

# FORUM

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**for promoting 3-19 comprehensive education**

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**Training Primary Teachers  
Assessing at KS1 & 3  
The Opting Out Challenge  
Making Post-16 Comprehensive  
Scottish Experience**



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# Contents

## VOLUME 35 NUMBER 3 1993

Editorial. <b>Dictator's Charter</b>	67
LIZ THOMSON. <b>A Sprat to Catch a Mackerel?</b>	68
AILEEN FISHER. <b>The Scottish 5-14 Development Programme</b>	70
PATRICIA RUFF. <b>Primary School Technology</b>	72
VICTORIA DE RIJKE. <b>Whose Æsop?</b>	75
ROSEMARY APPLEBY. <b>Assessing English at KS3</b>	77
BRYAN FERRIMAN, ROGER LOCK & ALAN SOARES. <b>Testing Science at KS3</b>	79
<i>Discussion</i>	
DICK COPLAND. <b>Mixed Ability?</b>	81
GEORGE MACBRIDE. <b>Scotland's Post-16 Debate</b>	82
DAVID ROBERTSON. <b>Access, Mobility and Choice in Post-secondary Education</b>	84
ANDREW MORRIS. <b>Unifying a Post-16 Curriculum</b>	87
IAN CAMPBELL. <b>Disaffected School Students</b>	89
MARTIN ROGERS. <b>The Opting Out Challenge</b>	91
DAVID CROOK. <b>Tension in Milton Keynes</b>	92
<i>Book Reviews</i>	94

## The next FORUM

Five themes will feature in the Spring 1994 issue (Vol. 36, No. 1): the future of Teacher Education (**Dave Hill**) will continue the debate begun by Liz Thomson); Special Needs provision (**Paul Ennals** of the RNIB writes in the light of the new Act); the development of local schools consortia to cope with the threat to local authorities; the future of Community Education (**Roger Seckington** surveys recent trends in Leicestershire); and the threat to teacher professionalism. **Mike Lloyd** writes about the campaign "to save English coursework"; **Derek Gillard** updates his 1992 article on Bullying; and **Clyde Chitty** discusses recent threats to the provision of effective sex education in schools. We hope to respond to the Dearing 'Review of the National Curriculum'.

# Dictator's Charter

The flawed 1988 Act begat the genetically flawed but gargantuan 1993 Act, heralded by a White Paper promising chaos and adversity (alias *Choice and Diversity*). The Baker Act promised to 'create a new framework' which would endure for decades in the manner of the 1902 Balfour Act and the 1944 Butler Act. Now a new Act is supposed to remedy its precursor's deficiencies, most significantly by speeding the growth of the Grant Maintained sector and the destruction of LEAs.

The highly centralist direction taken in 1988 has been monstrously enhanced: 50 more new powers are added to the 175 granted to the Secretary of State in 1988 making a running total of at least 300 with those already added meanwhile. A catchall interventionist Clause 1, inserted in the Bill in March, sparked Lord Beloff's accusation in the Lords of 'galloping megalomania'. This Act is a dictator's charter.

So hastily drawn up that the government itself had to bring in 981 amendments, the Bill became ever more confused and the guillotine ensured that it could not be properly debated at any stage in either House. Creating more problems than it supposedly resolves, this Act guarantees continuing instability for schools.

By malicious destruction of LEAs' democratically accountable planning and supervisory powers, the government removes a politically useful blame buffer. Substituting a non-accountable quango Funding Agency underlines disdain for the democratic process and leaves governors vulnerable.

The main purpose of this legislation was and remains to force the pace of opting out and extend the GMS sector by devious new schemes that disregard parents' wishes. This aim is now so blatant that in mid-July a network of 'Parents Opposed to Opting Out' formed and will be formally launched in September. It aims to provide a campaign resource pack. Hitherto only the LEA-funded Local Schools Information has been available to balance central government sponsored glossy propaganda. When trying to counter material put out by the Grant Maintained Schools Centre, LEAs and Chief Officers have been disgracefully attacked and muzzled.

Despite government machinations, including bribery and double funding, the number of schools with a parent majority voting to opt out has persistently fallen short of government targets – these have now been lowered and the slush funds are drying up. It is clear that many parents value the support their LEA brings to their children's school and the cooperative continuum across phases of schooling which that assures within their local comprehensive system.

*Forum* heartily welcomes the parents' new network and hopes that PTAs will plug in this autumn as all Governing Bodies are required by the new legislation annually to consider whether to hold an opt out ballot. Martin Rogers

of LSI sets the scene for this debate in our penultimate article.

The debate must clearly reveal that opting out really means opting *in* to central government control via a remote and unaccountable Funding Agency. It means losing the supportive protection of the LEA, when the school is anyway locally managed under LMS. It enables schools to select, not parents to choose. It means putting comprehensive education at risk.

Meanwhile, outcry was so unanimous against John Patten's midsummer madness proposals for a 'Mum's Army' of under-qualified infant teachers that even he must realise that no self-respecting school would employ them. The rest of his package for initial primary teacher training is also both inappropriate, as Liz Thomson shows in our first article, and unnecessary in the light of the latest HMI survey of new teachers. Yet again he has proved himself unfit to hold Office.

The almost total boycott of SATs in the summer term showed that teachers, parents and governors together can make sanity prevail against wrong policy imposed by manic dictatorship. That boycott incidentally also sabotaged the infamous league tables. When consultation is eschewed and advice ignored, the boycott becomes the only mode of common resistance left.

Sir Ron Dearing's Interim Report largely vindicated many of the teaching profession's concerns about implementation of the National Curriculum and assessment. It also facilitated a face-saving partial climb-down on league tables by Baroness Blatch, who accepted the report 'in its entirety'.

Unsurprisingly, the report was a compromise. Recognising that "you've got to give teachers more scope to use their professional judgement" (BBC *Newsnight*), Sir Ron insisted that compulsory content and tests must be reduced across the National Curriculum, a legitimate role be found for teacher assessment and more time allowed for other teaching. But the focus on English and mathematics at KS1 plus science at KS2 could, with simplified tests, revive the right's 'back to basics' orthodoxy and self-fulfilling streaming while failing to guarantee common entitlement to a 'broad and balanced' curriculum. There were hints, too, of divisive imbalance from 14 through vocational tracking. Nor are future league tables at 11, 16 and 18 dead. We award the report a cautious welcome but reserve judgment until the December one.

Right-wing puppeteers outside Parliament have manipulated the education policy antics of successive ministers as legislative havoc has been enacted. Although divisions within the governing party are probably as great on education as on Europe, the Education Bill failed to attract media and public interest. Sir Ron Dearing may bring calm but there is no cause for complacency. Argument must now focus on holding out against opting out. Teachers, parents and governors must join together.

# A Sprat to Catch a Mackerel?

**Liz Thomson**

A member of *Forum's* Editorial Board, Liz Thomson has worked at a Teacher's Centre and in the advisory service of two LEAs. Now Deputy Principal at Bishop Grosseteste College in Lincoln, here she puts forward some thoughts on the new proposals for the initial training of primary school teachers.

Stuart MacLure was right when he urged teachers to consider the sub-plot contained within the new Government plans for initial teacher training. In his Platform article in *The Times Educational Supplement* on the 18 June [1], MacLure outlined the sub-plot as a sinister attempt:

*to take teacher training out of the universities and colleges and ultimately to sever the connection between the study of education in higher education and its practice in schools.*

However, the important issue that MacLure highlights has been obscured by the sprat of one-year teacher training for mature entrants (the so-called Mum's Army) which was fed to all those who received the circular and which has succeeded in diverting a great deal of attention and scrutiny from the main thrust of John Patten's proposals.

The proposals for the reform of initial teacher training are concerned with introducing a greater range of diversified routes to qualified teacher status. The thrust of the reforms is to locate more of the training outside specialist university departments and colleges and develop an alternative culture for training and support within schools. The rhetoric of the changes is linked to the establishment of training partnerships between schools and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs); but the divisive nature of the way that the funding will be manipulated through "the transfer of resources from the institutions to their partner schools" is already militating against this.

The experience of HEIs involved in developing school-based training schemes within the secondary sector, has resulted in a kind of Dutch auction where the HEIs have had to bargain for places and then agree costs with each school for student placements. The costs ranged initially from £250 to £1250 per student placement but now seem to have bottomed out at around a £1000. The effect of this on universities and colleges has been disastrous. Recent headlines, 'Short cut could kill colleges' [2] and 'Universities set to abandon training' [3] give some substance to the reality of Stuart MacLure's sub-plot. There is no doubt that the new routes to QTS combined with recent Government and Funding Council moves to reduce the fee base for each student, and student intake for primary teacher training over the next three years, could well prove to be a death warrant for initial teacher training in many HEIs.

It is indicative of the arrogance of this Government that there are at least two significant differences between the way in which the proposals to reform the initial teacher training of primary and secondary teachers have been presented. Readers may recall my comments, in a *Forum* article earlier this year [4], concerning the mockery of the so-called consultation period ending after HEIs were invited to bid for additional funding to support school-based (secondary) schemes starting in September 1992. As far

as the primary proposals are concerned there has been no consultation document, just the draft circular. The other major difference is that the additional funding which was available for the secondary scheme (£6m) is conspicuous by its absence from the primary proposals.

I realise that it could be said that the proposals for primary will not be as radical in their effect on HEIs as the secondary school-based scheme is proving to be. However, it is worth examining the primary teacher training proposals more carefully, not just in terms of their general impact on the teaching profession, but also in relation to the combination of prescription and lack of detail which is in the draft circular.

Earlier I referred to the proposal to introduce a one year 'Mum's Army' course as a sprat to catch a mackerel. Its inclusion within the draft proposals is deeply insulting to Early Years teachers and has attracted so much widespread condemnation that it is likely to be removed from the White Paper. Even if it is not removed, the chances of it taking off are very slim as few schools will be prepared to employ students who qualify via this route. All the teacher unions have focussed on the unacceptability of creating a two-tier profession and the strength of feeling of their members is such, that the Government could well find itself being confronted in the same way that it was over the implementation of this year's SATs at KS3.

However, it is not only this proposal which is insulting to the professionalism of primary teachers. The creation of three types of primary teacher:

- the one-year trained mature entrant working with KS1;
- the generalist trained in six subjects (as yet we know not which) over three years (resulting in a general BEd degree); and
- the specialist (with an honours degree), presumably trained via the PGCE or the four-year course;

is clearly divisive, particularly when the one-year trainee is restricted in both the age they can teach and the range of curriculum subjects. There is an insidious suggestion, within the sub-text of the draft circular, that the real professionals are the specialist teachers, not the generalists. Indeed, paragraph 13 highlights the blatant interference of John Patten when he states how he thinks the curriculum should be taught at KS2:

*The Secretary of State welcomes and wishes to encourage the use of specialist teaching in primary schools, particularly at Key Stage 2. Lessons from specialists offer pupils a high standard of subject teaching. The Secretary of State believes that where opportunities exist to introduce time-tabled subject teaching, from teachers with specific subject strengths, before pupils move on to secondary school, they should be used to the full. [5]*

The division between the specialist and generalist is further

reinforced in paragraph 15 which refers to only one kind of movement between phases of schooling, from secondary to primary:

*Teachers with secondary training will continue to be able to transfer to teach in primary schools.*

This, despite the more rigorous entry qualifications for primary teacher training from 1998, when all new entrants will be required to have a GCSE grade C in science as well as English language and mathematics. However, the requirement for science is not mandatory for students being trained for the secondary sector "as secondary teachers teach across a narrower range of subjects".

There are further inconsistencies in the circular, particularly in relation to the need for trainee teachers to develop a knowledge and understanding of the continuity and progression of learning across key stages, which the introduction of the National Curriculum has purported to enhance. By restricting the focus of the different training routes, the circular fails to recognise that many primary teachers work with mixed age groups, not always by design but often through necessity. For example, in small schools it is not uncommon for a teacher to be covering more than one key stage within a class. In such circumstances, the teacher's knowledge and understanding of the continuity and development of learning is vital to the quality of teaching and learning they can offer children.

There are many questions unanswered by the circular which, even in the first paragraph, presents unsupported statements as evidence. We need to know by whom "the benefits of time-tabled subject teaching in Key Stage 2 are increasingly recognised". Similarly, we need far more information about the focus and content of the six subject BEd. As I have already stated, we are not told which six subjects might constitute the focus of the degree. Nor is there any indication about the depth or level of study required in each or all of the six subjects. There is little recognition of the requirements for validation at degree level, other than a catch all statement in paragraph 26, that the Council for Accreditation of Teachers (CATE) will be asked

*to consider as a matter of urgency what further guidance might be offered to schools and higher education institutions about the design of such courses, to ensure that all six subjects are studied at a suitable level.*

One would think, from reading the circular, that the new entrants into teaching over the past few years have been ill-equipped by their training to manage teaching and learning in primary classrooms. This view contradicts my experience of working with young student teachers, who are often far more confident in their approach to teaching the National Curriculum than experienced teachers who have had to incorporate the changes into their thinking and practice. Colleges are not concerned with promoting barmy theories, but they are committed to educating students who are able to maximise the learning opportunities for children in schools. That capability is based on an understanding of how children learn and is related to the student's developing self-awareness as a learner and a teacher.

The assumption, contained in the circular, that HEIs and schools will need to establish partnerships is also insulting to those many schools, university departments and colleges who already have strong working relationships. The notion

of partnerships, where practising teachers are involved more directly in the training of their future colleagues, is not new, but has grown in strength over the past ten years. If Stuart MacLure is right and the sub-plot is concerned with taking the training out of the HEIs and severing the connection between the study of education and its practice in schools, then the recipe contained within the circular is doomed from the start.

We need to stand firm in our belief that the education of young children is intellectually demanding for all those involved. The focus of the circular, on the content of what is taught as opposed to the process of teaching and learning, ignores what we know about the nature of education. The proposals also, as the NAHT response to the draft circular [6] states,

*devalue the benefit prospective teachers gain from undergraduate level study of the philosophical basis of education and of other subject areas. Whether or not a teacher is ultimately intending to teach a particular subject, study of a relevant subject at higher education level will provide that professional and personal development which is important in the education of a teacher.*

I am conscious that in reacting against the proposals it is important not to adopt a Luddite approach to change and development in teacher education. The positive messages of partnership and the constructive potential of schools playing "a much larger and more influential role in course design and delivery ... with higher education" must not be ignored, but should be seized as the greatest resource and asset for the future. After all, teacher education is a continuum which begins with initial training and includes the continuing professional development of all who are concerned with teaching throughout their careers.

#### References

- [1] Stuart MacLure (1993) Fight this tooth and nail, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 18 June.
- [2] Anthony Dore (1993) Short cut could kill colleges, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 18 June.
- [3] Nicholas Pyke (1993) Universities set to abandon training, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 16 July.
- [4] Liz Thomson (1993) FUD or fudge?, *Forum*, 35, pp. 18-20.
- [5] DFE (June 1993) Draft Circular. *The Initial Training of Primary School Teachers: new criteria for course approval.*
- [6] NAHT (July 1993) NAHT Response to the Draft Circular issued by the Department for Education.



# The Scottish 5–14 Development Programme

**Aileen Fisher**

The Head of Castle Kennedy Primary School in the Dumfries and Galloway Region, Aileen Fisher continues her explanation of the new curriculum and assessment arrangements in Scotland. She previously wrote in *Forum*, Vol. 35, pp. 24–26.

The 5–14 Development Programme came into being following the publication of the consultation paper *Curriculum and Assessment in Scotland: a policy for the nineties*, issued in November 1987 on the instruction of the Secretary of State for Scotland, who identified a need for clearer definition of the curriculum, the establishment of satisfactory assessment procedures, and better machinery for communication between schools and parents.

