of statements;

¹²² S J Prais, *Class Size & Learning: The Tennessee experiment: what follows?*, NIESR, 1996.

¹²³ E Hanushek, *The Evidence on Class Size*, Rochester University, New York, 1998.

¹²⁴ *Local Authority 96-97 Performance Indicators*, Audit Commission, March 1998; J Marks, *Value for Money in LEA Schools*, Centre for Policy Studies, December 1998.

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- to determine the date by which statements must be submitted;
- to refuse approval for the LEA's statement and to oblige them to prepare a revised one;
- to oblige the LEA to have regard to the Secretary of State's reason for not approving their first statement when preparing their second;
- to provide grants to LEAs to cover any expenditure incurred in complying with the limits;
- to make the provision of grants to LEAs conditional upon their meeting his requirements;
- to oblige LEAs to comply with any requirements stipulated in grants.

But what is not provided by statute, and was explicitly rejected by the Government in parliament during the passage of the Act, is any attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of the pledge in raising standards.

5.2 HOW TO DO IT – POLICIES WHICH WORK

Leave what works well alone

The situation is so bad that the first priority must be to leave existing good schools alone – whether they be independent or state schools of whatever type – and to continue to inform parents about standards in all types of schools so that they may choose the school which they think is best for their children, for choice without information is blind.

Policies for Change

The key to effective change is to devise policies which do not require constant direction from central or local government – policies which work while you sleep rather than failing to work even while you are awake and trying to impose them 24 hours a day.

Successful examples of policies which work include:

1. Performance tables

In 1980, the new Conservative Government of Margaret Thatcher sought to implement a pledge, made in the 1979 general election campaign, to publish examination results school by school. The educational establishment united in trying to force the Government to drop its proposals. Leaders of the National Union of Teachers and the Headmasters' Conference went together to try to persuade the Education Secretary to change his mind.¹²⁵ But they failed and the world of education was changed forever. The informal evaluation of schools by parents with school-age children and by the public – which has always taken place, based on a multiplicity of impressions, anecdotes and direct experiences – is now routinely informed by information about school standards.

Hardly anybody now advocates repealing these provisions which have enabled a degree of public accountability to be achieved which was never previously possible. The challenge now is to extend that democratic accountability into ever wider areas of policy.

¹²⁵ Those involved were, respectively, Fred Jarvis, Ian Beer and Mark Carlisle.

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2. Grant Maintained Schools

The existence of grant maintained schools – or even the possibility that schools might become grant maintained – had a salutary restraining effect on LEAs. The previously arrogant and closed culture of many LEAs was transformed in a very short time, largely by the grant maintained schools policy.

3. Policies based on choice

Policies based on parental choice have had and will have the effect of focusing the attention of schools on what parents want for their children's education, always providing that most of the money follows the child as it largely has in recent years.

Critics of choice often concentrate on the problems to which it leads. But government actions, either to impose their own solutions or to try to correct what are seen as problems of choice, may frequently be even more damaging and open to criticism.¹²⁶

We therefore need to compare the imperfections and successes of the centrally planned and organised systems preferred by the present Government with the characteristics of a more choice based system.

For example, on the class size pledge, it would be better – and more democratic – to give parents and public the information they need by including a column on average class size in all school performance tables, as suggested in Chapter 4, and letting the individual decisions of millions of parents and thousands of schools determine what happens.

Finally in putting these principles into practice, the vocabulary of education needs to be changed in two major respects – concerning comprehensive education and élitism and excellence.

5.3 A NEW COMPREHENSIVE POLICY

The fundamental, if often unstated, claim of education policy in most LEAs is that secondary school children should go to their local (community) comprehensive school because they will receive there as good an education as in any other comprehensive school. This claim is fraudulent. The publication of examination results has exposed the very large differences in results between similar neighbouring schools. This information has been in the public domain since 1981, following the 1980 Education Act, but has only become widely known after the publication of school performance tables from 1992 onwards.

Similarly policy for primary schools has traditionally assumed that children should go to their nearest local primary school again because they will receive as good an education as in any other primary school. This claim too is fraudulent but this is much less widely known because the national publication of test results at seven years old has not yet happened and so the very large differences in results between similar neighbouring schools – even after only two years of compulsory schooling – have not yet been clearly exposed to the public. The variations in results at eleven – which are published nationally – are largely a result of those at seven.

¹²⁶ A. Seldon, *Corrigible Capitalism, Incurable Socialism*, Institute of Economic Affairs, 1980; A Coulson, *Market Education: the Unknown History*, Transaction Publishers, 1999.

