What is preventing social mobility?

A review of the evidence

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Introduction

'Social mobility' (or the lack of it) is a prominent topic in political debate. All three main political parties are committed to addressing Britain's lamentable record for social mobility. Social class[1] remains the strongest predictor of life outcomes, including for educational achievement, where the UK's socio-economic gap for educational achievement is among the most significant in the developed world[2]. Social mobility is considered fundamental to a meritocratic society, and as vital both to economic productivity and to democracy. Yet efforts thus far to stimulate social mobility have been largely unsuccessful. What sort of initiatives and approaches, then, might prove more fruitful in securing mobility?

This review of the literature seeks to address this question, providing evidence to support a 'sister publication' from ASCL which makes recommendations to Government. It does so by mapping the various factors contributing to social *immobility* in England, with particular attention to education and the education system. We begin by taking a moment to reflect on the concept of social mobility, and to establish the scale of social inequality and persistence of social immobility in England, with especial focus on the social class gap for educational achievement.

Social mobility is distinguished from the concepts of social justice, and social equality (although the realisation of social mobility may be seen as an aspect of social justice). Social mobility is premised on a) inequality; and b) meritocracy. The concept of social mobility assumes that there *is* social inequality, but that this inequality should be based on merit/ability: citizens can move up and down social strata depending on their achievements. As such, in this meritocratic vision, society as a whole benefits from a system wherein individuals are matched to employment based on their abilities (including those most talented taking the most highly skilled and/or powerful jobs). Such meritocracy ensures economic productivity, as well as reflecting the equality of opportunity essential to a democratic society.

However, in England social inequality has grown, and there is little social mobility. A key element impeding social mobility is the scale of social inequality. This is because those from low socio-economic groups are so *disadvantaged,* and those from high socio-economic groups are so *advantaged*, from the outset. As inferred by Rawls, if the starting blocks in a race are placed at very different points, the race outcomes cannot be fair/simply based on merit. There is only so much room at the top (in terms of the best education and the best jobs available). The higher socio-economic groups have become adept at securing the reproduction of advantage for their children, and are more invested in doing so due to the greater inequality gap (ie the consequences of downward mobility are more severe, incentivising activities to guard against it).

[1] As indicated by e.g. earnings and parents' education
[2] See OECD (2010a; 2010c)

Key facts on social immobility and social inequality

The UK one of has one of the worst records for social mobility among OECD nations (OECD, 2010c; Cabinet Office, 2011; Hinds et al, 2012).

70 % of High Court Judges, and over half of senior medical consultants, FTSE chief executives and top journalists went to public schools, though only 7% of the total population do so (Sutton Trust, 2009). Those educated in private schools are disproportionately represented in the most powerful and well-remunerated jobs (BBC, 2011; Cabinet Office, 2011)

Private school pupils are over 22 times more likely to enter a selective university than are state school pupils entitled to free school meals, and are 55 times more likely than free school meals pupils to gain a place at Oxbridge. At the 25 most selective universities in England, only 2% of the yearly student intake was made up for free school meals pupils (Sutton Trust, 2010c).

Hence in order to facilitate social mobility and equality of opportunity, the government needs to take one of two broad approaches (or both). Either we have to make society less unequal, or we have to take radical and firm steps to interrupt the upper/middle class 'gaming of the system' which currently impedes social mobility. However desirable it may be that social mobility is realised through individual choice and autonomy (as evoked in the DfE Business Plan 2011-2015), research evidence and historic experience demonstrates that this will not happen (aside from in isolated 'heroic' cases) without intervention, due to the forces outlined.

Education is a central issue for social mobility, as it is the education system which is supposed to prepare young people with the knowledge and skills they need to secure successful futures as workers and citizens, and to delineate merit via the award of education credentials. For these reasons, education is often seen as a driver of social mobility. Yet in fact, the evidence shows that in the UK, education at best replicates, and at worst exacerbates, existing inequality. Statistics highlight that British children's educational attainment is overwhelmingly linked to parental occupation, income, and qualifications (EPPE, 2004; Lupton et al, 2009; National Equality Panel, 2010; EPPSE, 2012). Hinds et al (2011) observe that education has the potential to 'break the cycle' of disadvantage, and some schools are of course demonstrating that socio-economic gaps can be narrowed (Allen, 2012). However, in the case of the English education system overall, rather than the socio-economic gap for achievement shrinking as young people progress through it, the gap widens[3]. Lindley & Machin's (2012) recent work shows that, as educational opportunities have grown, so has inequality.

[3] See e.g. DfE (2011a, 2011b, 2012a); Cabinet Office (2012)

36.3 % of young people on free school meals (FSM) achieve 5 A*-C including Maths and English at GCSE, compared to 62.6% not taking FSM (DfE, 2013). This gap of 26.3 percentage points has remained broadly stable[4].

Young people from the richest fifth of families are nearly three times more likely to go to university than the poorest fifth (Anders, 2012)[5].

Only 7% of children attend private schools, but 17% Russell group university entrants and 34% of Oxbridge entrants have been privately educated.

The highest-performing 15 year olds from poor backgrounds are, on average, two years behind the highest-performing pupils from privileged backgrounds for reading ability (Jerrim, 2012)

Of course, other social factors also have a strong impact on educational outcomes. Research shows how gender, ethnicity and other variables intersect with social class in particular ways in achievement patterns; and it is important these are not overlooked. However, socio-economic background remains the strongest single predictor of attainment, and this is especially the case for the white majority population.

Two key elements impacting social and educational inequality are material capital and social capital. By material capital we mean financial (e.g. to be able to pay for private schooling or tuition, to be able to pay for school trips and educational resources/experiences, to be able to afford to move into the catchment of a good school, etc); as well as the provision of facilities conducive to learning. By social capital we mean the networks, understandings and experiences that can support social progress. For middle class parents this often includes, for example, experience of university-level education; understanding of the education system and the confidence to negotiate it; connections to others with expertise and information; connections to those who can offer high-quality support (such as professional work experience placements, internships etc). Of course there are different aspects of social capital, with certain knowledge and understandings held by those from low socio-economic groups; however in terms of *educational* social capital a raft of research demonstrates the advantage held by the middle-classes on a range of fronts[6].

In relation to education, the possession or absence of these two kinds of capital mean that children start in very different places in terms of the competition that social mobility presupposes. Children from low socio-economic groups tend to be already behind their more advantaged counterparts when they begin school (Cabinet Office, 2011). However, far from schooling narrowing this gap, the gap widens through schooling (Goodman & Gregg, 2010; DfE 2011a, 2011b; 2012a). And educational attainment has increased more rapidly amongst the well-off in the UK (Lupton et al, 2009; Lindley &

[4] Albeit what small changes there are are in the right direction. The ratio of those achieving according to socio-economic background has narrowed slightly (Lipton, 2009; Clifton & Cook, 2012), although there has been little change in the percentage point gap between those taking FSM and those not for the key indicator of '5 A*-C GCSE including Maths and English' over the last few years. Nevertheless, that gap shrank by one percentage point to 26% for GCSE outcomes in 2011/12 (DfE, 2013).

[5] The UK has a relatively high proportion of students whose parents did not receive higher education attending university, illustrating high mobility in relation to university education (OECD, 2012). However, the location of this provision remains highly segregated, with a very small proportion of disadvantaged students attending Russell Group universities.

[6] See e.g. Bourdieu & Passeron (1979), for the seminal work here; or Vincent & Ball (2007) for recent exemplars

Machin, 2012). The especially wide socio-economic gap for achievement in the UK comprises a serious block to meritocracy and social mobility. Furthermore, in spite of the policy focus on those taking free school meals (FSM), in fact analysis shows that in England educational achievement is directly correlated with socio-economic background – the higher the socio-economic group, the higher the achievement (Lupton et al, 2009). There are of course schools that manage to buck this trend, demonstrating that the pattern is not inevitable (see e.g. Blanden, 2006; Allen, 2012). But it is important to highlight that the direct correlation between attainment and socio-economic background reveals the issue is not simply with poverty (as expressed by FSM), but with social class inequality more generally (Clifton & Cook, 2012).