After the consultation period, working groups were set up for each area of the curriculum, under the aegis of the Scottish Consultative Council for the Curriculum. These 'Review and Development Groups' (RDGs) were largely made up of practising teachers, whose findings and recommendations were based on what was seen as 'good practice' already going on in schools. The groups published, firstly, consultation documents, and, finally, guidelines, for their respective curricular areas, these being, English Language, Mathematics, Religious and Moral Education, Personal and Social Development, Environmental Studies, Expressive Arts, Gaelic (both for Gaelic Learners and for Gaelic Medium education) and, for S1 and S2, Latin and Modern European Languages. As the name of the programme suggests, the guidelines cover the whole spectrum of education for pupils of ages five to fourteen years, which are identified as Primary One to Primary Seven (P1–P7), and the first two years of secondary education (S1 and S2).

The final plank of the programme was put in place with the publication, in June 1993, of the document *The Structure and Balance of the Curriculum 5–14*. (Many feel that this should have been the first, rather than the final document, as it provides a summary and overview of the whole programme—it is not really paradoxical to say that a summary is probably even more useful before than after reading study material.) The document also provides recommendations as to the relative proportions of the different areas of the curriculum.

The documents also provide recommended Programmes of Study. These are in no way prescriptive, rather a set of principles within the framework of which teachers can plan, choose and/or create their own material. Attainment targets, in all the guidelines, are based on the following descriptions of levels of attainment:

**Level A** should be attainable in the course of P1–P3 by almost all pupils.

**Level B** should be attainable by some pupils in P3 or even earlier, but certainly by most in P4.

**Level C** should be attainable in the course of P4–P6 by most pupils.

**Level D** should be attainable by some pupils in P5–P6 or even earlier, but certainly by most in P7.

**Level E** should be attainable by some pupils in P7/S1, but certainly by most in S2.

For the pupil, the aims of Education 5–14, as outlined in the final document are that "School experience between the ages of 5 and 14 should help each pupil to acquire and develop the following:

- knowledge, skills and understanding in literacy and communication, numeracy and mathematical thinking;
- understanding and appreciation of themselves and other people and of the world about them;
- the capacity to make creative and practical use of a variety of media to express feelings and ideas;
- knowledge and understanding of religion and its role in shaping society and the development of personal and social values;
- the capacity for independent thought through enquiry, problem solving, information handling and reasoning;
- appreciation of the benefits of healthy living and physical fitness; and
- positive attitudes to learning and personal fulfilment through the achievement of personal objectives.

Teachers were gratified to find that important emphasis had been laid on Scottish culture. In the English Language guidelines we read, under the heading 'Scottish Culture':

*The idea of diversity is crucial to understanding language. There is no standard form of Scots; there are many forms, varying one from another, although sometimes sharing common features. To help pupils, terms such as dialect and accent should be explained and used, with examples, to encourage discussion and develop perceptions of Scottish languages, and how they relate to the lives and experiences of Scottish people.*

(Suggestions are then given for ways in which awareness of diversity of dialect and accent can be fostered.)

*Given such experiences, and a conviction of the worth of their own accents and dialects, pupils will have greater empathy with those whose languages and cultures are different.*

(It has of course been a very long time since pupils were actively discouraged in Scottish schools from speaking in their own dialects and accents. Pupils have been encouraged, rather, to be 'bilingual', and develop an awareness of when it is appropriate to use dialect, or whether to use Standard English.)

The guidelines, within the framework of which schools

can help pupils to attain these aims, are based on a common set of principles, and aim to:

- clarify the content of the curriculum for all pupils in Scotland between the ages of 5 and 14 years;
- ensure breadth, balance, coherence, continuity and progression in that curriculum;
- provide advice on promoting the personal and social development of pupils in the context of a broad and balanced curriculum and school experience;
- develop coherent advice on the assessment of pupils' learning, including the place of national testing in assessment;
- provide advice on reporting to keep parents informed about their children's progress within the 5-14 curriculum.

Assessment is an important component of the programme,

approach to what went on in schools, and more unanimity between schools, and indeed regions. However, the very speed with which the programme has been put in place has caused teachers to have a sense of being overwhelmed, not only by the guidelines documents themselves, but by the plethora of material which has trailed in their wake.

How, then, are schools coping with the demands of so much innovation? Even those schools identified as being exemplars of 'good practice' will nevertheless have the same burdens of reading, discussion and planning as the less successful. One reassuring factor – in fact probably the single *most* reassuring factor (despite the invitation, in the introductions to most of the guidelines to "incorporate them as soon as possible") – is the recognition by the Scottish Office Education Department that if each component of the programme is to be dealt with thoroughly, a realistic

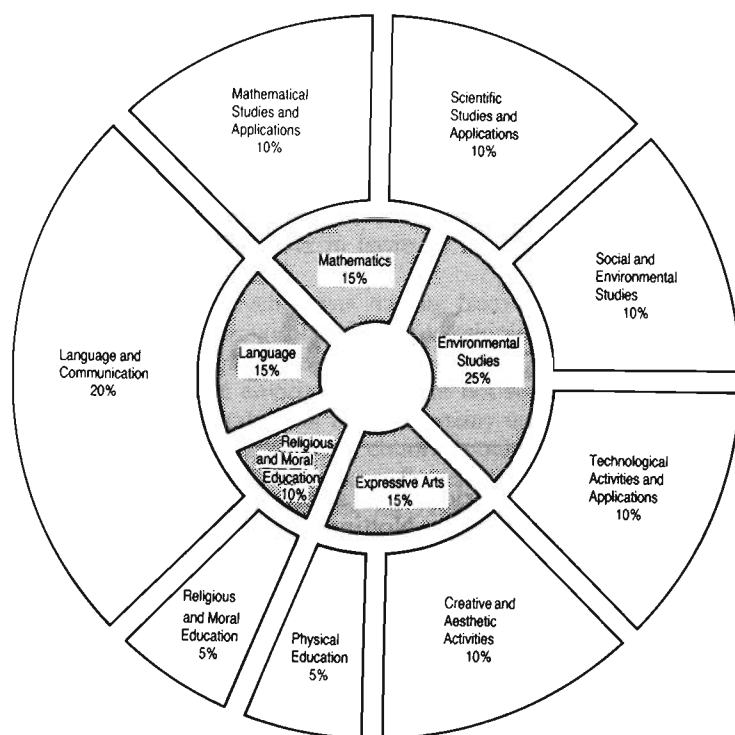


Figure 1. Balance of allocation time

and guidelines have been provided for assessment, and for reporting. National testing, which was originally to have been carried out at P4 and P7, at more or less the same time throughout the country, having been almost universally rejected, and largely boycotted by parents and teachers alike, can now be carried out at any time, and in any class, at a time when the teacher judges that a pupil is ready to progress to the next 5-14 level.

There has been fierce resistance to anything that could be construed as an attempt to establish 'league tables'.

It can be concluded that the main emphases are on formative and summative assessment.

Coming, as the several sets of guidelines have, over a period of just over three years, they have given rise to conflicting reactions in the section of the teaching profession affected by them. It is probably true to say that they have been, in principle, generally welcomed. It was not only the Secretary of State who perceived the need for a more coherent

Dark areas = Curriculum areas of the Primary school.

Light areas = Modes of the Secondary school (S1 to S2).

Percentages do not sum to 100%. An allocation of 20% of time is made in both primary and secondary to allow for flexibility.

Note: The time allocation of 10% for Religious and Moral Education in primary schools includes an element for specific attention to aspects of Personal and Social Development, particularly in the context of exploring moral values and relationships; time for Personal and Social Development can also be found from the flexibility element. In secondary schools, time for Personal and Social Development is to be found from the 20% flexibility element.

From *The Structure and Balance of the Curriculum*, SOED, 1993 (HMSO).

Each Curriculum Area is summarised under **Attainment Outcomes** and **Strands**. For English Language, Gaelic and Modern European Languages these cover Listening, Talking, Reading, Writing. Environmental Studies cover Science, Social Subjects, Technology, Health, Information Technology. Expressive Arts cover Art & Design, Drama, Music, Physical Education. Religious and Moral Education covers Christianity, Other World Religions and Personal Search. Personal and Social Development is concerned with Self-awareness, Self-esteem, Interpersonal relationships, Independence and Interdependence.

time-scale will be necessary. It is not expected, therefore, that the programme can be completely up and running in less than eight to ten years. This is endorsed by the Education Authorities, which have, to a greater or lesser degree, provided advisory support and materials to help schools begin to implement the guidelines.

Dumfries and Galloway Region have been recognised for some time throughout the country as being in the forefront of Authorities which recognise the need to help schools cope with new demands, and have provided invaluable guidance in the form of advice and mechanisms for assessing where a school 'is at', how to establish their own perceived priorities, and from this starting point, establish school development plans, which concentrate on one aspect of the curriculum, but state a projection for three or four years ahead.

Feelings of isolation are being overcome with the establishment, encouraged and funded by the Authority, of



networking in the form of 'cluster' groups of schools which are working on the same area of the curriculum. A comprehensive directory of staff development activities has been compiled by staff development groups of teachers working with advisors. Much of the staff development activity is being provided by teachers who have a particular expertise, and who are given training in its delivery.

Much important guidance has been provided by the Scottish Office Education Department itself, including management training for headteachers. The Scottish Council for Research in Education is producing resource packs in assessment for teachers. Guidelines have been given for primary/secondary liaison, which is proving, in some areas, to be one of the more felicitous benefits accruing from the 5-14 programme, with working groups of primary and secondary teachers being set up.

However, even with the reassurances regarding time-scale, and the abundance of valuable supportive material provided both regionally and nationally, the sector of the profession responsible for pupils in the 5-14 age range is nevertheless feeling overwhelmed and daunted by

the prospect of a round of prioritising, target-setting, implementing, establishing criteria for success, evaluating (and always with the dread of perhaps having to go back to the drawing board) and moving on to the next curricular area, for the next eight to ten years.

This has been recognised by Scotland's largest teaching union, the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) which, at its AGM in May 1993, committed itself to a campaign on teacher workload. A work to contract is on the cards. It has become obvious that the demands of the planning and implementation of the 5-14 programme cannot be met within contractual hours, and the additional resources, of which the most useful would be increased staffing levels, are unlikely to be forthcoming. It remains to be seen what effect this will have on the progress of the National 5-14 Programme. While it *has* been seen as valuable, not over prescriptive, and in keeping with what most see as educationally valid, there is nevertheless a feeling of 'too much, too soon', and a desperate need for some sort of breathing space.

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# Primary School Technology

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## Patricia Ruff

An Associate Lecturer at Bishop Grosseteste College in Lincoln, Patricia Ruff is also a Regional Education Officer with the Design Council. She has taught in two primary schools in Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire.

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At a time when the National Curriculum is under review and John Patten is urging a 'slimming down' of the curriculum, particularly at Key Stages 1 and 2, teachers must consider what is appropriate in terms of technology. How will this slimming down, if it occurs, affect the interpretation and implementation of technology at Primary level?

Before this is addressed it is perhaps necessary to look back on how and when technology became part of the Primary curriculum. Certainly ten years ago, few primary generalists in initial training had technology on the agenda. However by the mid-eighties craft design technology (CDT) was encouraged, within many LEAs, with support cascading down from secondary colleagues. Clusters of pilot schools for primary CDT emerged, where key teachers were trained and worked alongside their secondary colleagues to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to promote technology within the primary school. The theory was that the primary teacher would adapt the secondary model to the primary curriculum to provide appropriate and worthwhile learning experiences. Yet primary technology is more than simply preparation for secondary school work. As a result many primary teachers felt insecure, concerned with safety and how to use the box of tools gifted to the school. For many the practical implementation came before the analysis of

the learning, the understanding of the value of technology, and recognition that primary experience contributed greatly to children's technological thinking.

For some technology as a word in itself conjured up images of hi-tech, yet in its broadest sense technology means everything we use to work for us. In the context of the classroom a range of technologies is in use, tools such as paintbrushes, pencil sharpeners are all designed to perform a task.

Indeed, technology emerged as a subject associated in the main with science, craft and information technology. However a start was made in introducing technology to the Primary curriculum in a more defined way.

For those teachers that had made this start the arrival of The Design Council's report, *Design and Primary Education* (1987), came at a significant time. The report addressed design in the context of primary work and the central role of design-related activities, suggesting examples of capabilities central to design, for example the understanding of spatial relationships, visual awareness, the use and understanding of materials and the ability to make choices. Clearly identification of these capabilities within the primary classroom was not difficult. In brief the report promoted three broad aims for primary educators:

- to develop children's innate curiosity about the



natural and manmade world, and their critical awareness and understanding of it;

- to develop children's ability to envisage and realise possibilities for the improvement of that world;
- to develop children's confidence, skills and persistence in handling tasks for which there is no preordained solution, in collaboration with others.

These aims promoted future-oriented thinking and an understanding that they, children, can influence, make decisions and choices within their world.

The report concluded that the skills of designing and making are every bit as basic as literacy and numeracy.

It suggested that central policies should stress the importance of practical and aesthetic areas of learning and should avoid design being associated with one area of the curriculum. Instead it set out design and design-related activity in broad contexts which were already a strong element of the primary curriculum and went a long way to deepening the understanding of design and reassuring the primary generalist.

Not every primary teacher had been exposed to in-service training when the Technology Orders were placed in schools in 1990. Indeed it was recognised that teachers would require further training for Technology to be consistently and successfully implemented in schools. For many the principles of design and the processes involved were not wholly grasped or even clear in terms of the attainment targets.

Clearly not every teacher was starting from the same point and for many the vocabulary and terminology were threatening. For example, design outcomes described as artefacts, systems and environments were not something that could readily be taken on board by many competent teachers or the notion that young children could identify needs and opportunities as was reflected in *National Curriculum Technology: the case for revising the order* (May, 1992).

### Interpreting Key Issues

In the relatively short time since the introduction of the Order, a number of key issues have been interpreted and put into practice:

- DT (design technology) activity involves evaluating, identifying needs and opportunities, designing and making. These capabilities work alongside each other in the creating process.
- DT outcomes are artefacts (man-made objects), systems (sets of objects or activities which together perform a task or the ways of organising the interaction of people, artefacts or environments) or environments (surroundings made or developed by people). Many outcomes fit into more than one of these categories.
- A range of contexts exist in which DT can occur. For example contexts can be created through story from which children can empathise with characters and identify needs. By using story the teacher is creating a shared experience from which to work.
- There is no hierarchy of materials; children need to develop the ability to select materials which are appropriate to the task in hand. Within the nursery and primary school, children are already experienced in using a wide variety of materials: for example modelling materials such as clay, sand, plasticine and food, construction materials such as paper, card,

wood and Lego. From an early age children have developed their ability to sort and classify materials.

- A range of tools is already used competently within the primary classroom (paintbrushes, rulers, glue spreaders, scissors, measuring instruments, needles, hacksaws, etc.). Teachers must have high expectations of children's ability to choose and use tools, after instruction, correctly. A five-year-old if trained well will be able to select appropriate tools for the job, i.e. mixing brush, water colour brush. It is vital that teachers do not solely use the word tool in association with tools used with hard materials – saw, drill, etc. although they clearly have a place in primary technology.
- Children need to recognise the need for control systems (human need).
- DT promotes a range of skills, attitudes, and concepts many of which are of a cross-curricular nature.

These principles of design technology are coming into fruition. However, a clearer identification of many of these is needed to ensure continuity and progression. In a sense the review of the document is premature as the existing Order has had little time to work through. Indeed many Year 6 children are working at the same level as their younger peers, having perhaps a more sophisticated use of tools, materials and application of techniques due to more developed fine motor skills.