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Thus the old comprehensive policy is a *de facto* fraud – as is the policy of neighbourhood primary schools – precisely because the variations in standards are so large that many pupils are condemned to suffer in inadequate schools thus damaging their life chances for many years or even forever.

And the comprehensive policy is also a fraud because, as we saw in Chapters 1 & 3, a more diverse selective system can achieve more for all and not just for those who are selected for academic schools – especially if a stratum of technical schools¹²⁷ is made widely available as in Germany. A properly constructed selective system in the coming years need not and will not have all the problems of the earlier selective system of the 1950s.¹²⁸

Surely those who aspired to the laudable aims of improving the educational opportunities available to working-class children ought to have ensured that the policies they advocated – such as comprehensive reorganisation – were properly evaluated?

Advocates of a fully comprehensive system of schools have given many reasons to support their views – not all of which are mutually consistent.¹²⁹ But central among them has always been the claim that the change would improve overall educational standards and, in particular, increase the educational opportunities available for pupils from working-class backgrounds. Sincere advocates of these laudable aims ought to have encouraged evaluation of the effects of comprehensive reorganisation and, in particular, should welcome any evidence which throws light on the achievement of these aims. But sadly this has not happened. Far too many comprehensive enthusiasts have failed to initiate research into or monitor the effects of their chosen policies and have eschewed rather than encouraged comparison with the former selective system.

There is therefore a great inconsistency at the heart of the arguments used to justify a system of comprehensive schools. In the early days of the policy, we were told that comprehensive schools were needed because selective schools held back many pupils, especially those from the lower social classes. More recently massive efforts, albeit unsuccessful, have gone into trying to show that the poorer average results obtained by comprehensive schools can be explained

127 Technical schools were one of the casualties of the changeover to comprehensives in the 1960s and 1970s; see M Sanderson, *The Missing Stratum: Technical School Education in England, 1900-1990s*, Athlone Press, 1994.

128 Selective schools are, and always have been, popular with the public too. In October 1994, an opinion poll for the BBC *Education Matters* programme – to the surprise of the programme's producers – found that 55% of the population wanted grammar schools reintroduced around the country, thus confirming once more opinion poll findings over the last 40 years.

129 B Shaw, *Comprehensive Schooling – The Impossible Dream*, Blackwell, 1983, gives a detailed account of the often conflicting aims of the comprehensive lobby and the processes by which the policy of wholesale comprehensivisation was forced through despite opposition from teachers and the public.

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by the lower social class of their pupils. This inconsistency seems to indicate an unfortunate but increasingly probable conclusion – that the comprehensive revolution may have handicapped the education of the very people it was mainly meant to help.

So let us return to the noble aspirations – which were never forgotten or abandoned in Northern Ireland – of Sidney Webb:

What we have learnt, gradually and slowly, is that nothing worthy of the name of a national system of education can be built up out of schools of a single undifferentiated type, however numerous and however excellent they may be.¹³⁰

and of R H Tawney:

...equality of educational provision is not identity of educational provision, and it is important that there should be the greatest possible diversity of type amongst secondary schools.¹³¹

This was also the vision of Ellen Wilkinson, Minister of Education¹³² in 1946 in the post Second World War Labour Government:

There are differences in intelligence among children as well as among adults. There are distinctions of mind and these are imposed by nature. I am afraid that that is a fact which we cannot get over. Children will be different in bent, and in intellectual capacity. There is a purpose in education and that is to draw out and develop the best in every child. Because children differ in their intellectual make up, it seems to me that different provisions must be made by the Ministry of Education.¹³³

Let us also put behind us the rancour and divisiveness epitomised by this statement from Anthony Crosland, Labour Secretary of State for Education in 1966:

If it's the last thing I do, I'm going to destroy every f***ing grammar school in England. And Wales. And Northern Ireland.¹³⁴

And let us recognise the major contributions to higher standards made over the years not just by grammar and secondary modern schools but also by the independent schools. Any new comprehensive policy for education must include the education provided outside the state system – in independent schools of all kinds and, if parents so choose, at home. The unremitting hostility to all selective and independent schools shown by so many in state education over so many years must become a thing of the past as we recognise the contribution and the value we all gain as a culture, a society and a country from any raising of educational standards.

130 S Webb, *Secondary Education* in Brennan (ed), *Education for National Efficiency*, p 132; quoted in A Wooldridge, *Measuring the Mind*, Cambridge University Press, p 185.