There are many, often inter-related explanations for the size of the socio-economic gap for achievement. But they mainly relate to issues of material and social capital, and the ways these interact with institutional structures in education. Issues around identity and attainment are precipitated by these. For example, if a working class child arrives at school behind her/his middle class peers, and is placed in sets for the less able or struggles to keep up, they may rapidly begin to construct themselves as 'not much good' and 'not academic', with implications for their future learning, aspirations, and classroom behaviours. Social and financial capital, and the structural arrangements for a range of social institutions, interact in their impact on outcomes.

Government interventions usually seek to provide complimentary or remedial help to contribute to a levelling of the playing field. These may seek to a) provide help that would otherwise be circumscribed by limited finance, b) provide additional information that would otherwise be circumscribed by limited knowledge/social capital, or c) increase quality of public services that benefit all. In order to support the identification of effective interventions to facilitate social mobility, we draw out the different *impediments* that arise through the birth-to-work education journey.

Unequal starting points

Educational inequality begins before school, in a child's first years of life. The home learning environment has an important impact on development, and on readiness for school (EPPE, 2004; National Equality Panel, 2010). Here already, both social and financial capital available in the family environment make a profound impact on children's start in life and future educational prospects.

Facts on early years and arrival at school

- In 2011, 44% of FSM pupils for the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) achieved a 'good level of development' compared with 62% of other pupils (DfE, 2011a).
- Children growing up today in the UK from the poorest fifth of families are on average already nearly a year (11.1 months) behind those children from middle income families in vocabulary tests by age 5, when most children start school (Waldfogel & Washbrook, 2010).
- Just under half (45%) of children from the poorest fifth of families were read to daily at age 3, compared with 8 in 10 (78%) of children from the richest fifth of families. (Waldfogel & Washbrook, 2010).

This graph from Waldfogel & Washbrook (2011) also highlights the continuum for achievement correlated with socio-economic status (demonstrating again that this is not simply a problem for

‘those in poverty’ as opposed to ‘those not in poverty’, but rather highlights a wider issue of social class):

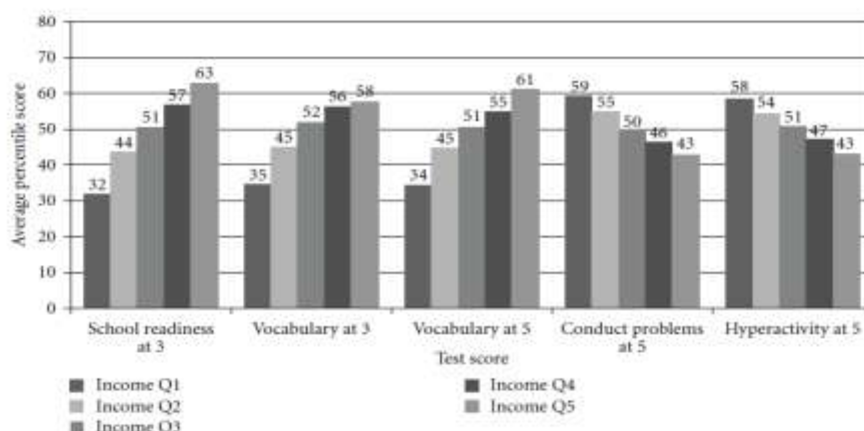

Figure 2: Mean school readiness scores in the MCS (UK) cohort at ages 3 and 5, by income quintile ($N = 10,476$).

The EPPSE project (2012) has shown that differences in academic attainment and social-behavioural development related to background emerged by age 3, and remain fairly stable to age 14. The project shows the especially strong impact of educational inequality among parents on their children’s outcomes. Low family socio-economic status, low or no earned income, and FSM, are significant predictors of poorer educational outcomes for children; but the strongest predictive element is parental education (particularly that of mothers). This is especially salient given that educational inequalities appear to be growing (Lindley & Machin, 2012).

In terms of preparedness for school, differences in language ability – and even the sorts of words children have learnt – are crucial. Sociological work shows the importance of language for ‘fitting in’ to the school system, not just in terms of competence to engage the curriculum, but also for feelings of familiarity or dissonance in relation to school life (Bernstein, 1960; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Such experiences have an important bearing on identification (or otherwise) with the school system, and language may also have a bearing on teacher perceptions of children and their abilities (Hamel, 2003).

The research on early years and inequality shows that: a) dis/advantage impacts children’s development even in the early years; b) that consequent inequality in preparedness for school impacts future educational progress; and c) that the home learning environment and early years provision impact development and preparedness for school. Hence intervention to support the home learning environment for disadvantaged children, and to improve the quality of early years provision, are of fundamental import (EPPE, 2004; Sylva et al 2010; EPPSE, 2012; Allen, 2011; Hinds et al, 2012).

Crucially, recent research has demonstrated the importance of the home learning environment *in addition* to external years provision (EPPSE, 2012; Waldfogel & Washbrook, 2010; Melhuish et al 2008) – the latter cannot be assumed to compensate for the former.

Current policy approach

The Government is currently concentrating attention and resources on external early years provision. For example, it is extending free early years education places for up to 40% of 2 year olds by 2014[7], and it is taking measures to improve to the quality and status of the Early Years workforce.

The rigorous research on early years provision, and especially that evaluating Sure Start provision, has shown that early years provision only positively impacts later outcomes for children if provision is of *high quality* (EPPE, 2004; Sylva et al, 2010; Melhuish et al, 2010; see also Sutton Trust 2012c). UK annual expenditure per pre-primary student is less than the OECD average (OECD, 2012).

As the Nutbrown Review Interim Report (2012) argued, at present the professional entry to the Early Years sector remains too low to ensure standards. As the review observed,

> "It must be a cause for concern that early years courses are often the easiest to enrol on and the courses that the students with the poorest academic records are sometimes steered towards" (p. 9)

Nutbrown (2012) identified a series of weaknesses in the quality and low-level certification among the early years workforce. Although early years group settings must be managed by someone with at least a relevant Level 3 qualification, the Nutbrown review maintains that many of the qualifications on offer are insufficient in standard and content. The review also asserts that Level 2 qualifications are insufficient to equip early years practitioners, and that all practitioners ought to be expected to have Level 2 maths and English. Hinds (2012) acknowledges the urgency of addressing the Early Years workforce challenge for supporting disadvantaged children: "We know that the countries least marred by social immobility tend to be those that have invested quite heavily in workforce development at early years level".

The Government is reforming the Early Years Foundation Stage from September 2012, and there is now a specific focus on social disadvantage in the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) programme. It is also supporting voluntary and charity sector involvement to increase quality of specific early years offers, and the Ofsted framework has been amended to promote improvement for poorer quality provision[8]. The Government has accepted the majority of the Nutbrown Review recommendations, with the aim of improving the status and quality of the early years workforce[9]; including that Early Years Educators will train at level 3 and be required to have at least a grade C in GCSE English and maths.

Such effort is to be strongly applauded. However, a more concerted focus on ensuring disadvantaged children access excellent childcare facilities, and on encouraging social mixing, remains urgently needed. The government has taken measure to facilitate high quality providers to expand, but it does not follow that any additional places in high quality settings will be accessed by disadvantaged families.