Teachers themselves have not in many cases had a comprehensive programme of in-service training, particularly in experience of practical skills such as joining techniques, drawing and application of design, i.e. evaluation or scientific principles.

How does the remit help then, in terms of clarifying the detail and directing the implementation at primary level? The Secretaries of State emphasised the objectives of the remit were to clarify the knowledge, skills and understanding which pupils should acquire at each key stage, to ensure that the curriculum was manageable, by reducing the complexity of the requirements and the amount of work required in each key stage, to clarify how and when the skills, knowledge and understanding developed through other curriculum orders should be put to use in technology. This was to secure progression, enhance the practical element, increase teachers' expectations of children's abilities and to improve manageability. These are sound objectives and in terms of the paper exercise have been met, with the reduction of the attainment targets from 4 to 2 (designing and making), SoA to 59 from 117 and PoS from 158, at KS 1 and 2, to 110. The quantity has gone but will the quality naturally follow?

The proposals for the revised Order have evolved from the existing Order and the understanding of the existing Order must be carried forward in the interpretation of any new Order. This is apparent through the close reading of the introduction to the revised Order (December 1992) which explains the proposed restructuring. The characteristics of DT in schools have not changed. For example the new proposals reflect the view that DT involves identifying, analysing and meeting human needs, requires a practical ability to apply knowledge and skills. It promotes the notion of fitness for purpose and the need to evaluate outcomes and to appreciate the impact of technology on everyday life. In terms of the contexts (home, school, community, recreation and business, and industry) and outcomes

artefacts, environments and systems) this terminology has been abandoned because of the complexity created. Yet one will recognise that although it is not always a clear-cut exercise of categorising contexts and outcomes the nature of them does not change, an outcome will be an artefact, system or environment and DT develops through a broad range of contexts, many additional contexts to those set out in the existing order such as story, role play and historical contexts. Indeed a good practitioner will continue to promote this spectrum of contexts to develop design and technological capability.

### **Danger of Narrowness**

The remit undoubtedly simplifies the statutory requirements set out in the present Order and results in clearer presentation which many teachers will welcome. Although the revised Order is currently on hold it is clear that a retention of what has gone before is vital. As it stands, the remit without its introduction could easily be interpreted in the narrowest of ways and result in the digression of primary technology practice. It is easy to highlight specific terminology which could lead to this narrow interpretation. Good quality products could infer that outcomes will be discrete objects or models; this is compounded by the emphasis throughout the proposals on control systems and components, and does not refer back to the definition in the introduction. Whilst it is clear children need to learn about these, the effect of the proposals could narrow the scope of activity and disregard the good practice achieved in the area of systems and environments. In part this is reinforced by the introduction of Design and Make Tasks which refer to a limited scope of making activity. Teachers need to hold on to the broad range of creative design projects currently taking place in many schools. Clearly the non-statutory guidance should seek to exemplify the nature of design activities and projects within primary classrooms.

The notion of quality expressed through the new proposals emphasises the above, and is driven by the question 'Does it work?'. Again consideration has been given to this in the introduction yet in the text the concept of quality should be more clearly related to an understanding of human factors. In order to provide a more holistic view of quality, 'fitness for purpose' should clearly denote the interrelationship of aesthetic and technological considerations. Children as designers and makers should therefore ask 'Does it meet the needs and the requirements of those using it?' It is also important to recognise that children can identify needs and opportunities, and that teachers are responsible for planning appropriate contexts to enable children to develop this capability. In addition these contexts must reflect the cultural diversity within our society and the revised proposals do not do this as effectively. Contexts are an important aspect of design technology because it gives children meaningful frameworks and has

a direct relationship to any rigorous idea of evaluation and quality.

### **Evaluation**

Clearly for effective implementation to take place there must be an understanding of the interrelationship of designing and making and the role of evaluation. Teachers will need to understand the nature of design and designing, its relationship to technology and other parts of the curriculum. Teachers will need guidance in how children can develop their ability to communicate their design ideas and the different modes of communication and progression in these skills. The revised Order lacks reference to the different modes of drawing to communicate design proposals used by professional designers, or indeed the role of professional designers in supporting school based work.

In terms of assessment a weighting of 50:50 would reinforce the interdependence of designing and making. Undoubtedly a breakdown of skills, key concepts and areas of knowledge into manageable steps would help teachers develop appropriate assessment criteria which would inform future planning, and therefore promote continuity and progression in terms of developing individuals' designing and making capability. Progression and differentiation are not controlled by projects undertaken; they are achieved through the outcome of activity and this is affected by: level of knowledge utilised, level of skill demonstrated, complexity of task, quality of judgement and decision making and the management of the project. This is clearly an area where teachers need further guidance.

As we await Sir Ron Dearing's review of the manageability of the National Curriculum we can only reflect on the nature of primary education. Subject divisions are not so clear even at KS1 and 2 and the interrelationship of curriculum areas is inevitable. We must promote a holistic review of the curriculum and hope that any changes have adequate time to sink in. To conclude, the opportunity for young children to learn how to practise design technology within a variety of contexts must be maintained. Design education must be appropriately linked to the requirements of life and work.

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# Whose Æsop?

**Victoria de Rijke**

Previously an infant teacher, the Head of BEd English at Middlesex University, Victoria de Rijke responds to Ken Jones's article 'Whose English', in *Forum*, Vol. 35, pp. 40-42.

*Once there was a little child who was in bondage. The child was quick-witted, but when given a 1950s teapot and told to remember its contents, the child could not free her hands to lift the lid, and sat, willing and struggling, for a year and a day on a chair in school.*

I'm sitting in an Infant Year 2 class on a Wednesday morning in Haringey, and a group of 8 children are doing their SATs in English, Key Stage 1: Reading. Two little girls in the corner near me are reading their documents (they appear to be taking it in turns to read to one another). They are working collaboratively, as they are used to doing.

**Who can tell whose ability in reading is being tested?**

The little girls are apart from the table with the teacher (is it because they can be trusted, and because she needs to keep an eye on the group of six boys?). Some of the boys read silently, some aloud, some simply cannot read it and the teacher reads it to them.

**What aspect of reading is being tested?**

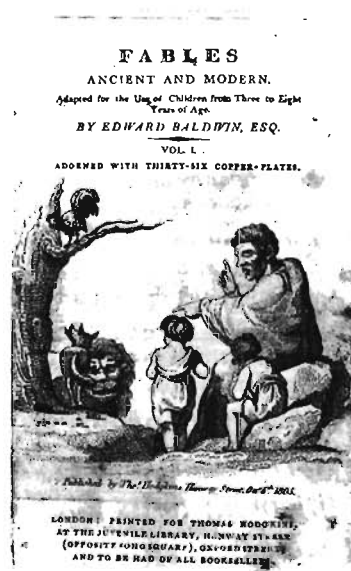
**Who can tell what aspects of gender may be an issue in these tests?**

One of the boys keeps interfering with his neighbours and turning his answers from correct to his preferred version (incorrect). The teacher notices this on a good few occasions, and tells the children not to copy because it might be wrong,

but she is only human and also misses the odd whispered "change that". Children would rather not copy, but if they are at a loss ... who can tell which answers are authentic?

One of the little girls comes up to me to ask if I will help her read. What do I do? She cannot read the text fluently, but within a moment I can tell she could sound it out and, if I read it back to her, make sense of it. I can tell she is capable of story comprehension, but not necessarily of deciphering the questions. Are these not totally different skills, anyway?

The text is *The Greedy Fox and other stories* by Æsop, published for Key Stage 1, Reading Test, 1993. The cover seems horribly familiar ... the illustrations are incredibly evocative for me, and it is with a nightmarish jolt that I recognise the illustration and typeface of *Janet and John*, that mindless reading scheme from the 1950s. The same crude washes of pastel colour outlined in uncertain pen and ink, the same bold print with patronisingly clear ascenders and descenders, the same naturalistically drawn animals and architecture. Surely even the figures are the same? Yet this is not a text about Daddy, Mummy, Janet, John and Dog, it is about Æsop. Æsop was black. In the SATs book he is not black. The people of Ancient Greece are all depicted as white. What kind of cultural and historical messages are conveyed in this 'translation'? In what way



Title-page from *Fables Ancient and Modern*. The engraving was based on the statue of Æsop, over the door at 11 Skinner Street



Æsop

*The above engravings from Baldwin's title-page of 1805, or Tenniel's witty illustrations to Æsop's Fables of 1848 are, extraordinarily, less racist. Has almost 200 years taught us nothing in children's book illustration? Do we resolutely go backwards? Whether one considers it from the representation of cultural stereotype, or the humorous characterisation of animals, there could scarcely be a better reference to the cultural tradition of English literary achievement than Tenniel, with his association with Alice in Wonderland, and Punch.*

is this English Literature? Æsop was a black slave. There is no indication in the illustration that he was a slave, although in the text the term is defined: "A slave was a man or woman who was owned by a rich person, just as they might own a chair or a chicken". Definitions are relative. Mine might be: "A slave is a person forced to work for another against their will, held in bondage" (although of course I would not be providing the facile phonic cues in 'ch' sounds – AT2, 6.66.9 – unpatronisingly, I would be aiming for Level 3, "inconsistencies in phonic patterns").

### Why not take the opportunity to celebrate traditionally English illustration?

The text reads: Æsop "is remembered as a wise storyteller who helped people understand how they should behave".

### Who 'remembers' Æsop in this way?

Æsop is said by Herodotus to have been a slave from Samos and lived in the sixth century BC. He is the founder of fable.

Æsop, a black slave with great wit and insight, became riddle-solver and advisor to the King in the first century AD. He was later granted his freedom as a measure of respect for his intellect.

Æsop was first translated into German in the fifteenth century. Æsop's fables in English are, in turn, translations from that, at least eighteen centuries after their original telling, and via a number of different languages.

Æsop was pushed off a cliff near Delphi before he reached middle-age, because he was a political troublemaker who spoke his mind with dangerous wit using fable as a vehicle for his satire.

In the SATs book he is a white-haired old man, raising his arms benevolently to a crowd of moral disciples. He looks as if he might be telling an exaggerated anecdote about fishing.


Here is a 'lesson' for Primary school teachers, and anyone involved in SATs. Æsop never existed.


Æsop is an amalgamation of oral storytellers who, like Homer, could have been wandering minstrels, poets, political dissidents, slaves who out-educated and humiliated their owners, philosophers, *educators*. Anyone involved in education is Æsop, knowing to their cost that 'Figures are not always facts', 'Faithful service should be long remembered', and (a favourite) 'Leave well alone'.

Is it not possible to give children tests that have intrinsic educational value? What has this little girl 'learnt' in one morning in school?

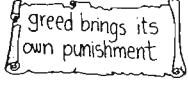
The test offers a multiple choice on alternative 'lessons' of the story. The little girl fixes on the word 'greed' and points to that relating to the fox in the fable (although the word 'lesson' has confused her, it wasn't a lesson after all, but a story. Teachers and children know the difference).


One lesson of the story is to think before you do something. Which of these could also be the lesson of the story?





3





### Does the English National Curriculum know the difference between a lesson and a story? Why does it shy from the word 'moral'?

"The fox is greedy", she tells me. "Do they want the same word?". Feeling myself cornered, slipping in with her demands, I reply meekly "Well, it's very like it". She gives me one of those measured looks children give grown-ups: eyes narrowed with necessary suspicion, weighing up unknown expectations, positioning herself carefully in the balance, and she decides my answer is good enough. 'Greed' must be the word.

### What is being tested here – a child's judgement of my honesty?

### Children's shrewd perception of their teacher's expectation?

I then watch her tick the wrong box as she ticks the one positioned underneath the word 'greed' rather than beside it. After all this she will have got it wrong anyway.

### What is this test testing?

Neither teachers nor children mind the despair – it's the hope that's most depressing.

*N.B. The teapot may have confused readers. I refer to the madhatter's tea party, the emblem of the teapot for the Surrealists and the Surrealist notion of examining the 'lack and the lacunas'. This is precisely the nature of the New Order and the SATs.*

***Is your school striving to adhere to its progressive principles and resist reactionary pressures so that all children may expect an equal entitlement to as good an education as possible?***

Please write to *Forum* (see inside front cover for address) about what you are doing. *Forum* aims to encourage good practice by sharing schools' experiences. Ed.

# Assessing English at KS3

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## Rosemary Appleby

Formerly Head of Physical Education in a West Country comprehensive school, Rosemary Appleby now teaches English. She is also tutor on higher degree courses at the University of Exeter's School of Education where she was recently on secondment as a TVEI-related lecturer.

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The National Curriculum has raised a storm of protest at every stage of its development. Initially, expressions of dissent were associated with principles – professionals exercising a right to protest over centralised interference with matters they had come to regard as their own, and venting anger at practical issues such as the timing of the publication of the initial consultation paper which coincided with the beginning of the long summer break. Recently more important issues have been at stake and teachers now feel they are forced to adopt a technocratic and instrumental regime which conflicts with professional beliefs about the nature of knowledge and creation of effective learning environments.

Despite the constant barrage of criticism maintained by the more vociferous opponents of the Educational Reform Act, it would of course be wrong to imply that all innovation related to the National Curriculum is bad. There have been many benefits. The new requirements have encouraged teachers to reappraise their practice. Many have become more methodical in their record keeping, systematic in their assessment, and more careful concerning the breadth of work covered. In this respect the principle of entitlement is better met. Thus few teachers reject outright the concept of a National Curriculum. It is, as Michael Golby (1992, p. 5) reminds us, "an idea whose time had come". But certain aspects, notably curriculum overload and the inflexibility of its subject based rationale, have attracted legitimate criticism. It is the arrangements concerning assessment which have consistently been at the centre of professional concern, engendering frustration and anger amongst primary and secondary teachers alike.

Around the time of the annual teachers' conferences during the Easter break of 1993 the furore over testing and assessment in the National Curriculum came to a crisis. English at Key Stage 3 proved the catalyst for widespread professional anxiety. The technicality of workload, on which unionised action was legally possible, focussed dissent. However, amidst the widely publicised rhetoric, accusations and counter accusations, little has been said about happenings within the microcosm of the classroom. Nor has much substantiated evidence been offered as to why even the traditionally compliant members of ATL were angry enough to join forces with their more militant colleagues from the NUT and NAS/UWT and to engage, for the first time ever, in industrial action and join a widespread boycott of Key Stage 3 tests.

In this article I outline some of my own experiences as a standard grade English teacher and try to show how the prescribed procedures relating to teacher assessment at KS3 are time-consuming and constitute an inefficient method of recording pupils' progress. How, far from raising standards, they endanger the quality of teaching and threaten to diminish opportunities for learning in the classroom.

Reflecting on my own struggle to master these requirements I can identify four genres of difficulties.

First, there were problems with determining the exact level at which any particular piece of work should be placed. This exercise appeared to resemble more a game of chance than a serious professional undertaking. I had no tacit understanding of the principles which determined the specific level any piece of work should be awarded. Decisions appeared to be linked to several variables which required guesswork as opposed to informed decision making. Circular 2/90 informed me that KS3 should cover levels three to eight. My year nine pupils were only a middle set of a not very able year group. I estimated therefore that they should be about level four or five. This tied in with my head of department's view that most of her set, the one above, were at level six or seven. While this was reassuring, there remained the question 'what if we were both wrong?' We had made little more than what amounted to an uninformed guess. This concern was later justified when the first inter-school moderation exercise took place and I found myself totally at odds with accepted opinion.

Nor was it easy to establish any conformity in assessment because I soon found that the same pupil often submitted work which was at a different level. These appeared related to the difficulty of the assignment and personal preferences of the pupils. For example in open-ended tasks on creative writing where pupils were working to their own agenda, not surprisingly they scored higher than when tackling assignments requiring understanding of a Shakespeare text which they found difficult. Furthermore not only did the quality of their writing deteriorate in such instances, but when pupils were thus stretched grammar, punctuation and presentation suffered as well. Thus the temptation to set relatively easy assignments must exist. Challenging assignments might offer more valuable learning experiences, but such demanding tasks will almost certainly make pupils actually appear less successful and their teachers less effective.