131 R Tawney, *Secondary Education for all*, The Hambledon Press, 1988 (originally published in 1924 for the Labour Party), p 66.

132 She also spoke of bringing about a 'Third Programme' society.

133 Betty Vernon, *Ellen Wilkinson 1891-1947*, Croom Helm, 1982, p 56.

134 *Tony Crosland* by Susan Crosland, Jonathan Cape, 1982, p. 149.

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5.4 BACK TO BASICS

We should always remember some fundamental truths. Education should be available to all according to their abilities and aptitudes and not their social origins. It should give a thorough grounding in basic skills such as reading and arithmetic so as to enable people to acquire many skills which are useful or even essential in their lives and to open doors to the glories of our culture and civilisation and to those of other civilisations and cultures too.

Such doors should be open to all and not just to a few. Access to the highest standards that have been achieved in the arts, the social sciences and the natural sciences should be widely available. For both cultural and pragmatic reasons we need élites. But they must be open élites – with the opportunities to scale the heights available to all no matter from where they come. At present, as we have seen, these highly desirable aims are a long way from being achieved.

But if standards become central to everything we do, as suggested in Chapter 4, it will once again become natural to talk of excellence at all levels of the education system, and for élitism to become a term of praise rather than condemnation – provided access to “the best that is known and thought in the world” is open to all no matter from where in society they come.¹³⁵

And it will become impossible for the present situation – in which about 40% of pupils enter secondary school unable to read well enough to cope with the National Curriculum – to continue for much longer.

Policies involving more information and choice are more democratic, fairer, and provide better educational value for the massive and increasing resources, in real terms, which are spent on education year by year than can any centrally imposed system. If there are clashes of philosophy, arising from the different views of the nature of education described above or for any other reason, they should be resolved by public accountability and choice and not by imposing solutions by central or local diktat. An open democratic society needs a fair, open and democratic education system based on information, choice and equality of opportunity.

As Pericles of Athens wrote more than 2,000 years ago:

Although only a few may originate a policy, we are all able to judge it.

But only if we insist that Government gives us the information we need to do so.

135 Matthew Arnold, *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time*.

APPENDIX 1

STANDARDS OF ACHIEVEMENT IN SCOTLAND

A number of recent official reports – four from the Assessment of Achievement Programme (AAP) for Scotland, three from Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) for Scotland and one from TIMSS (see above) – show that there is more cause for concern about standards of attainment in Scotland than is usually acknowledged. These reports are:

Assessment of Achievement Programme

1. I Robertson, R Meechan, D Clarke & J Moffat, *Assessment of Achievement Programme (Scotland), Fourth Survey of Mathematics (1994)*, University of Strathclyde, 1996.
2. A Napuk, B Normand & S Orr, *Assessment of Achievement Programme (Scotland), English Language, Fourth Survey (1995)*, University of Edinburgh, 1996.
3. *Assessment of Achievement Programme (Scotland), Fifth Survey of Mathematics (1997)*, University of Strathclyde, Educational Research Unit, Scottish Office Education and Industry Department, 1998.
4. A Napuk & B Normand, *Assessment of Achievement Programme (Scotland), English Language, Fifth Survey (1998)*, Scottish Executive Education Department, 1999.

HMI for Scotland

1. *Achievement for All: A report on selection within schools* by HM Inspectors of Schools, The Scottish Office, Education and Industry Department, 1996.
2. *Improving Mathematics Education 5-14: A Report by HM Inspectors of Schools*, The Scottish Office, Education and Industry Department, 1997.
3. *Improving Reading at the Early Stages 5-14: A Report by HM Inspectors of Schools*, The Scottish Office, Education and Industry Department, 1998.

APPENDIX 2

GCSE RESULTS FOR LEAS IN ENGLAND & LIBRARY BOARDS IN NORTHERN IRELAND (1998)