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[7] Although the rolling of Sure Start funding into the Early Intervention Grant with removal of the ring fence does represent a risk to provision in a period of cutbacks for Local Authorities. 4Children's (2012) survey of Sure Start shows that most local authorities have thus far prioritised SSCC for investment; however, many are facing significant budget reductions (and ensuing staffing cuts), and there has been a small reduction in the number of SSCCs open since April 2010. Additionally over 20% of centres are now charging for services that were formerly free.

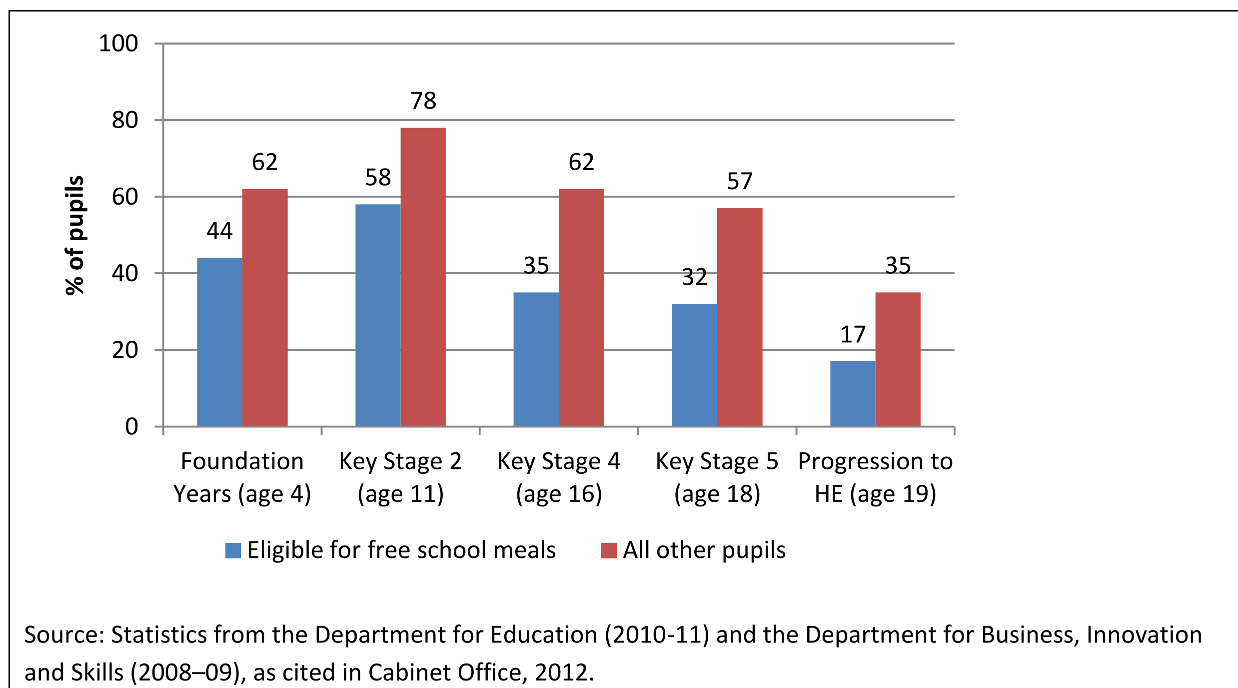
[8] See 'Government response to Supporting Families in the Foundation Years: Consultation on Proposed Changes to Free Early Education and Childcare Sufficiency' (2012).

[9] See DfE 2013b

The lack of simultaneous attention to the home learning environment, shown by research to be crucial for educational outcomes *in spite* of early years provision, remains a limitation in the current policy focus. The UK faces very high levels of child poverty (Adamson, 2010; Whitham, 2012), and while there was a downward trend in the number of children living in poverty in the early years of the century, this trend has now reversed (Brewer et al, 2011; Adamson, 2012). Poverty has a direct impact on the home learning environment in disadvantaged families, meaning that British children tend to have very different starts to life depending on their background. The Government remains committed to ending child poverty by 2020, and is trying to address the levels of disadvantage children in these families face through a range of initiatives[10]; in addition to its interventions for early years provision. However, current tax arrangements are not set to narrow inequality (Cribb et al, 2012), and current austerity reductions to public spending have the greatest impact on the vulnerable.

Schooling

As we saw above, the achievement gap according to free school meals grows over the different stages of compulsory schooling. For example, this table shows results at different Keys Stages in 2010/11. The attainment gap between FSM and non-FSM students at KS1 stands at 18%, rising to 20% at KS2 and even further to 27% by KS4[11].



Source: Statistics from the Department for Education (2010-11) and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2008–09), as cited in Cabinet Office, 2012.

[10] These include increasing the health visitor workforce to sure up the Healthy Child Programme, and support for parents in the form of a digital information service and the trialling free parenting classes and relationship support in different areas of the country. See DfE (2012b); HM Government (2012)

[11] Of course, other social variables also have a strong impact on educational outcomes. A raft of research shows how e.g. gender and ethnicity intersect with social class in particular ways in achievement patterns. However, socio-economic background remains the strongest single predictor of attainment, and this is especially the case for the White majority population.

We observed above that:

- socio-economic educational attainment gaps are especially wide in the UK (OECD, 2007; 2010c);
- gaps widen rather than narrow as children progress through the education system (DfE 2011a; 2011b; 2012a);
- prestigious routes and opportunities tend to be monopolised by young people from affluent backgrounds (Lindley & Machin, 2012; Sutton Trust, 2011)

Why should this be the case? There are many intersecting explanations, which we shall try to tease out here. But the over-arching factors are: 1) the high level of educational and social segregation in our system[12]; and 2) the facilitation of those with better financial and social capital to use this to secure advantage for their children. Although the socio-economic gap for attainment is a widespread international phenomenon, and research has shown that social deprivation has a negative impact on educational attainment across all OECD countries (Kerr & West, 2010), the UK has a particularly high achievement gap for social class (OECD, 2007; 2010c), and an especially high degree of social segregation within the education system.

This section, then, attends to some of the issues that impact poorer outcomes for disadvantaged pupils – what we might see as their 'double disadvantage', given they are disadvantaged on entry to the English education system, and then further disadvantaged within it (Francis, 2011). We focus first on systemic issues that perpetuate distinction and segregation; and finally on cultural/identity issues which intertwine with those of institutional segregation to impact outcomes.

School quality and dis/advantage

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to attend the lowest-performing schools and/or struggling schools (Cassen & Kingdon, 2007; Kerr & West, 2010; Lupton, 2010; Francis 2011). A key issue for school quality is that of teacher quality. Hinds et al (2012) draw on the research on the most successful school systems to identify the prioritisation of a high quality teacher workforce within these systems[13], and the lower gap for socio-economic background within them. It is certainly the case that teacher quality has an important bearing on learning outcomes for all pupils; and research shows that school quality (with teacher quality being a key factor within this) makes an especial impact for disadvantaged young people (West et al, 2010; Clifton & Cook, 2012). It is also the case that in the UK teaching quality is higher in more socially advantaged schools (OECD, 2012; Husbands, 2012). The government has the right intentions in taking measures to increase quality in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) recruits and provision – it has raised the bar for ITE recruitment, instigated incentives for key curriculum subject areas, and expanded the TeachFirst scheme (aimed at placing graduates from Russell Group universities in schools in areas of disadvantage). The Pupil Premium will also provide some of those schools with the most challenging intakes with the option to recruit new staff. However, it is currently the case that teaching quality and leadership of teaching tends to be related to the areas and demographics of different schools, with poorer quality of schooling correlated with higher numbers of disadvantaged pupils, and higher quality with advantaged pupils (Francis, 2011).