Second, the assessment process itself proved to be practically difficult, very time-consuming and somewhat pointless. One difficulty related to the way the statements of attainment are laid out. For example when assessing AT 3 'Writing' those pertaining to structure in levels three and four were 3a and 4b. However, when you move to levels five and six they become 5b and 6b. It was very difficult to remember where they changed, and constant referrals to the statements took valuable time. Overall the procedures lacked coherence and meaning, and were consequently difficult to administer efficiently. Rationality, if it exists, has so far eluded me, as have any principles which can be internalised in order to give understanding of what was involved. This lack of understanding meant that by the time I had read and assimilated each piece of work I had

often forgotten what it was I was trying to assess and where the assessment fitted into the complicated LEA prescribed record grid.

The futility of this lengthy and complicated exercise emerged one day when, as a matter of interest, I undertook the identical task using my own assessment procedures. These, by comparison, are simple, quick to award being predominantly intuitive, and easy to record. When I placed pupils on levels according to my own grades, twenty five out of twenty six results tallied exactly with the levels shown on the grids. Nor did this new regime prove to be helpful to my pupils. Told by the LEA advisory teacher to abandon former modes of assessment, I dutifully started awarding levels and comments omitting the marks which pupils customarily received. I shall never forget the look of disappointment on their faces when they looked for the accustomed marks which were not there.

"Marks are out", I explained, and, watching their eyes cloud with disbelief I added lamely, "we have to think in terms of the National Curriculum assessments now, I think most of you are at about level four, but some of you may be only three while others may be five or even six ....".

They were no longer listening. Intuition informed me that these pupils felt not only disappointed but cheated. I had broken a tacit agreement; if they did the work, I, for my part, marked it. The assessment procedures, a mark out of twenty and accompanying comment, were summative and formative, and constituted an important source of motivation. Fearful that my class was in danger of losing its main incentive to produce written work, something which I had striven hard to achieve with this group of not particularly well motivated pupils, I resolved that very night to reinstate my own marking system, running it in tandem with required procedures.

The third type of difficulty was concerned with problems relating to differentiation between the various statements of attainment. For example in English: AT3

3a) *Produce, independently, pieces of writing using complete sentences, mainly demarcated with capital letters and full stops or question marks.*

4a) *Produce, independently, pieces of writing showing evidence of a developing ability to structure what is written in ways that make the meaning clearer to the reader, demonstrate in their writing generally accurate use of sentence punctuation.*

5a) *Produce, independently, pieces of writing in which the meaning is made clear to the reader and in which organisational devices and sentence punctuation, including commas and the setting out of direct speech, are generally accurately used.*

5b) *Produce, independently, pieces of writing in which the subject matter is organised and set out clearly and appropriately and in which sentences and any direct speech are helpfully punctuated* (DES, 1990, p. 15).

There are of course subtle differences, but they are difficult to identify. What, for example is the difference between "demonstrate in their writing generally accurate use of sentence punctuation" and writing in "complete sentences, mainly demarcated with capital letters and full stops or question marks"? (op. cit.). Does the difference between levels four and five lie solely in the writer's ability to present direct speech correctly? The situation is further compounded by the fact the statements of attainment appear to differ

generically. Some, as for example AT1 level 4d, simply state that the pupil is required to "participate in a presentation" (DES, 1990, p. 4). Surely what may be inferred here is that participation is the sole criterion for awarding a pupil with this level of attainment? Whereas AT1 4c "take part as speakers and listeners in a group discussion or activity; expressing a personal view and commenting constructively on what is being discussed or experienced" (ibid.) appears to imply that certain standards of participation are implicit in the statement.

Finally, work from individual pupils did not appear to fit readily into the prescribed structures. Jacob's work was, for example, comparatively mature and showed real understanding. It was easy to follow, and relayed a certain depth of understanding. However, he constantly played fast and loose with capital letters and ignored commas almost completely. Claire, on the other hand, was a dab hand with the punctuation, but her ideas were superficial, and her writing conveyed little real meaning. It was possible to award Claire a higher level than Jacob, simply because there is little provision within the statements of attainment for depth of thought and quality of expression.

No doubt many English specialists will have been more successful than I have in coming to terms with the assessment procedures. Some may even be saying "why all the fuss?" I doubt it will be many. While the winter of 1992/3 may be remembered as a time when assessment in English at Key Stage 3 became something of a national *cause célèbre*, such notoriety represents only one example of many instances where intervention by central agencies has eroded teachers' professional autonomy and threatens to lower standards in the classroom. The arrangements which have been put into place are cumbersome and enable the professionals to report nothing that they could not have told using traditionally recognised and well established procedures. In a wider context the demands made by the imposition of these assessment arrangements within the National Curriculum cannot be justified either in terms of financial expenditure (how much does it cost to produce just one glossy National Curriculum folder?) nor in terms of pedagogical efficiency and effectiveness. Such time-consuming activities as those outlined above must adversely affect the quality of the teaching and learning which take place in the classroom.

These difficulties together with the prolonged period of unprecedented and higgledy piggledy imposition of change has served to exhaust and demoralise teachers. I cannot agree with Lord Griffiths's assurances to all chairmen (*sic*) of school governing bodies that "this Summer's tests will be valid and fair to pupils", and "that teachers will be in a strong position to do the very best for each child whom they teach".

However, the future looks bleak. The tests may have been boycotted and plans to publish league tables temporarily thwarted, but John Patten remains firmly antagonistic towards either changes or even compromise, and the revised English Orders offer little to cheer about.

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# Testing Science at KS3

**Bryan Ferriman, Roger Lock & Allan Soares**

Three colleagues at the School of Education, University of Birmingham, explore the impact of the National Curriculum tests. Bryan Ferriman has taught in the West Midlands and been a science adviser and now teaches on the Open University PGCE course. Roger Lock worked in industry before training as a teacher and has taught science education at Leeds and Oxford universities. Allan Soares previously taught in Bedfordshire and Staffordshire comprehensive schools.

During a recent small scale survey in West Midlands schools into key aspects of assessment at KS3, we took the opportunity to explore school policy and practice with respect to the science National Curriculum tests. Although our sample was not representative, the variety of practice within it was such that, if continued beyond the trial phase, it could have significant implications for the very existence of the National Curriculum tests and the purposes for which they were intended.

We focus here on three main issues:

- The way in which schools selected the band of papers for individual students.
- The effect of the testing on the teaching programme.
- The uses to which results might be put in reporting to students and parents.

In addition, we give our own illustrated critique of some elements of the National Curriculum tests which, we believe, may have a deleterious influence on the teaching and learning of science in KS3 and beyond.

## Matching Students to Bands

Since test papers were provided in four bands of levels, teachers needed to arrive at some decision about the most appropriate band for each individual. The general procedure appears to have been to use coursework assessment to provide a rank order and then, through some instinct, to draw boundaries to define blocks of candidates for each band of papers. In effect, this amounts to assuming that a distribution of abilities, not inconsistent with norm-referenced assessment, remains suitable when selecting candidates for a system which is essentially criterion-referenced. As we understand it, one of the purposes of the introduction of a criterion-referenced system was to avoid student performance being determined by reference to some diffuse notion of the 'average'.

The history of the coursework evidence upon which this strategy is based is, itself, very varied. In some cases it is merely the summation of a number of end of module test marks which have, themselves, been recorded as percentages with little direct matching of questions to the National Curriculum Statements of Attainment (SoAs).

No schools in the survey had entered students for the fourth band of papers (levels 7-10). However, in one case, no students were entered for the third band either; preferring to enter 50% of the year 9 students at each of bands 1 and 2.

Comparing this with another comprehensive school, serving a very different socio-economic area, which entered only 13% of its students for band 1 and 44% for band 3, must be reason for concern. In both schools all students achieved a level within the band at which they were entered;

thus largely vindicating assessment procedures used by the corresponding departments. If this experience were repeated widely in schools it would call into question the very need for existence of National Curriculum tests that merely confirmed the professional judgement of teachers.

When the results of the two schools referred to in the preceding paragraph are published in some crude league table, then they will compare very unfavourably. In fact, the two schools in our survey, which on such crude evidence would appear least effective, serve communities where unemployment is high and aspirations low, and where a significant proportion of their students speak English as a second language. To make hurried and ill-informed judgements on these schools, which serve their communities effectively, will do nothing to enhance their status or build their morale.

## Effects of Testing

Preparations for and the importance attached to this year's tests understandably varied a great deal. At one end of the range was the school that simply told the students that it was the material being tested and not them. Students were instructed to bring a book to read in case they finished early. In this way, the SATs caused little stress and had no serious impact upon the normal teaching programme.

In another school, where there was no tradition of expecting students to demonstrate long-term recall, normal lessons were suspended and students spent six weeks in revision of topics interspersed with short tests.

In a third school the departmental head, aware that students were becoming very anxious as their first public examination approached, gathered the whole year together and attempted to put them at their ease. The 'playing down' of the testing was, no doubt, meant to allay any anxiety in students.

In all schools the marking period led to some suspension of normal planned science lessons such that, in some cases, June 8th heralded the beginning of the end of term. Those interviewed felt that the testing in future years would cast a long shadow over their year 9 summer programme and that, in the light of this year's experience, they would find it difficult to avoid the tests influencing or dominating their teaching.

The unpublished HMI report (*The Times Educational Supplement*, 26 June 1992) implying that 14-year-olds enjoyed the first trial test, and Lord Griffiths's sentiments (*The Times Educational Supplement*, 12 June 1992) that these tests were "not intended to spark a rat race nor put emotional pressure on children", might need to be re-examined. Publication of future test results, and the consequent comparisons that will ensue, are likely to put



added pressure on staff and students. As testing in other subjects comes on stream, the time devoted to testing may well lead to a loss of over a month of effective teaching and learning time, not to mention the effects on the remainder of the term.

### Feedback to Students

If the National Curriculum is designed to raise the level of student achievement, then students will need both sensitively presented information about areas in which their performance can improve, and feedback on their strengths. Even though the National Curriculum test is summative in nature, there should be room, not least in the interests of providing continuity from KS3 to 4, to look at the papers and use the evidence they contain to inform students' future performance. This possibility can hardly exist where marked test papers cannot be discussed with students since the express marking system, suggested by SEAC and used by many teachers, leaves parts of questions unmarked; a procedure difficult to justify to students who generally know very little of the structure of the National Curriculum.

No school in the interview sample had entered students for the highest band of papers (levels 7-10). In none of the schools did any students achieve at level 7 in the third band of papers (levels 5-8). Further enquiries of 24 other schools suggest that this might be a more general picture and some questions need to be asked.

(i) *Are the teaching schemes adequately covering the Key Stage 3 programmes of study and do teachers need to revise their schemes further?*

(ii) *Are the requirements of level 7 in Science above the capabilities of 14-year-olds?*

(iii) *If students who were entered for the Band 5-8 tests were only able to achieve level 6, how will their confidence be affected when they find that they have been unable to, or failed to, answer correctly more than half the questions on each paper?*

The experience can only puzzle students who gain the impression that something important is happening to them, but have little idea of what it is. To play chess, before you know how the different pieces move and what is expected of you, can only be difficult. This is not unlike what we are expecting our students to do.

### Impressions of Test Questions

Three major points arose from our consideration of the SATs.

- Do the questions match the SoAs?
- Are question contexts of comparable difficulty?
- Can question formats and response style affect performance?

Since questions were aimed at assessing particular SoAs, then it is vital that the questions match those statements. This was not always the case. For example, the following question that accompanies Figure 1 was designed to test SoA 4.1d (be able to describe the apparent movement of the sun across the sky).

*It is midday and you are facing SOUTH. Draw where the Sun will be in the morning and label it A. Draw where the Sun will be in the afternoon and label it B.*

This question requires more than just describing apparent movement of the sun before students can provide the correct answer. It may be agreed that this is what should be expected of a 14-year-old, but to say that a student has not attained

the Sun at midday



Figure 1

the level statement by failing to answer this question is unfair to the student.

Another question used to assess SoA 3.2a (be able to group materials according to observable features) further illustrates the point.

(b) Use this table to help you answer the questions below

Thing	Hard	Is see-through	Dissolves in water
Jelly	No	Yes	Yes
Glass marble	Yes	Yes	No
Steel ruler	Yes	No	No
Sugar cube	Yes	No	Yes

(i) *Which things are hard and do not dissolve in water?*

(ii) *Which things are NOT see-through? (iii) Which thing is see-through and DOES NOT dissolve in water?*

Here students need to use their skills of analysing data in a tabular form before proceeding to give the correct responses.

The preceding examples are taken from the band of papers that are aimed at the least able and it is for this group, more than any other, that questions should be unambiguous and written in simple language.

A third example questioning the validity of test items is the one designed to assess SoA 3.4c (know that the combustion of fuels releases energy and produces waste gases).

(c) (i) *Give the names of THREE fuels which could be used to heat homes.*

(ii) *Heat is given off when a fuel burns. What substances are made when a fuel burns?*

While part (ii) of the question clearly matches the SoA, part (i) seems less appropriate as the SoA makes no reference to named fuels.

The Assessment of Performance Unit (APU) has shown that students' performance is influenced by different question contexts, formats and response styles. This finding has, apparently, been applied in the construction of the test material as is shown in the following questions used to assess SoA 2.4a (be able to name the major organs of the human body).

(d) *The picture below shows some of the organs of the human body.*

(i) *Label the organs.*

(ii) *Put an x on the picture to show where the heart is.*

(e) *Describe the journey a sperm takes, from when it*

leaves the testis until it fertilises an egg. Include the names of the organs.

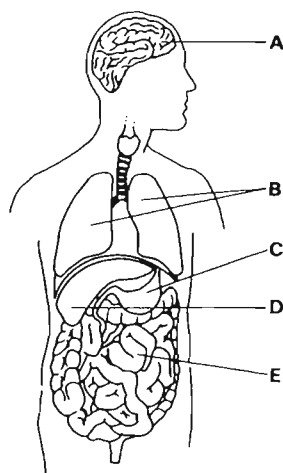


Figure 2

Part (d) involves just naming the different major organs in an organism, while part (e) involves organs within an organ system and requires an extended prose response. Both questions address the same SoA and yet appear to offer routes of very different difficulty to achieve the same outcome.

While we felt the layout of the test materials was good, the high cost of producing such a volume of papers we considered questionable. The wording of the questions, in some instances, could have been rephrased to increase the chances of a correct response, and, in addition, we had considerable anxiety about the amount of pure recall demanded.

The three parts in each paper made the assessment of levels within an Attainment Target more manageable, but is likely to reinforce or reintroduce the organisation and teaching of science along separate subject lines.

If, as our small-scale survey suggests, the teacher assessment and the SATs are providing evidence that confirms the level of student achievement, then one or other of these processes could be made redundant. In these circumstances, would it not be sensible to wave good-bye to these costly and unfriendly tests which are wasteful of teacher, student and teaching time?

We close with a warning. If the 'blind run' has produced nationally a level of agreement between SATs and teacher assessment similar to that which we have found in a few schools in the West Midlands, then, in future years, this level of attainment will be even higher. Why? Because all teachers will coach their students and carefully prepare them for the tests. Such action will, inevitably, lead to higher levels being attained; but at what cost? Beware of those who will claim that the achievement of higher levels in 1993 is evidence of rising standards!

## Discussion: mixed ability?

School students can be taught effectively without selection up to and including year 11. This was the encouraging message from contributors to 'Responses' (*Forum*, Vol. 35, pp. 58-60) yet, in the same issue, Brian Simon (A return to streaming?) had to warn that long-held gains in this field at the primary stage could now be at risk.