	LEA Name	GCSE Points per Pupil	GCSE %5A*C	% of pupils in Grammar Schools
1	Isles of Scilly	47.0	67.0	0.0
2	Buckinghamshire	44.2	61.4	40.3
3	Kingston upon Thames	44.0	59.7	18.7
4	Sutton	44.3	59.0	31.7
5	Windsor & Maidenhead	42.5	58.0	0.0
6	Wokingham	41.4	57.5	0.0
7	BELB	•	57.2	51.6
8	North Yorkshire	41.7	57.1	4.6
9	Barnet	42.2	56.9	11.6
10	SELB	•	56.3	34.1
11	Bromley	42.1	56.2	7.4
12	Gloucestershire	42.1	55.9	12.9
13	West Berkshire	41.0	55.6	0.0
14	Redbridge	43.2	55.6	9.2
15	Hertfordshire	41.0	55.4	0.0
16	Trafford	40.4	55.3	36.4
17	Surrey	41.9	55.1	0.0
18	NEELB	•	55.0	41.3
19	Bath & NE Somerset	41.1	54.4	0.0
20	Poole	42.1	53.7	19.2
21	Cheshire	40.5	53.6	0.0
22	Shropshire	41.1	53.6	0.0
23	Harrow	40.6	53.4	0.0
24	Solihull	39.8	53.2	0.0
25	West Sussex	41.1	52.9	0.0
26	North Somerset	39.6	52.7	0.0
27	Wiltshire	40.4	52.6	5.5
28	WELB	•	52.5	38.7
29	Cambridgeshire	40.8	52.5	0.0
30	Hampshire	41.0	52.2	0.0
31	Somerset	40.6	51.9	0.0
32	SEELB	•	51.8	39.2
33	Cornwall	40.2	51.5	0.0
34	Stockport	37.8	51.1	0.0
35	Richmond upon Thames	40.1	51.0	0.0
36	Kent	39.1	50.7	29.8

37	Dorset	40.0	50.7	0.0
38	Havering	40.1	50.5	0.0
39	Bournemouth	40.2	50.4	17.2
40	York	39.3	50.2	0.0
41	Suffolk	40.5	50.0	0.0
42	Southend on Sea	39.4	49.8	29.3
43	Essex	39.7	49.7	2.7
44	Torbay	38.3	49.6	28.5
45	Lincolnshire	38.2	49.2	23.3
46	Warrington	39.2	49.2	0.0
47	Bexley	38.4	48.1	25.2
48	East Sussex	38.9	48.1	0.0
49	Bury	38.8	47.9	0.0
50	Herefordshire	37.9	47.8	0.0
51	Lancashire	38.2	47.8	3.8
52	East Riding of Yorkshire	37.9	47.8	0.0
53	Camden	37.4	47.7	0.0
54	Devon	38.8	47.6	1.6
55	Oxfordshire	38.3	47.4	0.0
56	Bedfordshire	39.4	47.4	0.0
57	Hounslow	37.6	47.2	0.0
58	Warwickshire	37.9	47.1	7.1
59	Worcestershire	37.1	46.7	0.0
60	Norfolk	37.0	46.6	0.0
61	Telford & Wrekin	38.4	46.6	6.9
62	Derbyshire	37.5	46.3	0.0
63	Wirral	37.2	46.2	22.3
64	Leicestershire	36.6	46.1	0.0
65	Kensington & Chelsea	38.1	46.0	0.0
66	Hammersmith & Fulham	37.7	45.9	0.0
67	Bracknell Forest	37.2	45.9	0.0
68	South Gloucester	38.1	45.9	0.0
69	Northumberland	37.5	45.9	0.0
70	Ealing	37.5	45.7	0.0
71	Staffordshire	36.9	45.7	0.0
72	North Tyneside	37.1	45.5	0.0
73	Brent	37.0	45.4	0.0
74	Northamptonshire	38.1	45.3	0.0
75	Dudley	36.0	45.2	0.0
76	Hillingdon	37.2	45.0	0.0
77	Reading	39.9	45.0	22.9
78	Sefton	38.1	45.0	0.0
79	Plymouth	37.9	44.9	11.2
80	Swindon	35.8	44.7	0.0
81	Wigan	37.5	44.3	0.0
82	Medway Towns	36.2	44.2	25.3
83	Cumbria	36.5	44.0	1.7
84	Rutland	39.0	43.9	0.0
85	Slough	37.3	43.6	35