But even where disadvantaged young people attend good schools, they tend to underperform in comparison to their more affluent counterparts (Cook, 2012; 2013). Possible explanations for this are considered below. It has been argued that underperforming pupil groups (wherein working-class pupils are over-represented) may not receive the best teaching unless they are perceived to be able

[12] See e.g. Cassen & Kingdon (2007); National Equality Panel (2010); Knowles & Evans (2012).
[13] See e.g. McKinsey & Company (2011); Sammons (1999); Levin & Fullan (2008).

to contribute to their school's league table position (Cassen & Kingdon, 2007). The explanation for this can be found in the competitive education market and its drivers (league tables) (see Ainscow & West, 2006; Ainscow et al, 2012). We shall elaborate this point further below.

For the purposes of this section it is sufficient to note the strong tendency for poorer pupils to experience poorer quality schooling (including, crucially, teaching); where for their affluent counterparts the reverse is true. Academies are empowered to use performance related pay to attract good staff. However, it is far from clear what the effect would be on teacher quality in schools in areas of deprivation if regional pay bargaining comes into effect; or if academies start to use their freedoms on pay and conditions (currently the majority are not [Bassett et al, 2012]).

The previous Government also took steps to improve school quality, and significant initiatives such as the City Challenge appear to have contributed to a narrowing of the gap at school level in some areas (Lupton et al, 2009; Lupton, 2010); notably London (Hutchings et al, 2012, Gove 2012). Sponsor academies are a further strategy to address school quality: the original sponsor academies were mainly located in areas of poverty, and the current policy is for struggling schools to be removed from local authority control, becoming sponsored academies. Outcomes have been mixed (NAO, 2012), although the impetus to revitalisation, and impact of some notable success stories cannot be doubted (Academies Commission, 2013). With regard to narrowing socio-economic gaps via the sponsored academies programme, again findings are somewhat mixed, although there are positive signs. The National Audit Office (2010) observe that, although early sponsor academies tended to raise attainment overall, on average, the gap between more disadvantaged pupils and others had grown wider in academies than in comparable maintained schools. However, recent analysis by the DfE (2012e) shows more positive outcomes and a slight narrowing of the gap for FSM, especially in sponsored academies open the longest.

Educational segregation

As we observe above, England has an especially socially segregated education system. We address various key facets of educational segregation below.

Private schools

England has one of the largest private school sectors in Europe (Dorling, 2012), with 7% of children attending fee-paying schools (Hinds et al, 2012). Dorling (2012) reports that the UK is second only to Chile in spending on private education. Hence in England a significant section of families pay for advantages perceived to be less available in the state system. The impact of this is also disproportionate, as the higher percentages of private school pupils attaining A levels and accessing Russell Group universities (and then progressing to take up top jobs) attests (see e.g. Hinds, 2012).

Significantly smaller class sizes and higher teacher-pupil ratios is one strong advantage provided by the private sector. According to Independent Schools Council (2012) the pupil-teacher ratio in their member schools averages 1 teacher to 9.4 pupils (Smithers & Tracey [2003] report private school average class size in 2009 at secondary level was 10.5). The average class size in the state sector is 26 pupils (20.5 in secondary, and 27.2 in state-funded primary schools, DfE, 2012b). Hence twice the number in private school classes[14]. As Glatter (2012) points out, the UK private school average of

[14] Research on class size suggests that, where small reductions in class size do not significantly impact outcomes, *larger* reductions (as in the case of typical private school class sizes) do impact (especially if teaching practice is designed for the smaller group). The Education Endowment Foundation Toolkit (2012) explains, *"Overall the benefits are not particularly large or clear, until class size is reduced to under 20 or even below 15. There is little advantage in reducing classes from, say, 30 to 25. The issue is whether the teacher changes their teaching approach when working with a smaller class and whether, as a result, the pupils change*

10.5 pupils per class is less than half the OECD average for independent private institutions (21.3 pupils; see OECD, 2011); indicating that the private school sector in England is more distinct from state-provided schooling than it is in most other countries.

Another advantage is per-pupil funding. Sibieta et al (2007) report that spending per head in the state sector was only 58% of that spent per head in the independent sector in 2006–07 (and this is in a period where state sector spending was comparatively high).

Figure 1 is drawn from Sibieta et al (2007, p. 18)

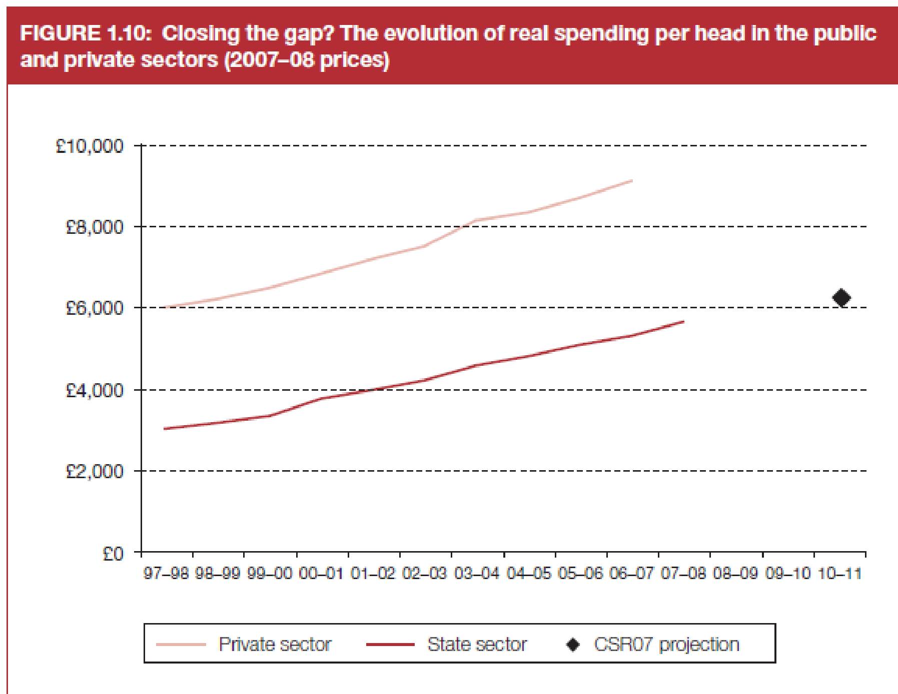


FIGURE 1.10: Closing the gap? The evolution of real spending per head in the public and private sectors (2007–08 prices)

Sources: For public spending per pupil, see Budgets 2006 and 2007, Comprehensive Spending Review 2007, and Department for Education & Skills, *Departmental Report: 2007*. Figures for private sector spending per pupil are taken from the annual census of independent schools conducted by the Independent Schools Council from various years, http://www.isc.co.uk/Publications_ISCCensus.htm.

In addition to small class sizes, this additional resourcing of course pays for outstanding sport and enrichment facilities, and material and social educational resources, including those specifically and determinedly targeted on ensuring progress through elite educational and career routes (Green et al, 2011). The extent of such activities is often insufficiently understood. However, it routinely includes the preparation for elite career routes from targeted careers education from an early age and quality guidance and work experience (Archer, 2012; Huddleston et al, 2012), and the additional provision of targeted coaching for access to Oxbridge and other Russell Group institutions.

Clearly, state schools can never match this provision without a *radical* injection of funding. It may be argued that public schools are saving the state the cost of educating 7% of pupils. Yet there is a detrimental impact on the system overall in terms of a) social segregation (see OECD 2001;

their learning behaviours. Having 15 pupils in a class and teaching them in exactly the same way as a class of 30 will not make much difference. There is evidence that, when done successfully, benefits of reducing classes sizes to below 20 can be identified in the behaviour and attitudes of pupils as well as on attainment, and that these benefits persist for a number of years (from early primary school through to Key Stage 3)".

[14] There are benefits from greater social mixing for a range of reasons, including the driving up of educational outcomes overall (see Adamson, 2010; OECD, 2010b; Hinds *et al*, 2011).