The case for non-streaming is as important today as ever and it continues to need informed support through journals like *Forum*. We can make a useful start by abolishing the unfortunate expression 'mixed ability'. If ever there was a banana skin this is it; the term is seriously misleading and makes non-selective grouping an easy target for detractors.

Teachers of non-selective groups aim to encourage students to develop a wide range of abilities through appropriate learning experiences yet 'ability' in the singular suggests that each student has a single ability. In order to create a 'mix', one must presumably be able to measure, estimate or in some other way identify it. The expression

'mixed ability' appears, therefore, to give credence to old discredited theories of intelligence and we should remember the implications of those for the classroom: if students' abilities are known, why not group them accordingly and let teachers revert to the condescending and demoralising task of helping their charges to 'work to the best of their ability'?

'Mixed ability' has also acquired connotations of social engineering when the reverse is the case; it is in-school selection, often based on the most dubious of criteria, which falls into that category. Bernard Barker noted that "classrooms constructed of a microcosm of the community are the most natural arrangement for a common school" [1] whilst a feature article in *The Times Educational Supplement*, describes Mike Hughes's non-selective approach to GCSE geography. Mike uses 'flexible learning' to characterise his work noting that "the methods that do the trick are what the Department of Employment diplomatically calls 'flexible' but which many on the Right dismiss as 'progressive'" [2]

In the absence of an established alternative for the term 'mixed ability' I use 'non-selective' as a more accurate and informative description of both teaching methods and the groups themselves. Streams, bands and sets can then be distinguished as 'selective' which identifies their true character although the students themselves represent a wide range of abilities, educational needs and motivation. The pedagogical implications for their teachers should be identical to those working with non-selective groups – an effective campaigning point with colleagues.

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# Scotland's Post-15 Debate

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## George MacBride

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There is a myth in Scotland that our education system has been since some time immemorial marked at least by equality of opportunity, if not equality. This is a powerful myth which is widely referred to; while historically unjustified it acts as a symbol of our aspirations. A critical aspect of the myth is the belief that the upper levels of our school system are freely open to all youngsters.

In fact secondary education was only extended to all pupils after the Second World War. Between then and 1960 our secondary education systems were often deeply selective. Even after secondary education became comprehensive in structure throughout the country in the 1960s there was no system of certification at statutory school leaving age. With the raising of the school leaving age to 16 in 1972 certification was available to school leavers, though only to a higher-achieving minority of the age cohort; there was no system of certification open to all school leavers until the mid-1980s.

The keystone of certification in the upper secondary school was the Higher grade. This certificate was introduced over a century ago. Typically achievement in Higher grade is assessed by external examination at age 17 or 18. It is open to students after only one year's study. Until a few years ago it was generally accepted in Scotland that the Higher provided a sound standard. It was further agreed that standards had risen in that ever greater proportions of the age cohort were achieving Higher grades. Standards were clearly higher than in England; many more youngsters achieved the requirements for entry to higher education. The examination had proved flexible enough to meet this increase; to reflect new content; to meet the demands of new pedagogical principles; to encompass new subjects; to include new assessment techniques. The examination was also flexible in another sense; it ensured that young people who might otherwise have left school would remain because the system did not require long-term commitments from a student; success could be incremental. A clearly higher proportion of the cohort remained in school after the age of 16. It was also argued that young people gained a broad education through the Higher grade structure. In general when we made comparisons with the A-Level system south of the Border we saw this as a highly successful structure.

It was agreed that certain criticisms could be made of the Higher. In particular because it was sat only a year after Standard grade (roughly equivalent to GCSE) it was often approached as a hurdle to be got over by a range of techniques rather than being approached as an educational and intellectual challenge. Sound education was often sacrificed for the sake of examination passes and teaching had to be a speedy cramming in of basic knowledge and skills in a couple of terms. More radical criticisms came to be made. There was no doubt that the Higher (and the

system of which it was the pinnacle) was one that was discriminatory in social terms. Boys and girls achieved differently; socio-economic status was critically important in determining one's chances of success; in so far as could be determined the assessment system discriminated against ethnic minority children.

A structural criticism could also be sustained: the Higher could survive only so long as it followed a selective assessment system at age 16 which removed large numbers of young people from entry to the upper secondary. The introduction of Standard grade and certification for all school leavers with a consequent increase in the number of those entering S5 (at the age of 16) made it difficult to go on claiming that most S5 pupils could tackle a full diet of Higher grades.

An answer was found which permitted the Higher to remain as the principal assessment instrument in the upper secondary even though many students would not undertake a full diet; a modular system of assessment devised for vocational further education was introduced to the secondary school where it rapidly grew. These National Certificate modular courses, each forty hours long, were initially used as fillers and provision was often lacking in coherence and progression.

Thus in recent years, after certification for all S4 pupils within a single coherent differentiated structure, S5 and S6 (those aged 16 to 18) students were served by two examining bodies which operated two assessment systems based on very different assessment principles, which enshrined a dichotomy between academic and vocational education. The result inevitably was a less than comprehensive system. Even with this range of provision, however incoherent, around half the cohort did not remain in school after their first opportunity to leave.

Such a position could not be sustained indefinitely. A number of bodies within Scottish education, including the EIS, began to argue the case for a coherent two year structure which would include all young people beyond statutory school leaving age.

The Government responded to this concern by the establishment of a committee chaired by John Howie, professor of mathematics in St Andrews University. Unlike other government initiatives in Scottish education this 'Committee to Review Curriculum and Examinations in the fifth and sixth years of Secondary Education' seemed not to be overtly designed to implement a radical right wing agenda. The membership of the Committee was not dominated by members and associates of the Conservative Party or by industrialists; membership was to a notable extent derived from higher education and those who manage the school system. The Committee was not given a remit limited to ensure the adoption of government dogma; instead it was relatively open-ended. The Committee was given a

reasonable time to work and its conclusions, published as *Upper Secondary Education in Scotland* (HMSO, 1992), have been the subject of an extended and informed consultation. The Government has not rushed to implementation.

The Committee interpreted its remit broadly and proceeded to gather information through a number of means: examination of statistics; written evidence; visits to schools and colleges; evidence from HMI; background papers; academic research; visits to several European countries.

After the Committee's examination and analysis of present practice there can be little room left for complacency about the value of current provision in S5 and S6. Provision in the upper secondary fails to provide a coherent educational experience for many young people. It results in a relatively low level of achievement in comparison with the rest of Europe (though not with England). Somewhat more contentiously the Committee argued that Scottish school leavers are not well prepared for the rigours of study in higher education. Present provision does not ensure the breadth on which we had prided ourselves. Perhaps most importantly, the experience of teaching and learning in the upper secondary school is unsatisfactory and limiting for all concerned. This is a damning indictment and one which, although described here in very broad generalisations, is now largely accepted as justified.

After analysis of the upper secondary the Committee moved to solutions to the identified problems. The Committee put forward a set of proposals which they considered to be both logical and radical. In brief the Committee proposed the creation of two different certification systems which would have different curricular rationales, different internal structures, different forms of assessment and even different names. The first of these, SCOTBAC, would require three years' study, would consist of year or two-year long courses in the traditional academic areas, would be largely externally assessed and would afford little choice to learners who would form relatively stable classes. The more academic pupils would follow this. The other system, SCOTCERT, would require one or two years' study, would consist of modules which would be largely internally assessed, would permit wider choice and would frequently group modules under traditional vocational headings. There is a certain familiarity about aspects of this allegedly radical schema.

However, these proposals go well beyond minor reorganisation of Higher Grade and National Certificate. The Committee considered that the depth of study appropriate for SCOTBAC would require three years of study. It would be politically and socially impossible to extend upper secondary education for a further year; hence SCOTBAC would have to commence at the end of S3 (at the age of 14/15). The Committee argued that this was educationally possible because there was evidence (not clearly specified) that achievement in the earlier secondary school could be considerably enhanced and that Standard grade could be taken a year earlier than now at the end of S3. If this argument is to be sustained it requires to be supported by considerably stronger evidence that progress is slow in S1 and S2 than that which the Committee drew in; the Committee's model of progression demonstrates an embarrassing lack of understanding of child development and of epistemology. The Committee also ignored the effect on teacher and parent morale of the near destruction of the Standard grade system, which had taken a decade to develop.

A further aspect of their proposals which occasions disagreement is the strongly argued proposition that SCOTBAC be available only as a group certificate. This was generally agreed to be likely to deter young people, especially those without a family background of higher education, from remaining in school.

Criticisms were made also of SCOTCERT. In particular key aspects of its organisation were left blurred but it was clear that many of its courses could be called vocational. There was also incoherence and ambiguity about the fact that it could be awarded after either a single year or after two years of study.

Underlying most of these specific criticisms is the failure of the Committee to consider the need for any reform of upper secondary education to pursue equality. Despite a rhetoric of equality it is clear throughout the Report that the perceived needs of higher education were the driving force behind the proposals. There is no real sense that other post-school destinations are regarded as of equal importance to higher education. The split of the upper secondary into two quite distinct streams which will enjoy different esteem runs counter to the growing tradition of inclusive comprehensive education.

This split will clearly result in the labelling at a comparatively early stage of youngsters as SCOTBAC or SCOTCERT material. At a technical level it is clear that there could be no ready transfer between the two proposed types of course, certainly not in the direction SCOTCERT to SCOTBAC. The Committee's bland assumption that ladders and bridges could be safely left to the profession to construct could be considered a vote of confidence but was in reality an avoidance of difficulty. Pupils will have to be identified and locked into each course at the latest at the end of S3 and in likelihood considerably earlier. This lack of concern appears to arise from a naive assumption that all our pupils are presently equally supported by society. The barriers to learning imposed by our society on many youngsters are scarcely noted, far less tackled, in the Report. Gender, ethnicity and class scarcely rate a mention as factors in achievement. Neither is the consequent development of inequalities between institutions serving different areas considered seriously.

The response to the Committee's proposals has been interesting in that a consensus has rapidly grown up that the wrong road was taken by the Committee. Elements of this consensus include:

- a belief that there must be a unified two-year system in the upper secondary;
- that certification should be available at least for the present at the end of statutory schooling;
- that there should be a balance between external and internal assessment;
- that differentiation can be achieved by a number of means;
- that the traditional written examination is not the only model of assessment we should use;
- that there is a need for upper secondary courses to be organised on a modular basis;
- that such a modular provision need not be incoherent provided that there are clear pathways through the system and that linkages between units or modules are made explicit;
- that there is a need to ensure that access to the system can be gained at various points;

- that there is an opportunity to carry over partial certification from school to other environments;
- that many existing courses whether modular or longer can be reorganised into some such coherent system;
- that core skills should not be taught separately;
- that a balance must be struck between compulsory breadth and individual choice;
- that there is no distinction between vocational and academic.

Several bodies within Scottish education, including the EIS, have begun the work required to develop such a system.

What has been the government's response? Interestingly, where all other reforms have been pushed through at high speed, in the case of the upper secondary school there has been lengthy consultation and the government has made it clear that it will not be rushed into supporting any particular option.

In the interim of course matters have not rested where they were when the Howie Committee began its work. There has continued to be development of revised Higher courses; Standard grade has ceased to be new; SCOTVEC has introduced gSVQs (equivalent to GNVQs) and these are currently being piloted in a number of schools. There is an inherent danger that we may end up with a Howie scenario by the back door if we are not careful.

Why did the Committee manage to assess the current position in a way that has achieved a very considerable

measure of consensus, while at the same time their proposals for action have gained almost no support?

The answer may lie partly in the isolation of the Committee and its members from the realities of Scottish schools and society. Few of the members had any long-standing direct contact with schools. Although visits were taken across the country these must have been relatively brief. Nor did the Committee enter into a dialogue with the education service or consumers in Scotland. Although a wide range of organisations provided written evidence after invitation and public advertisement, this evidence was produced in response to fourteen questions provided by the Committee. When first published these questions, which formed a somewhat incoherent group, were widely considered as a first trawl for evidence which would be followed by a more carefully directed gathering of evidence. Apart from a very small group of public bodies, no oral evidence was obtained nor was any other opportunity provided for the provision of further written evidence. Their use of European evidence is similarly uncritical and unidimensional. Perhaps most importantly the Committee appears to have lacked any underpinning philosophy of learning or epistemological model and to have lacked any understanding of the means by which social change can be implemented in a democracy.

Their means of operation, however well intentioned and informed in parts, does raise major issues about the means by which educational development should be pursued in a democracy well beyond the nature of the upper secondary curriculum and assessment.

# Access, Mobility and Choice in Post-secondary Education

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It has long been recognised that the British system of education is amongst the most stratified and selective in the world. Opportunities in post-compulsory education have been determined by the expectation that a carefully chosen élite would naturally occupy positions at the apex of achievement – higher education.

Thirty years ago, Ralph Turner described this process as 'sponsored mobility', to be contrasted with the more participative and democratic 'contest mobility' of North America and much of Western Europe.[1] Revisiting this problem at a time when Government is apparently committed to increased participation in all stages of post-compulsory education, it is sobering to reflect that little has changed. Participation by volume has begun to improve but, as a recent paper for the National Commission on Education as concluded [2], social class selection remains the

dominant influence upon post-secondary education. In addition the narrowly-focussed curriculum of higher education continues to exercise a paralysing influence upon the reform of post-secondary provision.

## Economic Decline and the Crisis of Learning

This concentration of opportunity in the hands of a selected minority has had a debilitating effect upon social and economic performance. National economic decline increasingly represents itself as a crisis of investment and participation in post-secondary education. Whereas some years ago attention focussed on the wastage of national talent caused by early selection at the secondary (11+) level, now the emphasis is upon the skills deficit produced by an inaccessible post-secondary sector.

Overwhelmingly the case has been documented: business strategists have charted the lack of competitive advantage engendered by low levels of achievement [3]; academic research has confirmed the crisis of a low-skills economy [4]; industrialists have complained [5] and 'think-tanks' have proposed solutions [6]. The consensus for change in post-16 and higher education has been much more broadly-based than the sociologically-informed critique of early secondary selection, rendering it ideologically immune to rejection. Government appears finally to have accepted that significant changes must be introduced.

The strategy of higher education expansion, which began with the 1987 White Paper [7], has recently been joined by a strategy for the expansion of further education [8]. This latter policy development has been produced by an immediate economic crisis which has made higher education expansion too expensive for the time being, and by rising unemployment which has made spending on further education look politically attractive as a means of keeping young people off the unemployment register.

Nonetheless, as I have argued elsewhere [9], beneath the surface of crisis management, there is a current of consistency in post-secondary education policy. This appears to be driven by a conviction that a significant element in any strategy for the reversal of national economic decline must be increased participation in post-secondary and higher education, a stance which has yet to be supported by an adequate investment strategy.

Participation in higher education in England and Wales has leapt from 11% of the 18-year-old age group in 1987 to 28% by 1992, well above the Government target of 33% by the end of the decade; the rate of expansion in Scotland has been of a similar magnitude. Moreover, demand for higher education places has risen by over 25% during the same period whilst the real price to students has risen by over 30%. This escalating pattern of demand, regardless of price, has encouraged Government to believe that the costs of higher education can be squeezed down yet further.

In further education, similar forces now apply. Following the Autumn 1992 Public Expenditure Statement, Government plans a 25% increase in post-secondary college places. Whilst the expansion of the further education sector may be welcomed as a long-delayed recognition of its importance, commensurate resources may not accompany the growth. One effect will be to fuel the rising aspirations of prospective students, exercising additional upward pressure on places in higher education.