86	Brighton & Hove	35.7	43.5	0.0
87	Nottinghamshire	35.5	42.7	0.0
88	Peterborough	36.3	42.1	0.0
89	North Lincolnshire	36.3	42.1	0.0
90	Enfield	35.8	42.0	5.9
91	Southampton	37.4	42.0	0.0
92	Stockton on Tees	35.5	41.4	0.0
93	Gateshead	36.7	41.3	0.0
94	Bolton	35.2	41.0	0.0
95	Isle of Wight	35.8	40.8	0.0
96	Kirklees	34.7	40.6	2.6
97	St Helens	34.6	40.5	0.0
98	Croydon	35.4	40.2	0.0
99	Calderdale	34.0	39.8	11.3
100	Wakefield	34.4	39.7	0.0
101	Sheffield	33.8	39.2	0.0
102	Redcar & Cleveland	34.1	39.0	0.0
103	Tameside	33.7	39.0	0.0
104	City of Derby	33.6	39.0	0.0
105	Leeds	32.8	38.4	0.0
106	Merton	33.9	38.3	0.0
107	Coventry	33.4	38.1	0.0
108	South Tyneside	34.2	38.1	0.0
109	Darlington	33.9	38.0	0.0
110	Oldham	33.5	38.0	0.0
111	Waltham Forest	33.6	37.9	0.0
112	Rotherham	33.3	37.5	0.0
113	Birmingham	33.0	37.1	8.2
114	Wandsworth	34.6	36.9	0.0
115	Blackburn with Darwen	34.5	36.7	0.0
116	Rochdale	32.0	36.6	0.0
117	Durham	33.5	36.3	0.0
118	Wolverhampton	32.3	36.1	3.6
119	Leicester City	30.7	35.7	0.0
120	Luton	36.5	35.6	0.0
121	Walsall	32.4	35.4	5.5
122	Milton Keynes	36.0	35.3	0.0
123	Blackpool	32.2	35.2	0.0
124	Hartlepool	33.2	35.2	0.0
125	Thurrock	34.0	35.2	0.0
126	Westminster	30.6	35.0	0.0
127	Halton	33.2	34.9	0.0
128	Doncaster	31.7	34.8	0.0
129	Salford	31.6	34.4	0.0
130	Greenwich	32.6	34.4	0.0
131	Newham	33.6	34.1	0.0
132	Lewisham	31.8	33.7	0.0
133	North East Lincolnshire	31.1	33.5	0.0
134	Stoke-on-Trent	30.9	33.2	1.6

135	Sunderland	33.0	33.0	0.0
136	Newcastle	30.7	32.5	0.0
137	Portsmouth	31.3	32.1	0.0
138	Liverpool	29.5	31.8	2.3
139	Barking & Dagenham	30.4	31.5	0.0
140	City of Bristol	30.0	30.0	8.2
141	Southwark	30.0	30.0	0.0
142	Bradford	28.6	29.9	0.0
143	Barnsley	29.5	29.9	0.0
144	Lambeth	32.2	29.8	0.0
145	Manchester	28.5	29.6	0.0
146	Sandwell	29.4	29.4	0.0
147	Tower Hamlets	31.0	28.4	0.0
148	Middlesborough	28.2	28.4	0.0
149	Hackney	31.0	27.7	0.0
150	Haringey	27.7	27.3	0.0
151	Nottingham City	26.6	26.9	0.0
152	Knowsley	25.7	23.8	0.0
153	Islington	26.9	23.6	0.0
154	City of Kingston upon Hull	26.0	23.4	0.0

A SELECTION OF RECENT CPS PUBLICATIONS

NICE AND BEYOND: The parting of the ways?

Christopher Booker

The Nice summit is a turning point for relations between Britain and the EU. France and Germany have now openly stated their wish for an "avant garde" of member states to proceed rapidly to much closer political integration. The German foreign minister has commented that: "We must put the last brick in the building of European integration, namely political integration", while the French Prime Minister spoke of a "hard core of a few more closely integrated countries". Will the British Government try to push a reluctant public into monetary union and political union, or will it accept Britain in a "second tier"?

In a proposal which had gone virtually unnoticed before the publication by the Centre for Policy Studies of Christopher Booker's pamphlet, Nice and Beyond, federalist-inclined countries are to be allowed to push ahead with deeper integration - Leading article in the Daily Telegraph

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS: an analysis of a new growth industry £7.50

Dr John Marks

Are there really twice as many children who need special help at school as there were a few years ago? The proportion of pupils with Statements of Special Educational Need (i.e. those children with the most severe problems) has more than doubled in only eight years (from 1991 to 1999). The proportion of pupils with Special Educational Needs but without Statements (i.e. those children defined as having learning difficulties) has also risen very rapidly. Nearly 1.4 million are now judged to have special needs without statements. One fifth of all children are now classified as having some form of Special Educational Need and one-third of the total education budget (£7.1 billion out of £20 billion) is spent on them. The author suggests that the reason for the explosion in Special Needs may lie in the fact that so many pupils are not taught properly (particularly reading). He calls for the reform of teaching practices; a new definition of categories of disability; the use of more special schools for those children with severe problems; and a National Enquiry to establish accurately the scale of Special Educational Needs and the use - or misuse - of resources.

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