Adamson, 2010)[15] and b) the purchase of advantage via the educational facilities and additional social capital private education can provide. In terms of policy to facilitate social mobility, the Government needs to confront the extent of additional advantage that those already advantaged in society are purchasing for their children; as this works against meritocracy and its socio-economic benefits. At present the state to some extent subsidises private schooling. For example, private schools often benefit from charitable status[16]; and private schools do not contribute funding to Initial Teacher Education, despite benefiting from it (Howson, 2012). The government is seeking to involve private schools in sponsoring academies, and is also facilitating those private schools that wish to become state schools to convert through its academies and free schools programme. Nevertheless, we suggest that if the Government genuinely wants to tackle England's lack of social mobility, it needs to take steps to disincentivise private schooling (by ending state subsidy for it); and/or take proactive steps to level the playing field.

It is of course true that many middle-class families also exercise their financial and cultural capital advantage in selecting state schools, and operating within them, but these are separate issues that need to be dealt with differently. We look at selective state schools next.

Selective Schools

Fully or partially-selective schools continue to feature strongly in England. These range from fully selective grammar schools retained in some counties (the non-selective schools coexisting beside them now called 'comprehensives' rather than 'secondary moderns'); to those that select a portion of pupils on ability; to single sex schools; to faith schools and various other schools that select according to specific attributes.

Underpinning all this is the Admissions Code, recently amended by the present Government, which accommodates this complicated patchwork wherein many schools choose pupils rather than the other way around, but seeks to ensure that within these complex parameters, fair principles are operated across the board.

Although one of the key reasons for scrapping of the original tripartite system[17] was the social inequality and subsequent loss of talent it perpetuated, with a concentration of working class pupils in secondary moderns (which, it is often forgotten, outnumbered grammar schools by 3:1, educating 70% of children[18]); commentators often recall grammars as facilitating social mobility. Often these commentators are those who themselves benefitted from upward mobility through grammar school provision (e.g. Andrew Neil, BBC, 2011). In fact these experiences were limited to a disproportionately small minority (Newsom, 1963; Boliver & Swift, 2011); yet nevertheless they illustrate the possibility of social mobility for a few through that system.

Recent research, however, shows that such fragile opportunities have been largely closed down. Evidence suggests that in many regions where grammar schools persist, there are now an extremely small number of disadvantaged children in those schools. Grammar schools contain 2% pupils on FSM, compared to the national average of around 16% (Sutton Trust, 2005; BBC, 2012). This

[15] There are benefits from greater social mixing for a range of reasons, including the driving up of educational outcomes overall (see Adamson, 2010; OECD, 2010b; Hinds *et al*, 2011).

[16] Yet the principle of "a wide opportunity for the public to benefit" as a criterion for this status cannot be upheld either in relation to spread of benefit from the schools' main function, or in terms of facilitation of social mobility (that *is* a public benefit).

[17] So called because the system included three types of school; grammars, technical schools and secondary moderns

[18] See Newsom Report, 1963

outcome belies views of grammars as engines of social mobility. As the CMPO (2004) show, and Cook (2012a) reiterates using the case of Kent, in areas that retain grammar school systems poor children are concentrated in non grammars, while grammar schools hold very few poor children. As the CMPO observe, "What is most worrying is that poor children are not securing places in grammar schools even when they are of high ability." (p. 2). Work by West & Hinds (2007) shows that academically selective schools in London also under-represent pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as those from minority-ethnic backgrounds.

An explanation for the very low representation of disadvantaged children in grammar schools in the present day is that, as social inequality has increased in recent decades, social and financial capital enables middle-class parents to find ways to access the most advantageous schools, and as a result, disadvantaged pupils are under-represented at selective schools (and at other good schools) (Cassen & Kingdon, 2007). For example, it is now standard practice for pupils to practise intensively for the '11-plus' and similar exams necessary for access to selective schools (The Telegraph, 2012c). Many families secure individual tutors or paid-for after-school classes to prepare for these tests (The Telegraph, 2011, 2012c). Clearly, not all families can afford to pay for such expensive practices, nor are necessarily able to help with revision and preparation at home. To suggest that the outcome of such practices is a simple reflection of 'natural ability' or talent is clearly wrong. What is being tested is a) diligence and b) available financial and social resources[19].

While such processes of social selection and distinction may be at their most overt in the case of schools that *articulate* selection by 'ability', a range of other types of school have been found to influence the social mix within their institutions via a range of covertly discriminatory practices.

Research has identified processes of covert selection via admissions in faith schools, and in over-subscribed state schools (West et al, 2009). For example, West & Allen (2007) found that religious secondary schools in London educate a much smaller proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals than non-religious schools and their intakes are significantly more affluent than the neighbourhood they are located in. They found that within the religious sector there are both Catholic and Anglican socially selective 'élite' secondary schools which appear to 'select out' low income religious families, thereby displacing them to religious schools with less affluent composition (see also Allen & West, 2009).

The Admissions Code is supposed to militate against such discriminatory admissions practices. However, as acknowledged by many head teachers[20], this is not always effective as ways can be found to circumnavigate its intentions, and some of the mechanisms by which to hold schools to account for any bad practice are disappearing.

There has long been diversity in the arrangements for admissions in the English state education system, partly due to the proliferation of church schools which have Voluntary Controlled or Voluntary Aided status. As we have seen, these distinct arrangements have been shown to foster social segregation and covert selection (see e.g. Allen & Vignoles, 2006). However, this diversity in admissions arrangements is rapidly intensifying at present due to the explosion in academies since the 2010 Education Act that allowed community schools to choose to convert to academy status. At the time of writing, around half of secondary schools are now academies (or in the process of becoming such). Academies become their own admissions authorities. There is an association between the numbers of schools controlling their admissions and exclusionary practices (Allen & Vignoles, 2006; Barnardo's, 2010; Academies Commission, 2013); and hence a danger that this trend

[19] Indeed, some grammar schools are currently exploring methods by which to disrupt the extent to which the 11+ test can be prepared for (Telegraph, 2012f)
[20] E.g. evidence to the Pearson Think Tank/RSA Academies Commission, 2013.

for schools to become their own admissions authorities exacerbating social distinction in the schooling system. Allen & Vignoles (2006) found an association between local authorities with higher proportions of pupils in schools that controlled their own admissions or have explicit selection by ability, and the level of FSM segregation. Moreover, a 2010 report by children's charity Barnado's shows a link between schools that are their own admission authorities and unfair admissions practices; and that such practices were resulting in schools with skewed intakes that do not reflect their neighbourhoods.

Commenting on the Barnado's study findings (2010), Chief Executive of Barnado's Martin Narey said,

> "we are seeing impenetrable clusters of privilege forming around the most popular schools. Allowing such practice to persist – and almost certainly expand as increasing numbers of schools take control of their own admissions – will only sustain the achievement gap in education and undermine the prospects of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children" (Guardian, 2010).

He noted further that many working class parents do not understand, or feel unable to participate in, the 'complex game' that is being played with admissions.

The new 'free schools' provide an illustrative case in point. Free schools are mandated to the Admissions Code and the same principles shared by other state schools supported by public money. Moreover, the free schools programme is specifically promulgated by Government as a mechanism for boosting social mobility in areas of disadvantage. Nevertheless, data collected by Gooch (2012) via Freedom of Information requests shows that the overall proportion of pupils on FSM at the 24 (then) open free schools was 9.4%, significantly lower than the national average of 16.7% of pupils on FSM. Further analysis shows that in many cases there is a significant discrepancy in this regard between the proportion of those pupils on FSM in the local free school, compared to the (far higher) proportion on FSM in the local area. All but 2 of the 24 initial free schools were found to be below the local average for FSM (when compared to their 5 nearest schools with the same pupil age range)[21].