### **Responses to the Crisis**

Post-secondary education has become habituated to a pattern of provision which anticipates low aspiration from the majority of eligible learners. It fosters an acquiescent attitude to learning from those who do participate, and a fatalistic or complacent attitude to future labour market placement, depending on whether students leave from a further education college or a university. Provision has been predicated upon a dismal assessment of individual potential: either school-leavers are defined as 'failures' fit for low skill training or 'second chance' opportunities in further education; or they are carefully nurtured towards the élite activities of profession, Empire and State. With economic decline and loss of international standing, some significant changes are now overdue.

Within most universities, there is a growing recognition that the pattern of learning which might have suited 11%

of the 18-year-old age group may not be appropriate for three times this number of students. Whilst some institutions continue to define the principal purpose of higher education as the reproduction of the next generation of academic staff, most institutions now accept that students need to be properly equipped for future labour market participation. Breadth and flexibility in the curriculum are now understood to be essential if higher education is to meet its wider social objectives. To achieve this, the initial cycle of undergraduate education is being broadened in scope and range of achievements.

On the other hand, the organisation of learning opportunities in further education has traditionally emphasised the interaction between academic and vocational programmes, between students intending to pursue careers either into higher education or directly into the labour market. In recent years this ambivalence in the focus has been sharpened by two developments: firstly, Access courses, franchising arrangements and other linking programmes have raised the importance of the connection with higher education; secondly, the growth in the influence of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ), the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and their Scottish equivalents has concentrated attention upon the specifically vocational aspects of further education.

These developments have produced within further and higher education a reconsideration of purpose, raising questions about the degree of appropriate interaction if post-secondary education were successfully to contribute to a national improvement in the skills base.

### **Student Flexibility and Choice**

Existing organisational arrangements militate against extensive participation. The curriculum remains largely provider-centred and over-determined by academic definitions of appropriate learning needs; access is constrained by inflexible course structures and an over-reliance on traditional forms of assessment; mobility between different learning experiences (within and between institutions) is restricted by obsolete organisational arrangements and inhibiting financial regulations; and students are not provided with genuine guidance and information about learning opportunities.

Yet the principles of student flexibility and choice can be readily accepted across the ideological spectrum. To the Right, such principles speak of individual consumer entitlements; to the Left, they offer the relatively dispossessed some chances of success against the implacable fortresses of the academic establishment. Accordingly, attention has turned recently to reforms in the organisation of post-secondary and higher education which may be assisted by the establishment of a comprehensive framework.

### **Credit Systems and a Framework of Achievement**

The threads of the reform programme have been drawn together and given public exposure by the Further Education Unit. Responses have been largely very supportive and additional publications have added weight to the argument.[10] The Higher Education Quality Council has sponsored a major project to move forward a range of matters relevant to the development of a national credit framework as an essential element in a reformed post-secondary and higher education sector [11].

The emergent consensus across further and higher

education can be defined around a number of propositions which are further explored in the national project:

- A **Credit System** is the most effective means of linking together demonstrated learning achievement. Credit systems enable the unification of post-secondary and higher education in a comprehensive framework of opportunity; they join academic and vocational achievement in a series of awards; they embrace learning which is institutional, 'off-campus', work-based or experiential, full-time or part-time. Students learn to 'trade' independently amongst the constellation of learning opportunities available to them.
- **Modularisation** is a necessary element in the development of a flexible and accessible curriculum. Such developments have been commonplace within the Open University and throughout some former polytechnics, but in the past two years the older universities have begun to move steadily in this direction also. In further education the additional influence of unit-based vocational programmes has assisted similar progress.
- The **Achievement-led Curriculum** is the means by which students receive objective information on the outcomes of learning. Although there is some way to go before higher education fully embraces the output-oriented curriculum, there is swift progress across further education.
- **Guidance and Information** become of paramount importance in an environment where student learners are expected to make decisions about their learning careers. Institutions will move from a position in which they use information solely as an arm of marketing and recruitment to an arrangement wherein information is freely available to students in order to inform and guide their decisions. This information may well need to include previously sensitive data on assessment performance, student cohort analysis and other institutional performance indicators.
- The **Professional Role of the Lecturer** begins to be reshaped. This has understandably become interwoven with concerns over attacks on professional conditions of service. However, the change in the role of the lecturer turns more upon the change in the balance of power between the teacher and the learner. Student-learners are vested with fundamental entitlements to obtain a learning experience commensurate with their needs; the sovereignty of the lecturer is challenged and modified. Instead, a 'natural' and more egalitarian partnership may need to develop between teacher and learner if essential freedoms are to be protected.

### Credit-led Resource Strategies

Most importantly, work is underway to produce a credit-based resource model for both further and higher education; this would emphasise the individual learner and resources would be distributed according to the specificity of the individual learning programme rather than by the mode of attendance. Progress is likely to emerge sooner in further education [12] but the outcomes are likely to refigure further developments in higher education. A

credit-led resource methodology would radically transform the way in which resources were distributed across the sectors, between institutions and perhaps within institutions themselves. It would also place considerable influence in the hands of the learner.

### Implications and Conclusions

A national credit framework, employing credit as a 'currency' to facilitate student access, exchange and mobility, will allow the articulation of academic and vocational learning irrespective of mode or site of attendance; it will place real decision-making power in the hands of students as they progress through the modular framework of learning provision; and it will encourage teachers to provide a stable and informative guidance environment within which students may exercise their choices.

Moreover, while participation in post-secondary and higher education remains marginal or selective, public support will remain modest. As the vast majority orientate their expectations towards an extended engagement with learning, commitment will improve. By generalising participation, popular support might be mobilised for increased investment in the sectors, thereby making a contribution both to national and to personal regeneration.

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# Unifying a Post-16 Curriculum

**Andrew Morris**

Now Deputy Director at Islington Sixth Form Centre within Islington Federal College, Andrew Morris initiated and directed the Hamlyn Post-16 Unified Curriculum Project from 1992.

The past few years have seen convergence around the economic and social policy objective of increasing the percentage of the population that achieves level II and III qualifications. The principal means by which it is expected to raise these average attainment levels is an increase in the participation rate in further education at 16 and in higher education at any age. To achieve this a number of simultaneous developments will be required in resourcing, institutional organisation, marketing and in the curriculum.

The curriculum paradigm within which government policy is developing involves the classification of learning activity into types – until recently, vocational and academic. Reform within this model involves, on the one hand, the improvement of quality within the types; and on the other, the addition of new types. Thus it is hoped that the quality of the vocational curriculum will be improved through the rationalisations of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications, the narrowness of academic education through the addition of ‘AS’ levels to the mixture. The types of learning that are not captured by A/AS levels or National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) (the existence of which has only been recognised at government level in the last few years) will, it is hoped, be encouraged through the additional qualification the general NVQ.

Using this typological approach, it is anticipated that a greater number of learners will be encouraged to remain longer in education and training and thereby to attain at higher levels. The rationale for this would be that potential learners fail to participate or to attain because the track along which their progress would be enabled is inadequate.

## Learners

Real people do not conform to types. The way people behave in the realm of learning is consistent with the overall complexity of human behaviour. Brilliant scientists may emerge from poor backgrounds, violinists outstrip their humble teachers, biologists write poetry and children emerge depressed and ignorant after thirteen costly years of private education.

People do not behave consistently. In the educational context, young and mature learners often surprise themselves and others by developing competences in unexpected areas when nurtured in a confidence-building environment. It is a common experience in post-16 education to find students beginning to flourish who had fallen into a habit of failure in their secondary school. Adults on Access courses frequently find themselves stimulated by pre-degree study and develop skills at a speed that astounds themselves. The issue is that such flowerings are widely regarded as marginal beside the great continent of ‘predictable’ behaviour in classrooms and examination halls throughout the country.

My contention is that such ‘flourishing’ is not marginal behaviour, nor is its appearance random. It tends to occur where the curriculum, the learning environment and the

expectations are appropriate to the individual. In general terms this implies that curriculum organisation needs to be capable of responding to the strengths and weaknesses of the individual and of reacting to the changes that occur as a consequence of their learning. In other words, as a piece of learning in, say, writing or mathematics takes place and begins to fire up the motivation and the self-confidence of the learner, choices need to be available that build on that confidence. The learners themselves need to participate in the decision-making as a preliminary to building the subsequent round of self-confidence.

Such patterns of radical change in an individual’s performance are regularly seen in courses like the now extinct Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education, Access courses for mature students, some forms of Special Needs provision. The curriculum in these areas has been allowed to develop a flexibility and a responsiveness to the individual learner. It is the experience of this kind of curriculum structure that needs to be embraced in designing reforms for the mainstream.

## Flexibility

The overriding characteristic of such a curriculum structure is that it is flexible. The units of learning should not be organised into long courses lacking branching points or depending intricately on fragments of prior knowledge. As the British Baccalaureate report (Finegold et al, 1990) and others pointed out, flexibility implies that learning opportunities should be presented in some kind of modular form. A coherent set of learning outcomes is increasingly being described as a *unit* (see FEU, *A Basis for Credit?*, 1992). The coherence may be defined by an industrial lead body, a group of teachers or a validating body. The *module* of learning activity will actually be delivered in ways that vary enormously according to the client group. An intensive fortnight at a company training school, a weekly meeting of an adult class, a distance learning package or a regular school class will all experience the agreed unit in different modular forms according to the means of delivery.

## A System of Credit

Clearly a system of such flexibility, that parcels up learning in modules of varying shapes and sizes, requires a concept of credit to give value to the learning achievement, much as a trading system with varied commodities requires a concept of currency. It becomes essential that a sense of credit awarded for the achievement of an agreed piece of learning needs to be established that is capable of recognising learning gain in the full range of contexts including vocational and academic, in-college and in-company, part-time and full-time, adult and school-age, traditional and new. To establish such a system of credit against the value systems that have grown around the different learning

traditions will involve a relatively value-free definition of credit. The Further Education Unit has proposed one.

Following the proposals for flexibility suggested in the FEU paper, the learning opportunities available to a potential learner can now be visualised as a set of modules. These may last one week (like a geology field trip) or one year, they may take place in the local FE college, sixth form, Youth Training scheme or company workplace. They may be classified as academic, vocational, general, or none of these. They may be targeted at young people, adults, people with specific learning difficulties or in-company trainees. What they all share is that the outcomes of the learning are explicitly stated and form a coherent set in somebody's terms. They would all carry a credit value, to denote the quantity of learning they represent, and a level indicator to reflect the complexity of the learning or the expectation of autonomy in the learner.

Learners are thus presented with a range of discrete units of learning from which to construct their own learning programme. To do this in a way that makes sense will require a rich bank of information and an effective process of guidance.

### Some Current Developments

Interest in the concept of credit-based flexibility is spreading rapidly. The paper *A Basis for Credit* was published by the Further Education Unit in February 1992 as a result of innovative cross-sector discussions that the FEU initiated. The paper proposed that a system of credit, based on explicit statements of the 'outcomes' (or attainments or achievements) could be overlaid on existing qualifications in a way that integrated the traditions of both higher and further education. A summary of the responses was published by FEU in February 1993.

A number of development activities are flowing from, or being influenced by, the FEU proposals. The FEU itself has sponsored research and development activities and college feasibility studies in several parts of the country. It has also set up a national network of colleges involved in using credit systems. The Hamlyn Post-16 Unified Curriculum Project is trialling a standardised module format and credit-rating procedure based on the FEU proposals.

At the regional level, a post-16 credit framework is being developed in Wales with the support of the Welsh Office and in the capital city, the 'London Together' and 'London First' organisations are investigating the viability of a credit framework for all sectors across London.

During 1993, the Higher Education Quality Council National Development Project is making a thorough investigation of issues of credit accumulation and transfer and will report in Autumn 1993.

### The Hamlyn Post-16 Unified Curriculum Project

The Paul Hamlyn Foundation is funding an innovative project which is exploring some possible ways to bring greater unification to the post-16 curriculum. The project has been organised as a partnership involving Islington Education Authority, the Post-16 Centre at the Institute of Education, University of London and the City and Inner London North Training and Enterprise Council (CILNTEC). In its preliminary phase, the project worked with a number of additional authorities and institutions (including Warwickshire LEA and colleges in Harrow, Croydon and Hackney) to explore the proposals made in *Towards a*

*Unified 16+ Curriculum* (Morris, 1991). This study demonstrated that:

- collaboration across further, higher, adult and sixth form education, and TECs, YT providers and employers was possible;
- there was a widespread common interest in flexibility, breadth and coherence;
- unifying module formats and accreditation procedures could be developed. It also produced prototype modules, progression agreements and a set of 10 working papers that reported on the work.

In Spring 1993, the project entered a development phase with further funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. It now involves a unifying framework, developed through a partnership between the sixth form, further and adult education institutions of Islington and Hackney, CILNTEC and some Youth Training providers, and the Institute of Education Post-16 Centre.

The research arm at the Institute is developing a concept of the 'curriculum of the future' (Young, 1993) which will be used as a theoretical framework for a process of iterative evaluation of the work undertaken in the development sub-projects in the Islington and Hackney institutions. The practical development work, which will also help to shape the theoretical framework, will take the form of a set of interrelated sub-projects initiated by teachers, lecturers, trainers and officers in three broad categories:

- Modularising and credit-rating a range of learning activities. Initially these have been taken from the 'enrichment curriculum': management education, pre-forming arts, careers education and learning support. Others are based on GNVQ units.
- Exploring the potential for GNVQs to unify elements of the curriculum and groups of learners. This is likely to involve exploitation of the 'additional units' and 'core skill units'.
- Development of a scheme of progression agreements running across school, sixth form college, further education, adult education and YT. The aim of this is to move from a 'gate-keeping' model for transfer between courses to one based on preparing learners for the true requirements of their preferred path.

There has been considerable activity in the post-16 curriculum field over the past few years. A tension exists between centralising tendencies in resourcing and the regulation of qualifications on the one hand, and the growth of local initiatives on the other. The experience of TVEI and of adult Access developments, for example, has left many practitioners aware of their own significance and authority in helping to shape appropriate curricula. It is important that such 'bottom up' enterprise continues to interact productively with the centralising tendencies.

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# Disaffected School Students

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## Ian Campbell

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In the years following the implementation of the 1988 Education Act, the majority of research and writing on the experience of secondary education has tended to concentrate on issues related to the curriculum. However, the recent publication by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) of a study of the motivation of secondary school pupils has brought to the forefront a number of other issues of fundamental importance. Included among these is evidence of the existence of substantial numbers of disaffected and alienated pupils right from the beginning of year 7, and the finding that almost a third of the pupils in the survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "Most of the time I don't want to go to school". My own research, undertaken during 1992, is entirely in keeping with the NFER findings.

This research took place while I was teaching in a school catering for pupils with emotional difficulties, most of whom had refused to attend mainstream schools. I was working exclusively with small groups, and as a result was able to get to know individual pupils well. The research resulted from the experience of having my own preconceptions overturned during the time I worked with these young people. Initially, my view was that the problems lay with the pupils themselves. My perception was that they were unable to cope with large comprehensive schools due to anxiety and depression. However, as the pupils related their experiences to me, I came to realise that their anxieties and depression were, in many cases, rational responses to their experiences at school. This is not to say that the young people did not have problems of their own entirely unrelated to school. However, without exception, they were able to make powerful and valid criticisms of the circumstances at their previous schools.

The purpose of this article is not, it must be clear, to make sweeping criticisms of the schools concerned. The schools themselves have considerable problems to contend with, and are staffed by many dedicated and hard-working teachers. My aim is to enable some of the views of these teenagers to be heard. They themselves were able to identify a wide range of important factors which contributed to their decisions not to attend school. Within the scope of this article I will focus on two in particular which were also identified in the NFER study: the behaviour of pupils in class, and bullying. In doing so, I intend to argue that these issues must be addressed if schools are to meet the needs of all their pupils.