Over-subscribed schools have always been able to select types of pupils (rather than the other way around) to some extent. But it seems that when significant control over admissions is handed to individual schools and organisations such risks are intensified (Barnado's, 2010; Allen, 2010). With the recent proliferation in admissions authorities, and the loss of some local level mechanisms for appeal and complaint[22], there is potential for such practices to be exacerbated, with a knock-on effect of further social segregation. And since the Education Act of 2010, the vast majority of academies (given greater autonomy, including becoming their own admissions authority) are 'converter' academies; those schools rated 'Outstanding' or 'Good' by Ofsted. These schools are disproportionately represented in wealthier areas (Lupton, 2010; Francis, 2011)[23]: hence those schools advantaged by autonomy are now more likely to be those with affluent populations.

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[21] For discussion of increased social segregation in the Swedish free schools that inspired the English versions, see e.g. Wiborg (2010), or the review of the literature on free schools by Allen (2010).

[22] Local authorities are no longer required to convene Admissions Forums, and the Local Government Ombudsman can no longer address broad complaints about schools and academies' practices.

[23] Although there is a relatively high proportion of Outstanding schools in areas of high social deprivation (perhaps reflecting previous government interventions and resourcing; Lupton, 2009 et al; 2010), generally the pattern is for poorer quality schools to be concentrated in areas of disadvantage, with Outstanding and Good schools concentrated in more affluent areas (Lupton, 2010; Francis, 2011).

One of the explanations for (covert) selective admissions practices is that the school performance league tables which provide the mechanism for competition and 'choice' in the system disincentivise schools from taking on FSM pupils and/or pupils with SEN (as these pupils are more resource-intensive and/or less likely to achieve high grades). The Pupil Premium is an insufficient counter-incentive for many schools (Sibieta [2009] estimated that the pupil premium requires around £25K per pupil in order to raise their attainment to that of the national average). Given this, the taking on of 'challenging pupils' in a context of performance may be seen as unpalatable risk by many schools. It is to be hoped that the government's welcome efforts to reform school league tables will militate against such perverse incentives.

A further factor contributing to such outcomes is the quasi-marketisation of schooling, and the emphasis on parental 'choice' as a driver of improvement.

Diversification, and school choice

A succession of UK governments have placed faith in a quasi-marketisation of schooling, premised on school diversification and parental choice, as driving improvement as schools compete to attract students. The diversification of schooling has been intensified by the present Government via: mass academisation (wherein academies are detached from local authority control); new measures to allow successful schools and academies to expand; and by the introduction of new models such as free schools, UTCs and studio schools. Parents are then presented with greater choice of school model (as well as quality of school) from which to select, and competition between schools for pupils is anticipated to drive up quality over all.

Such approaches may have some positive outcomes, especially in urban areas (Allen, 2010). However, diversification is also shown to increase the social segregation that negatively impacts system-wide achievement. Analysing what works and what does not in terms of system-wide improvement, Levin & Fullan (2008) argue that an emphasis on choice and competition as the drivers of improvement has *not* been shown to work in England or elsewhere, and that most educationally successful countries tend to have less differentiated school systems (see also OECD 2013).

As noted above, the focus on performance measures provided to facilitate parental 'choice' (and as an accountability measure), through league tables and other attainment/quality indicators, incentivises schools to exercise care in choosing children as much as the other way around (see Ainscow et al, 2012). In a competitive and performance-aware environment where a drop in attainment or in Ofsted grading can have strong consequences for a school, schools are incentivised to avoid those pupils that pose a risk to their over-all achievement scores (such as pupils taking FSM, and those with SEN and/or BESD). Ainscow et al (2012) maintain that these processes of distinction and selection are exacerbating existing trends for poorer children to be concentrated in lower quality schools (thus posing a challenge for system improvement). Extensive international and national analyses draws similar conclusions: The OECD PISA analysis (2007), and other academic analyses of the PISA figures has identified that 'more market-oriented school regimes tend to increase schools' social segregation, whilst those characterised as more comprehensive and publicly regulated tend to reduce it' (Angel Alegre & Ferrer, 2010: 433). These 'wrong drivers' (see Fullan, 2011) also impact within-school segregation, with detrimental impact on mobility, as a) pupils may be channelled towards qualifications that support league tables but not necessarily the pupils' future progression (Wolf, 2010), or b) may not receive the same attention if they are unlikely to contribute

positively to league tables (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Dunne et al, 2007)[24]. Again, it is to be hoped that the new league table measures may work to halt some of these tendencies.

While schools choosing pupils is one reason for the patterns of social distinction and school hierarchy emerging, parental choice is another. Some of the structural reforms that have emerged within the choice agenda – be they academies and free schools in the UK, or the charter schools in the US – have proved popular with parents, including those from disadvantaged and/or BME groups (e.g. Kleitz et al, 2000); albeit overall reception to notions of choice is somewhat mixed (Exley, 2012)[25]. Nevertheless, some parents are better able to exercise and effect agency than are others. This is demonstrated via a range of research on school choice practices according to socio-economic background, showing that middle class families can use their financial and social capital to secure their choices in a way that working class families often cannot. Examples include the financial resource to move house to access the catchment of a high-performing school, buy additional tutoring to support entrance exams (practices documented by Cassen & Kingdon, 2007); or pay for travel. Likewise, cultural capital provided via educational experience and well-resourced networks provides middle-class families with knowledge of 'the rules of the game', understanding of the way the system works and the hierarchies therein, and confidence in liaising with the school (Reay, 1998; Crozier, 2000; Crozier & Reay, 2005). By contrast, some working-class parents have little option but to send their children to schools with poor reputations and results (Reay & Wiliam, 1999). Research by Burgess and colleagues (2009) has demonstrated that, while working-class parents are also concerned with school quality in identifying a location for their children, they more often have to opt nevertheless for the local school (see also Wilson, 2010).

All this, then, furthers the social distinction already so prevalent in the English education system.

Setting and streaming

Although school quality and horizontal (between-school) segregation is an important issue, vertical segregation is also a concern: attainment of disadvantaged pupils remains an issue within individual schools, including those schools that are high achieving and/or rated as good quality by Ofsted (Cook, 2012b; 2013). This also relates to the fact that the UK system has smaller quality variances between than within schools: in other words, which school a pupil attends matters less than which teachers s/he gets at the school (Husbands, 2012). An issue that maps directly on to access to quality pedagogy, is the further impact of *within school segregation* in the form of setting and streaming.

Practices of streaming and – especially – setting, have become ubiquitous in English schooling, extending even into primaries and Key Stage 1, where 'ability tables' (whereby children are seating at different tables depending on their proficiency) are used with increasing frequency for key curriculum areas (Hallam et al, 2003). These practices have often been initiated to promote attainment, although as we shall see, the evidence here is mixed at best. However, such practices have certainly promoted social segregation (Cassen & Kingdon, 2007; OECD, 2007).

These trends were noted by sociologists of education as far back as the 1960s. Various studies have shown that teachers tend to hold lower expectations of/underestimate the abilities of working class

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[24] The Government has taken measures to address these tendencies, via the introduction of the EBac, doing away with 'equivalences', and instigating a review of performance data.

[25] Parental attitudes to market-style 'choice' reforms have been shown to be somewhat mixed. Two-thirds of British parents support parents' basic right to choose a school for their children. However, nearly two-thirds think parents should simply send their children to the closest local school, and over two-thirds believe 'secondaries should provide the same kind of education for every child'. Only 19% support the idea of 'schools varying so that parents can choose what's best" (Exley, 2012).

pupils[26], and consequently working class pupils tended to be assigned lower streams (Jackson, 1964; Ball 1981; Tomlinson, 1987). For example, Jackson (1964) found children whose fathers were in professional jobs had a lower chance of being placed in a low stream than children with similar IQs whose fathers were in unskilled jobs. Certainly working class pupils (and those from certain minority ethnic groups) tend to be disproportionately concentrated in low streams (Dunne et al, 2007; Cassen & Kingdon, 2007), and Dunne et al (2007) found that many children appear to be in the wrong sets (according to prior attainment).