### Behaviour in Class

The NFER study points to a significant degree of poor behaviour in class resulting from boredom, disaffection and pupil perceptions of the way teachers treat them. One of the most powerful impressions gained during my own research was of the enormous effect which the disruptive behaviour of some pupils has on the learning and state of

mind of others. This is well illustrated by the following written responses. These and all others in this article are presented exactly as written, with no correction:

*At \_\_\_ School there were so many children that most of them couldn't get a proper education the teachers didn't care what they did and couldn't control them There were so many fights and people calling each other abusive names The teachers had to shout and most of the time didn't teach us properly they would just write things on the board we didn't understand and tell us to copy it. The teachers said don't ask us to help you because you won't listen. The bad kids spoiled it for those who wanted to learn.*  
(Boy: 15)

*I was alright for the first two years but then the pressure being put on me started. I was always nervous at school, always worrying about what other people thought. I worked hard and got high marks and people who didn't do as well held this against me. I had people coming up to me, knocking my pen out of my hand and just constantly annoying because I wanted to work ... I got worried about going to school and every day I'd have an upset tummy and feel sick with physical vomiting. I just made excuses not to go so my parents took me but as soon as they drove off I walked straight back out of the gates.*  
(Girl: 16)

The strategies used by some pupils to cope in class were equally alarming. The following interview extract follows on from a discussion about how a number of pupils in the group used to get headaches due to the amount of noise in class:

*I didn't get headaches. I used to block it off.*

Could you tell me how you did that?

*I just like ... the teacher would be talking and I just used to sit there. Then she said now ... I'd listen but I'd turn off.*

Right. And what were you thinking of when you turned off?

*I just wanted to get through to home time.* (Girl: 14)

A number of the young people interviewed also explained that at their previous schools they had been very reluctant to speak in class because other people made fun of them. This concern was expressed particularly, though not exclusively, by girls. The damage to their self-confidence and ability to learn was enormous:

*Like when the teacher used ... she never used to ask me anything but if she was asking something ... say ...*

*I wouldn't say anything so then she'd answer it for me.*

*I knew what the answers were ... they used to get it right and they'd get all the praise.*  
(Girl: 14)

The young people who participated in the research repeatedly described two other ways in which disruptive behaviour on the part of some pupils had highly damaging consequences. Non-compliant pupils tended first of all to

dominate the teacher's attention, as illustrated by the following questionnaire findings:

*Which of the following statements do you think were true?*

People who behaved badly got a lot of attention	10
People who worked hard got a lot of attention	5
People who were quiet got a lot of attention	1
If you were quiet, teachers tended not to notice you	10

(17 respondents)

As a result, there was almost unanimous agreement that class sizes were too large, a theme cogently argued by James Pye (1988):

"The comprehensive system attempts to offer equality of opportunity. But teachers will not be able to realise this aim until the problem of class size is addressed. All they can do at present is to divide their unwieldy crowds into those they can teach and like, those they can leave to get on with it, and those whose capacity to make their lives difficult they can suffer, suppress, outwit or try to ignore.

The pupils who participated in my research came entirely from the group which, according to Pye, is left to get on with it.

The second damaging consequence of disruptive behaviour was that some teachers understandably tended to resort to 'damage limitation'. This is illustrated in the following interview extract:

*Well it was a few kids in the class who'd start playing up and throwing things about and the teacher would say "Alright, I'm not gonna bother with you any more. I'm not gonna help you". So he'd just write something on the board and make us copy out.*

So what you're saying is the whole class had to suffer for the behaviour of a few ...

*... and if you asked for any help, he'd just say, "No you was messing about and you wasn't listening". ... It was the same in Science. Because all the kids were playing up and that, we didn't do any experiments or practical work in that subject either. We just had to do writing out of a book. ... Whenever there was an experiment that was needed, the teacher would just do it on his table and show us then we'd have to write about it.*

(Boy: 15)

In the light of the NFER finding that pupils enjoy practical work, group work and discussion, the effects of such an approach are likely to be entirely counterproductive.

## Bullying

The NFER study has stressed once more the extent of bullying at secondary school. For a number of young people who participated in my research, the experience of being bullied had had a devastating effect:

*I felt very frightened and depressed. I was being bullied and I felt hurt and very frightened. I felt out of place like I didn't belong anywhere. I started to dislike the lessons as well because sometimes the children would embarrass me in front of the teacher and he/she never did anything. I felt very lonely and by myself.* (Girl: 14)

There was also a widespread belief that schools did not do enough to prevent bullying:

*There was loads of bullying going on that the teachers didn't even know about. They didn't have teachers on duty at break times and dinner times ... The teachers did not walk around on duty just stay inside and there were loads of places away from the staff rooms where people were hurt and abused from other kids.* (Boy: 15)

What happened with regard to bullying?

*The teachers said "Oh we'll see what we can do", but done nothing. They didn't make any efforts to find out who was doing it or nothing like that.* (Boy: 16)

They were in no doubt, however, with regard to what schools should do:

*Teachers should be more sympathetic to children who are being bullied, And believe them or learn to recognise the signs if someone is being bullied.* (Girl: 14)

The Elton Report on Discipline in Schools (1989) was equally clear in calling for schools to "take action based on clear rules which are backed by appropriate sanctions and systems to protect and support victims". It appears that many young people still do not receive support of this kind.

## Conclusion

There are currently unprecedented pressures on those who work in comprehensive schools. The mechanisms of the 1988 Act and subsequent legislation have created a climate in which an increasing number of schools are striving to compete against a set of measures which so poorly reflect much of the good work which takes place. It is vital, therefore, that schools resist the pressure to depart from comprehensive principles, and that they continue to work towards meeting the needs of all their pupils.

In order to do so they need to listen to what those pupils have to say. They need to establish why so many pupils are poorly motivated, and why so many express their dissatisfaction through poor behaviour. Not all the reasons lie in schools, but some most certainly do. Schools must not assume that the majority of pupils whose behaviour is compliant are actually satisfied with their experiences at school. Many are not, and some are silently very unhappy.

The opinions expressed by the young people in the NFER study and in my own research are essentially unverified. It is difficult to believe, however, that they do not contain a great deal of truth. In any case, this is what a large number of young people actually believe. There is a very great challenge ahead for schools in the 1990s: a challenge which, in my view, needs to take precedence over educational agendas imposed from elsewhere.

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# The Opting Out Challenge

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## Martin Rogers

A school governor for many years and Chair of the ILEA schools sub-committee during its final two years, Martin Rogers is co-ordinator of Local Schools Information, the LEA-funded body which monitors and advises on opting out. He is the author of *Opting Out: choice and the future of schools* (Lawrence & Wishart).

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The summer of 1993 may turn out to have been something of a watershed for the course of the policy of encouraging schools to opt out of their local education authorities. Whether it will develop into a fully fledged flow or retreat into a tired trickle remains to be seen. Events of this summer, however, will probably come to be seen as the key determinants: the outcome will depend on whether it is the Government or its opponents who capitalise most successfully on developments.

The largest ever Education Bill, most of it concerned with extending the grant-maintained sector, became the 1993 Education Act. The process of opting out has been simplified and shortened; governing bodies are required to consider annually whether or not to hold a parental ballot, and to report their reasons to parents; LEAs' ability to provide information for parents has been severely restricted through the imposition of a spending limit on their attempts to influence the outcome of ballots, whilst governing bodies will be given grants to 'promote' grant maintained (GM) status. Amendments placing a duty on governors to ensure that parents receive balanced, accurate and objective information; requiring that a ballot be preceded by a minimum period during which the school is in session to enable parents to fully debate the matter; and requiring a 'level playing field' over funding of GM and LEA schools were all rejected by the Government.

The result, ministers hope, will be to increase the pace of opting out; to enable them to reach targets for the growth of the GM sector which they were embarrassingly forced to revise downwards in the face of a conspicuous lack of enthusiasm by schools in most areas to opt out under the arrangements introduced by the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA). The passage of the 1993 Act, in contrast to that of the ERA, was relatively muted. Following a general election campaign in which education, extraordinarily, barely featured as an issue, a new shadow education team was faced with the difficult task of opposing the new measures with very little time for preparation; a task made all the harder by the cynical early application of a guillotine on debate. The Government must have been surprised, and delighted, by the lack of media coverage and consequent public inertia surrounding the introduction of an Act which, potentially, could see local authorities virtually losing their role in the education service, to be replaced by a new quango (the Funding Agency for Schools) and the greatly enhanced powers of the Secretary of State.

However, there have been some notable setbacks for the Government over the same period. The only one of the formerly 'Tory shires' still under Conservative control after the County Council elections is Buckinghamshire. The introduction of the National Curriculum testing programme was brought to a shuddering halt by teachers, with the clearly expressed support of parent organisations. A £50 billion

budget deficit presages cuts in public services across the board and the popularity of the Government, and the Education Secretary, slumped. All of which are factors with a direct bearing on the advance, or otherwise, of the GM sector.

Opting out so far has been highly concentrated in relatively few areas. One-third of LEAs account for over four-fifths of the schools voting 'yes'; another third still have no GM schools. A large majority of the schools voting to opt out are in the county LEAs where the Tories have recently lost control; just three such counties – Essex, Kent and Lincolnshire – contain one-quarter of the national total. Whilst many Tory councillors may have opposed the policy in private, few of these councils openly resisted it in public. Parents in these areas thus voted largely on the basis of a very unbalanced presentation of information, and often with the feeling that their LEA cared little whether their schools opted out or not. That will now change, as new administrations plainly opposed to opting out seek to establish new, and different, relationships with their schools. The successful resistance to the introduction of the SATs testing programme, and the consequent publication of league tables of results, has severely dented the credibility of ministers, particularly the Secretary of State. Apart from being a major distraction from opting out, for many schools which otherwise might have been considering the issue, it has exposed parents and school governors to a taste of what increased central control might be like; most appear to have been unimpressed by the experience. Indeed, the support and guidance offered by LEAs, in marked contrast to the veiled threats from ministers, may prove a major influence on decisions over opting out in the future.

There are also growing signs of parental unease over the publication of crude league tables and, indeed, the whole thrust of policies designed to turn education from a public service to a market commodity. The establishment of a national parent campaign against opting out, to be launched in autumn 1993, was reported in the press. If the organisers are able to harness this 'anti-market' feeling, and enlist the support of the large number of parents who have been appalled by their own experience of the opting out process, this campaign could be a major blow to the Government's claim to be acting in the interests of parents.

The ever-tightening squeeze on public spending has already led to the widespread realisation that the financial benefits offered as an inducement to schools to opt out cannot, and will not, be sustained; in fact, they are already largely gone. Whilst LEAs will undoubtedly face further cuts, some of which are bound to be passed on to schools, it remains the case that many still spend more than the Government believes they should (as expressed through their Standard Spending Assessments). Few parents believe that giving the Government direct control of school budgets

would lead to higher spending. And, as LEAs delegate more to schools under LMS, the benefits of opting out which derive solely from the redistribution of existing expenditure diminish. It has recently become apparent that even advocates of GM status are warning parents that opting out offers no pot of gold for schools.

Revelations that ministers took a policy decision to double fund early GM schools for the loss of LEA services (through the 'cash protection' of their 'central annual maintenance grants') have not only added to the complaints about the preferential treatment of the GM sector, but have opened up huge resentment within it, as schools realise that those which opted out earlier are receiving up to £200,000 a year more than those which did so later. The move to a 'Common Funding Formula' (CFF) as the basis for funding GM schools is bound to lead to painful cuts in the budgets of those which have gained in this way. It is also becoming clear, as more details emerge about the CFF, that it will lead to a much cruder basis for school funding than the relatively sophisticated LMS schemes employed by most LEAs. This is hardly surprising, as a single national funding agency could hardly be expected to cope with the complexities of local conditions that are a natural part of LEAs' functions.

The stage is thus set for an inevitable battle this autumn for the support of parents in determining the future shape of school provision. The Government, armed with its new Education Act, is bound to launch a major initiative to try and rekindle interest in opting out. The Department for Education, which already has a 'publicity' budget approaching £7 million, is likely to produce an avalanche of advertising and glossy handouts. The headteachers of GM schools, already widely deployed in persuading others to join them, are likely to find themselves under even greater pressure to take to the campaign trail. As the promise of financial gain recedes, much will be made of the alleged inevitability of the change with the suggestion that, if the money is drying up, it is better to move fast. Parents will also be threatened with the uncertainties of local government reorganisation, and the ensuing instability.

The opposition parties and LEAs will emphasise the benefits of local democratic accountability and the

irrelevance of opting out to raising educational standards and the quality of provision. Schools will increasingly realise, and use, the strength of their bargaining position. Wise councillors will recognise (as many already have), if not enjoy, the reality of that strength, and will make great efforts to fashion an education service which meets, as far as possible, the demands of schools in order to preserve a coherent service for the future. Wise headteachers, incidentally, will recognise that change cannot be achieved overnight and that too fast a pace threatens the viability of much that they would wish to see preserved. Wise parents will recognise that neither councillors nor headteachers are necessarily wise nor, for that matter, government ministers, school governors or even parents themselves!

The issue of opting out, and the structural organisation of the school system, will be discussed more widely in schools than it has yet been. It is important that it is so, but it is vital that this discussion does not overshadow the necessary debate about how to improve provision and raise standards; they are far from being the same. The danger is very real that the debate will focus narrowly on whether or not to opt out – and that debate will often be informed, so far as parents are concerned, in a very one-sided way as a consequence of the new Education Act. There is a desperate shortage of identified speakers to whom schools can turn to help them present parents with a balanced range of views. Whilst some local headteacher associations have sought to remedy this by making themselves available, this practice is not yet widespread. Other groups, too, have much to offer in this regard.

At different times over the past couple of years, it has been reported that education is at the top of each of the main political parties' agenda. That is not the perception of most parents, governors or professionals in the schools I visit. Whilst some are happy, indeed anxious, to 'keep politics out of education', most realise that the future of our major, local authority based public service is, definitively, a very political issue. It is essential now to engage as many as possible in the debate that lies ahead in schools, for the debate surrounding the passage of the 1993 Education Act barely broke out of the walls of Westminster.

# Tension in Milton Keynes

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## David Crook

A teacher in a Milton Keynes comprehensive school, David Crook previously taught in Birmingham and Warwickshire and was recently a Research Associate for an Anglo-American project on comprehensive education at the School of Education, University of Leicester.

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In contrast with the pattern of policy-making in many areas, the planning of state education in Milton Keynes has almost always been a forethought, rather than an afterthought. Development plans of the 1960s and 1970s suggest the impact of post-Plowden thinking, as sites were carefully earmarked to provide primary, middle, secondary, further and higher education. The Stantonbury campus helped to point the way ahead for community education during the

1970s, and the pattern of large schools, leisure and adult education centres, sharing facilities on vast campus sites, has been developed in subsequent years. In most districts, falling rolls have been more than counterbalanced by the city's population growth. This has boosted demand for post-16 and higher education. That other pioneering educational landmark of Milton Keynes, the Open University, is now being complemented on an adjacent site

by a satellite campus of De Montford University (formerly Leicester Polytechnic), with an ambitious expansion programme.

The exact extent and speed of industrial and demographic change is always difficult to predict, but the concept of community education across all age ranges is one which has, to date, broadly been achieved. Most residential communities within the city boast their own local primary and middle schools, and a long bus journey to school is, happily, the exception, rather than the rule for those children aged over twelve, who attend the city's eight comprehensive schools.