For example, based on a sample of 4,688 primary pupils and 6,674 secondary pupils, Dunne et al (2007) found the following pattern:

Table 4.5 FSM by sets (%)

Primary

	Low Sets	Middle Sets	High Sets
Not eligible for FSM	22.1	35.2	42.7
Eligible for FSM	50.7	26.3	23.0
Total	28.2	33.3	38.5

Secondary

	Low Sets	Middle Sets	High Sets
Not eligible for FSM	22.0	38.7	39.2
Eligible for FSM	37.2	42.5	20.3
Total	29.5	40.6	29.9

Note: These percentages show the proportions of the sample in each set category. Each set category is not expected to be exactly one third 33.3% as they relate to school populations that are not usually equally split by sets.

Ball (1981) pointed out that these trends meant that even within 'comprehensive' schools, streaming meant that young people were socially segregated by social class; processes of distinction that Reay (2009) brands the 'fixing of failure in the working classes' (p.26). Boaler & Wiliam (2001) summarise,

> "The various studies that have been conducted in the UK provide conclusive evidence that setting and streaming create and perpetuate social class divisions among students. They have also shown that students of similar ability are frequently placed in different sets or streams according to their social class...." (p. 177).

The research evidence suggests that overall these practices are not beneficial to achievement (or certainly not of significant benefit), with a negative impact for lower sets and streams – those wherein pupils from lower socio-economic groups are over-represented. Advocates of 'ability grouping' maintain it allows teachers to adapt instruction to the needs of a diverse student body; giving them the opportunity to provide more difficult material to high achievers, and more support to low achievers. The challenge and stimulation of other high achievers are believed to be beneficial

[26] These lower expectations were also shown by studies in the 1970s and '80s to extend to girls, and to minority ethnic pupils; see e.g. Clarricoates, 1983; Stanworth, 1983; Gillborn, 1995.

to high achievers. Yet Slavin's (1990) systematic review of the most significant, methodologically-sound research from the US and elsewhere found that the effects of ability grouping on achievement are essentially zero (in terms of statistically significant outcomes; see also Nomi, 2010). As Boaler & Wiliam observe of Slavin's review, the four British studies included in his analysis did not find achievement differences between streamed and unstreamed classes (see also Ireson et al [2005] who more recently looked at the effect of setting in English, Maths and Science at GCSE, and found no significant effects for setting in either subject).

Slavin notes that those opposed to ability grouping focus "primarily on the perceived damage to low achievers, who receive a slower pace and lower quality of instruction, have teachers who are less experienced or able and who do not want to teach low-track classes, face low expectations of performance and have few behavioural models" (Slavin, 1990; 473). Linchevski & Kutscher (1998) looked at students who were borderline between different ability bands and sets. While the differences in attainment between the highest-scoring students in the lower band, and the lowest-scoring students in the upper band were very small, the *subsequent* attainment differed greatly, with the students assigned to the higher groups attaining significantly more than students of a similar ability assigned to lower groups (see also Ireson et al, 2005). Linchevski & Kutscher concluded from this that the achievements of students close to the cut-off points were largely dependent on their arbitrary assignment to either the lower or higher group. The study also showed benefits for lower achieving students of being taught with higher achieving students.

Boaler & Wiliam (2001) note other studies have tended to replicate Linchevski & Kutscher's findings 'with some small, statistically insignificant increases for students in high tracks gained at the expense of students in low tracks' (p. 178)[27]. Boaler's own work (1997) also contests assumptions that high ability students necessarily thrive by being placed in the top set (see also Ireson et al [2005] for the mixed picture here). Boaler & Wiliam (2001) acknowledge a common view that the academic benefits of setting outweigh the social disadvantages, but point out,

> "However, there is little, if any, research that supports the notion that setting enhances achievement for students. Indeed, in bringing together the different research studies on ability grouping the general conclusion is that streaming has no academic benefits whatsoever, while setting confers small academic benefits on some high-attaining students, at the expense of large disadvantages for lower attainers". (p. 179)

These 'disadvantages' of course have impact on social mobility, given that they disproportionately affect disadvantaged pupils. One of the explanations for these tendencies in outcome, highlighted by Slavin's (1990) research and conclusions, is that lower streams and sets tend to be assigned less experienced and less qualified teachers (see also Ireson & Hallam, 2001). Such practices comprise evident infringements to equality of opportunity.

Teacher expectations and related teaching styles also have a bearing, with Ireson et al (2005) showing that teachers of high sets convey high expectations through provision of fast-paced and challenging work, whereas pupils in low sets receive slow-paced teaching that covered less of the curriculum. Boaler et al (2000) found teachers catered effectively to mixed ability groups in Year 8, using a variety of strategies for differentiation but adopted much more limited teaching styles when teaching setted groups (see also Hallam & Ireson, 2005) – and Boaler reports these styles were associated with disaffection amongst students. Setting can also produce an 'artificial ceiling', wherein pupils in lower sets are excluded from higher tier study and qualification routes (Ireson et al, 2005); especially significant for social (im)mobility, given that low sets and streams contain disproportionate numbers of disadvantaged pupils (and pupils from some BME groups) (Ireson & Hallam, 1999; Dunne et al, 2007).

[27] See e.g. Kerckhoff (1986); Hallam & Toutounji (1996); Harlen & Malcolm (1997); Sukhnandan & Lee (1998).

Moreover, placement in low sets has been shown to provoke self-fulfilling prophecies by a) damaging children's self-perception of ability and reducing their confidence (and even shaming them); and b) by consequent disassociation with education and investment in alternative forms of status. Hallam & Ireson (2007) showed that nearly two-thirds (62%) of young people in bottom sets expressed a wish to change set. Ball (1981) observed that processes of streaming and setting created polarization of students into pro- and anti-school factions. Those in low sets became anti-school, with consequent impacts on their achievement and aspirations.

To conclude this section on social segregation in the English education system, it is worth reiterating that the OECD (2010c) is clear that school systems that perform well and show below-average socio-economic inequalities 'provide all students, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds with similar opportunities to learn', and have less segregated systems. As Douglas Willms (2006) observes from this international analysis,

> Countries with high levels of segregation along socio-economic lines tend to have lower overall performance and greater disparities in performance between students from high and low socio-economic backgrounds … In countries with high levels of socioeconomic segregation, policies that aimed to reduce socio-economic segregation through compensatory reforms would likely bring considerable gains in raising and levelling the learning bar.' (p. 68)

Identity, and self-fulfilling prophesies

These process of in-and between-school segregation have an impact on student identities and their relationship with education and learning. In a culture where academic 'success' is valued and promoted, and fears of failure are common (Reay & Wiliam, 1999; Jackson, 2010), working-class young people who are statistically more likely to 'fail' can become quickly de-motivated and disengaged from education (Archer et al, 2007). As working class children understand and internalise messages that they are 'slow' and underachieving (whether as a result of struggling through school, being placed in low sets or less aspirational qualification pathways, and/or doing badly in exams), a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby expectations are lowered results – 'lower aspirations' being a logical response to the messages provided. The dampening of aspiration via negative schooling experiences has strong educational consequences (Reay & Wiliam, 1999; Reay & Lucey, 2003; The Telegraph, 2012d). It may also promulgate anti-school and disruptive attitudes. As Jackson (1999) showed, especially for boys, competitive attitudes encouraged by school practices mean that pupils are averse to 'failure' and to being seen as failing by peers[28]. If they cannot 'win' academically pupils (especially boys) may invest instead in activities where they can excel, for example in rebellious behaviours, or prowess in non academic areas of the curriculum.