Educationally, socially and economically – as well as architecturally – Milton Keynes has little in common with the remainder of Buckinghamshire. The city's non-selective three-tier pattern, with transfer at the ages of eight and twelve, provides a marked contrast with the experience in south Buckinghamshire, where the eleven-plus examination continues to allocate children to secondary modern or grammar schools. The influx of highly skilled and professional workers into Milton Keynes during the past twenty years has accentuated economic divisions. Some modern housing estates within the city exhibit aspects of deprivation more commonly experienced in older urban areas and, the percentage of Milton Keynes children proceeding to their local comprehensive with a statemented learning difficulty is, at 4%, approximately double the county average.

At the top end of the ability range, the city's secondary schools suffer a further disadvantage. Milton Keynes children may, if their parents so wish, sit a voluntary twelve-plus examination, enabling successful candidates to transfer to county grammar schools in Aylesbury Vale or Buckingham. Others travel outside the county to selective schools in Bedford. Between three and five per cent of the potential comprehensive school intake are 'creamed' by state grammar schools. Generous scholarships, permitting transfer to the local independent sector – which the city's incoming professional classes have not been slow to take up – further undermine the 'comprehensiveness' of the comprehensive schools.

Predictably, in last year's local controversy over examination league tables, such significant extenuating circumstances were not always taken into account. Ignoring encouraging statistical evidence – which indicates a 7% rate of improvement for Milton Keynes students achieving five or more GCSE passes, compared with a national increase of 2% – the advocates of selection have been content to rely upon raw data from the published tables. Even Buckinghamshire's secondary modern schools, they argue, perform better than the city comprehensives.

But the debate about league tables is only one recent manifestation of a recurring controversy about comprehensive education in Milton Keynes. In July 1992, for the third time in five years, Conservative-dominated Buckinghamshire County Council rejected proposals to found a grammar school in the city. Commenting on this decision at the time, the principal anti-comprehensive spokesman, Councillor Andy Dransfield, told the press that he regretted the behaviour of the 'comprehensive mafia' (amongst whom, presumably, he counted a number of his party political colleagues), and promised that the matter would not be allowed to rest.

So it has proved. Councillor Dransfield has generated much local press publicity during the intervening period.

In December 1992 it was reported that governors of Denbigh comprehensive school, where Dransfield was only three months into a four-year term as the county representative on the governing body, were seeking to remove him on the somewhat understated grounds that his campaign was not in the best interests of the school. The following month, comments attributed to him in a local newspaper attracted censure from, amongst others, a forum of middle school headteachers in the Denbigh catchment area.

The Education Committee's Labour group succeeded in blocking a full debate in January 1993, but the results of the May local elections have failed to resolve the issue. Buckinghamshire Conservatives lost four and retained just three seats in Milton Keynes, but Councillor Dransfield (who, after five recounts saw his majority slashed to just 28 votes) looks set to continue his crusade against comprehensive education. A motion for the County Council, now the only Tory shire authority in the country, has already been drafted, which reads: "This Council resolves that, unless consultation shows there is insufficient support, any planned future Milton Keynes secondary schools be built as grammar schools until demand is satisfied". The proposal is different from its predecessors, in that it anticipates no direct change of status for existing Milton Keynes comprehensive schools, but rather concentrates on the city development plan's anticipation of two new secondary schools at Shenley Brook End (to the south-west) and Walnut Tree (to the east). Indirectly, however, there are unfavourable implications for some – if not all – of the existing comprehensives, with catchment areas threatened by yet another unwelcome creaming process.

The Liberal Democrats (who, in May, gained eight county seats, including three in Milton Keynes) and Labour have forcefully argued that the Conservatives now have no mandate for grammar schools in the borough. However, it seems unlikely that their combined opposition will prove sufficient to prevent a consultation process being triggered before the end of the year. A number of Buckinghamshire's Conservative gentry leaders, who for many years shaped a supportive, if not unreservedly enthusiastic policy towards comprehensive schools, retired in May. Speculation now focusses upon how many Tory Councillors from the south of the county will be prepared to lend support to Dransfield and his two Milton Keynes Tory colleagues. The latter three Councillors are, ominously, all existing Education Committee members, who supported the idea of public consultation on grammar schools in their election campaigns.

The scenario which the eventuality of consultation would present for John Patten (or whoever may succeed him) is intriguing. Not for the first time, the objectives of local and national Conservative educational policy are in serious conflict. The pro-grammar schools lobby are not, interestingly enough, working on the same assumption as the Secretary of State, that the future role of LEAs is merely to competitively provide client services, rather than devise local educational policy.

Amongst the petitioners, who would certainly object to grammar schools, would be the city's four comprehensive Grant Maintained Schools (GMS). The two large schools on the Stantonbury campus, Bridgewater and Brindley (each with more than 1,000 pupils on the roll) opted out of LEA control in 1990. Their declared motive was to preserve their status as comprehensives, in the wake of an earlier effort to establish a grammar school. Although the possibility



of a collective opt-out application was tentatively considered at that time, heads and governing bodies of other Milton Keynes comprehensives gambled that the issue would die down. It has not.

Two further schools, Radcliffe (in Wolverton) and Lord Grey (Bletchley) have followed the Stantonbury example by opting out in 1993. Both have underlined their commitment to maintain a fully comprehensive intake. Ironically, it would be these two schools which would suffer most if a grammar school was built on the Shenley Brook End site. By opting out of council control, Radcliffe and Lord Grey have sought to extricate themselves from Councillor Dransfield's tiresome annual political game, and GMS has been viewed as a means of protecting their comprehensive status. However, neither of these aspirations may be taken for granted. Regardless of whether or not they are nominally independent of the LEA, the fate of every non-selective secondary school in Milton Keynes rests with county Tories.

The city of Milton Keynes was planned with community comprehensive education in mind. The personnel of the schools continue to overwhelmingly reflect these objectives, and they must now look towards the Commission for New Towns, which has replaced the (now defunct) Milton Keynes Development Corporation as the city's principal planning agency, to underline this commitment. In the immediate future, there will continue to be a mixture of GM and LEA

comprehensive schools in the city; but, given the prevailing climate of uncertainty regarding the two unbuilt secondary schools, Milton Keynes is hardly likely to become the kind of competitive arena which the Secretary of State envisages.

The government's stated target is for 1500 GM schools by April 1994, and the Secretary of State will, no doubt, derive some satisfaction that four Milton Keynes comprehensive schools may be counted in the statistics. But figures alone can be deceptive. It does not seem unreasonable to suggest that if education in Milton Keynes was administered by a unitary authority, rather than Buckinghamshire County Council, opting out would not have been a high profile issue.

A victory for Mr Patten? Not necessarily. Regardless of whether their particular school is locally or centrally-funded, committed Milton Keynes governors, heads, staff and parents are unlikely to passively observe the transformation of existing comprehensive schools into *de facto* secondary moderns. If the Secretary of State approves any future Council proposal to build a grammar school in the city, the GM schools will surely be amongst his sternest critics. These schools have, after all, been attracted by promises of greater control, independence and freedom from external interference, and have perceived opting-out to be the surest method of preserving community comprehensive education in the city.

## Reviews

### Fighting Back

**Education Answers Back:** critical responses to government policy  
Clyde Chitty & Brian Simon (Eds), 1993  
London: Lawrence & Wishart  
176 pp., £9.99. ISBN 0-85315-781-2

If reading this book does not make you very angry then check your pulse and look in the mirror to see if you are still on this earth. I had read most of its contents before I started, for it is mainly a collection of existing speeches and articles, but being reminded of the events in education of the last two or three years is not good for the blood pressure.

The authors have brought together a set of sixteen documents of one kind or another that tell the sad tale of Government mismanagement, incompetence, ignorance, prejudice and downright malevolence since the 1988 Education Act. It is a shabby story. Many of the seminal statements of the early 1990s are now available under the same cover: Eric Bolton's searing speech to the CLEA conference in Liverpool; Caroline Gipps's presidential address to the British Educational Research Association conference in Stirling, in which she attacks the misuse of evidence by ministers and others; Paul Black's measured demolition of the same crowd in his presidential address to the British Association; the often

hilarious correspondence between Fred Jarvis and John Major's office about the Prime Minister's beliefs, and several others.

Eric Bolton said much of what needed saying when he lobbed a few stun grenades at the annual conference of the local education authorities, "the present situation is unsustainable ... some things of great value and high standards are suffering ... the Government shows little sign of being a listening Government ... There is no harm in listening to your political friends. But a wise government listens more widely than that".

These points are then echoed by the Chairman of the House of Commons Select Committee on education, a Conservative MP, Sir Malcolm Thornton, in his speech to heads and academics at De Montfort University: "The concept of grant-maintained schools owes more, in my view, to the antipathy of national government to local authorities than to finding the best way to improve education in this country ... I believe that both the wider debate and the ears of Ministers have been disproportionately influenced by extremists whose pronouncements become ever wilder and further from the reality of the world of education which I recognise ... Their insidious propaganda must be challenged ... The extreme right-wing think tanks ... are the spindle and loom of chaos; the offspring of bigoted minds and muddy understandings".

The section of the book I enjoyed most was the long running correspondence between Fred Jarvis, former *El Supremo*

of the National Union of Teachers, and various minions who answer letters addressed to 10 Downing Street. I can just imagine the scene: a letter arrives from a former union chief, some flunky is assigned to what is thought to be an easy task, namely fobbing off a now impotent member of the general public. Little did the poor beggar realise that he was taking on not only a man who had vast experience of dealing with politicians, who was very bright, and had bags of energy, but someone who had retired and therefore could devote lots of time to kicking the crap out of the Prime Minister and then telling the press about it. The world, and Fred Jarvis, still await in vain an answer to questions about the Prime Minister's attitude to pre-school education, a General Teaching Council, as well as evidence for his assertions that there were "insidious attacks on literature and history in our schools" and that some local authorities employ more bureaucrats than teachers.

Another emetic is John Patten's speech to the Conservative Party Conference in 1992. In cold print the awful banality of the words seem worse even than the dreadfulness of the original delivery: "But all too often, the problems in education lie ... with the 1960s theorists, with the trendy left, and with the teachers' union bosses. Some seem to think that children shouldn't be taught the alphabet ... I want William Shakespeare in our classrooms, not Ronald McDonald ... I want to see all schools going grant maintained". It was the usual call for applause

via unsustainable prejudices and direct appeals to the Id.

All the other contributions in the book are well worth reading, not something one can always say about a collection of think pieces. There are articles by good journalists like Stuart Maclure, Judith Judd, Ngaio Crequer, Anne Corbett and Barry Hugill, and respected academics, such as Caroline Gipps, Paul Black and Denis Lawton, whose speech about the national curriculum and the various ideologies of the privatisers, minimalists, pluralists and comprehensive planners, is a masterpiece of succinct analysis. Duncan Graham and Peter Watkins, former chief and deputy of the National Curriculum Council, also give their views of recent events.

Anyone fancying a heart attack should read the first two pages of the piece by Caroline Gipps, in which she tells once more the sorry story of Kenneth Clarke announcing to the press, four days before the results were available for checking, that "nearly a third" of seven-year-olds could not recognise three letters of the alphabet. It turned out that the true figure was under 2.5 per cent. Old Clarkie had not taken the trouble to distinguish between level one and level two of the national curriculum, and his "nearly a third" turned out to be the 28 per cent who had not reached level two, all of whom could recognise three letters of the alphabet. By the time belated corrections appeared in small print on page 94, rather than in banner headlines on page 1, as in the original, the damage had been done. It was a piece of incompetence at best.

The twenty-first century will look back at these years in total disbelief. Why was there no revolt? How did they get away with it? What would have happened if the Government had tried out their ideas on the French? Only a tolerant and orderly country like England would stand for all this nonsense. In the meantime read this excellent collection and weep.

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### **SOS: Save Our Schools**

Brian Simon & Clyde Chitty, 1993

London: Lawrence & Wishart

152 pp., pb., £9.99. ISBN 0-85315-782-0

This book sets the latest Education Act in the context of increasing right wing control of Tory education policy. It is the companion volume to the same authors' documentary collection and together they aim to "contribute to keeping alive an alternative and more generous concept of the role and future of education".

The authors expose Conservative governments' ideological aim since 1987 to effect "a basic transformation of the education system" as it had evolved from the 1944 Act, and particularly through the decades 1960-1980. Essentially this meant destruction of the comprehensive systems that Labour and Conservative local authorities had created throughout most of Britain. Steps were therefore taken first to undermine and finally to eliminate LEAs, but without any evident plan for a viable new structure.

Key strands in the process of transformation, and the resistance encountered, are examined from 1988 to the new Act heralded by the 1992 White Paper. The analysis shows how lack of support for measures initiated in the 1988 Act impelled the government to force the pace with greater central control.

Opting out is identified as 'the crucial means' for destroying LEAs and comprehensive systems while fostering market forces. A 'diversity' and 'variety' of schools would be created as Grant Maintained took their place alongside existing public, private and independent schools. Opting out was presented as increasing 'choice', 'freeing' schools from LEA bureaucracy and giving parents power through the decisive ballots. Popularist Tory slogans came together with opting out.

Brian Simon analyses opting out in considerable detail in his chapters. With a trenchant and succinct summary of the rationale, growth and potential of locally administered comprehensive systems, he sets the context for the Tory attack. This was launched after Keith Joseph's era of underfunding had created the 'national scandal' of an 'educational crisis' which provided the opportunity to lay the blame on LEAs.

Detailing the financial inducements, he shows how LEAs' planned reduction of surplus places was frustrated but the forecast 'avalanche' of opted out schools did not result. The 1988 Act failed to destroy the comprehensive system.

The new Act is designed to increase the number opting out and even establish new Grant Maintained Schools. By creating quango Funding Councils to gradually replace LEAs, it is intended to end democratically accountable local planning. It is meant to ensure an end to comprehensive education in England and Wales.

Centralisation of control is the other main theme for systematic analysis. It is shown as the outcome of all the measures aimed at destroying LEAs and a significant feature of the latest legislation. The Secretary of State's detailed powers over the National Curriculum were the most overtly centralist controls in the 1988 Act.

Clyde Chitty recognises that the curriculum before 1988 was often "fragmented or partial ... lacking either structure or coherence". He implies that an opportunity for sensible reform was lost when the efforts of the National Curriculum Council, under Duncan Graham's leadership, to develop cross curricular elements with potential towards a whole curriculum approach were undermined by the growing influence of right wing pressures on the nature and purpose of assessment. He argues that since 1988 there has been "a steady retreat from the only principles which make assessment a worthwhile activity".

His analysis of sharp divisions within government and among Conservatives over the National Curriculum and assessment, on which the right wing largely won, exposes the lack of rationale in the original scheme and explains the subsequent chaos.

Important issues concerning the role of pupils' own teachers' assessments, as well as the function and type of SAT testing are addressed, but the significance of the drive to make tests serve league tables is not explored. Nor is the insidious use of SATs to induce schools to reintroduce streaming or subject setting – an issue which, admittedly, became more evident in the resistance to Key Stage 3 English SATs after this book was written.

The undermining of comprehensive schooling is portrayed mainly in structural terms, linked with the destruction of LEAs and dependent on the reintroduction of selective schools, whether Grant Maintained, CTCs, specialist or the new types envisaged in the 1992 White Paper. The threat to streaming in primary schools from such developments and from early labelling of their own children by SAT 'levels' is ignored.

Tory schism is shown up over the National Curriculum and its assessment, but an impression is given of a concerted drive to destroy local authorities and establish central control despite its inherent conflict with rhetoric for market forces, league tables and competition. The absurd unmanageability of the potential chaos unleashed by such an incoherent stratagem must surely become a factor in awakening doubt and opposition.

The book ends with an outline for an alternative educational policy drawn up by the Council for Educational Advance and with encouraging examples of successful ventures in local collaboration among schools and the construction of new partnerships to counteract the destructive effects of government mismanagement. By exposing the reality of the transformation being enacted, the authors have provided a weapon for resisting it.

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