Other aspects of identity relating to social class background and culture may also impact children's approaches to education. For example, especially for men, generational investment in physical skill and strength rather than academic knowledge may be entrenched and passed on despite changes in the labour-market that have demanded changed skills sets in the labour force (Nayak, 2009). Working class young people are less likely to see that certain aspects of the school curriculum are relevant for their lives (Cooper & Dunne, 1998). Coupled with this is the different social capitals available, including a relative lack of educational capital to facilitate children's educational trajectory. As Crawford et al (2011) observe, there is a lack of information to working class families, meaning that parents are unlikely to understand the difference to future earning potential that certain academic credentials can make, or to be able to discriminate between qualifications to that end.

[28] Dominant constructions of masculinity that foreground not just competition but also 'winning' mean that boys are likely to avoid/resist participation in competition where they will be seen to fail (Jackson, 1999).

Curriculum

This raises the curriculum and qualifications as issues.

The disadvantage faced by working class young people and their parents in understanding the implications and future consequences of curriculum decisions taken at the end of Key Stage 3 was a key focal point for the Wolf Review (2011). There are concerns that many vocational routes – taken mostly by lower income students – are generally less valued and do not improve an individual's labour market prospects (Cabinet Office, 2011). Wolf (2011) found that:

- Many 14 - 16 year olds were on courses which the league table systems encourage but which do not facilitate progression (especially in professional routes). Many young people had not been told the truth about the consequences of their choice of qualification.
- A quarter to a third (300,000 - 400,000) of 16 to 19 year olds were on courses which do not lead to higher education or good jobs.
- High-quality apprenticeships are too rare and an increasing proportion is being offered to older people not teenagers.

There have been a variety of policy responses. There are concerns that vocational routes (which are disproportionately taken by disadvantaged students) are less valued, creditable and respected in terms of progression (Cabinet Office, 2011). The introduction of specialist University Technical Colleges (UTC) established for 14-19 year old on technically-oriented courses of study has been one approach to instilling excellence and status in vocational routes; albeit the separating of young people down different routes bears risks of social segregation[29].

Meanwhile, the Government has removed 'equivalences', and introduced the 'EBac' measure to raise expectations and ensure the availability of meaningful qualifications that provide clear access routes to HE. This represents an important step in ensuring a basic entitlement to knowledge, and attempting to keep academic routes open to all pupils. However, on its own this will not aid social mobility. There are three factors to consider.

Firstly, the indications are that relatively low proportions of FSM children may be entered for and/or pass the EBac. As reported by the DfE (2012c), in 2010, only 8% of pupils qualifying for free school meals (FSM) took the English Baccalaureate (with 4% achieving it) compared to 24% of non-FSM pupils who took the English Baccalaureate, and 17% that achieved it. In 2011/12 5% of pupils taking free school meals achieved the EBac compared to 18% of those not taking free school meals; the gap of 13 percentage points remaining the same (DfE, 2013).

Hence for the EBac to support social mobility, means will need to be found to support disadvantaged students to access it. Secondly, young people need to be engaged and to see the relevance of their education (our conclusion in the ASCL recommendations is that there is a need to ensure that a] a proportion of curriculum time can be devoted to subjects for which young people have an especial passion and/or flair, and b] the curriculum and exam system need to emphasise application, as well as acquisition of knowledge). And thirdly, as the OECD has proposed, it is also vital that, in addition to academic knowledge, young people are supplied with the capabilities they need for their future civic, working and personal lives (see Schleicher, 2012). The development of broader creative and personal skills remains vital in providing young people with necessary skills (such as research skills, presentation skills, team-working and so on) that they need for effective study and for later life (Aynsley et al, 2012).

[29] A key reason why the original Tripartite system was ended.

In order to ensure that young people can access an enriching and facilitative curriculum however, they need to be equipped with basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Disadvantaged pupils underachieve at both ends of the achievement spectrum, however it is the scale of low attainment that especially drags down the UK system (OECD, 2010c; OECD, 2013; Clifton & Cook, 2012). Clifton & Cook (2012) identify,

> "the sheer volume of UK students failing to achieve basic proficiency (level 2). Around a fifth of students failed to reach basic proficiency in reading and maths, which translates to around 113,000 students in England. This group is more than twice as big as the group of students that reached the top two performance levels".

As Cassen & Kingdon (2007) conclude from their study of students who do not secure GCSEs, illiteracy undermines the potential to succeed across all subjects. The Government is attempting to address this via its emphasis on phonics, with newly-introduced reading tests at age 6, and tests of grammer, punctuation and spelling replacing current writing tests at Key Stage 2 from 2013.

Thus, as well as an emphasis on a high quality, diverse and engaging curriculum being available to all pupils for as long as possible, there needs to be renewed emphasis in primary education on ensuring that all young people are equipped with the basic proficiency they need to access such curricula and future learning.

<u>Current Policy Approach to social segregation in schooling</u>

A variety of measures are being taken by the Government and its agencies to secure school improvement. These include the academy sponsorship of schools rated as 'inadequate' by Ofsted (and a fund to encourage further sponsor involvement), new measures by Ofsted to incentivise the improvement of schools 'requiring improvement' (formerly labelled 'satisfactory'), and the various schemes for CPD, leadership development and school-to-school improvement support offered by the National College of School Leadership. The former measures may especially benefit disadvantaged children, given that they are over-represented in poorer quality schools (Francis, 2011), albeit as we have seen, the systematic support for struggling schools remains a weakness: struggling schools need to be actively supported to improve.

In relation to the key element of teaching & learning, the Government's has moved to drive up standards in Initial Teacher Education (ITE), including making a second class degree the minimum standard for entry to the post-graduate route, and incentives for key subject shortage areas. These measures represent important steps in supporting quality (albeit arguably the wrong message is sent by the recent move to allow academies and free schools to employ teaching staff without Qualified Teacher Status). The Government is also encouraging school-to-school support and improvement via initiatives such as Teaching Schools, and the required commitments from Outstanding and Good schools to work with another school/s to support improvement as a condition for conversion to academy status. Evaluations now demonstrate the success of the City Challenge (wherein schools collaborated and worked together for area-wide improvement), especially in London (see Hutchings et al, 2012). However, the City Challenge was structured and resourced. Current collaborations are iterative and patchy, and there is no mechanism by which to hold converter academies to account for the partnership with less successful schools that they pledge to undertake application to convert (Academies Commission, 2013).

Curriculum content is being strongly addressed by a range of measures, including the above-mentioned focus on literacy at Key Stages 1 and 2, the introduction of the EBac, and the planned revised content for exams at Key Stage 4 and 'A' Level. The EBac, and the planned restructuring of exams at age 16 and beyond have a strong emphasis on facilitating progression, yet there is concern

as to how many young people will be able to access and succeed on these pathways. The Government is right that educationalists should apply the same ambitions to pupils whatever their background. However local employment markets and other factors also impact young peoples' engagement with such routes (elite routes and destinations, by their very nature, cannot be available to all); and access to these routes depends on the education system's narrowing of the socio-economic gap for achievement in early phases of schooling.

With regard to social segregation in schooling, Secretary of State Michael Gove has pledged to transform what he complains is "one of the most segregated and stratified education systems in the world[30]" (Gove, 2011). We hope our analysis demonstrates the scale and depth of the problem. The Government has introduced the Pupil Premium (wherein a sum is allocated to the each child on free school meals, to further subsidize their education and incentivise schools to take them), specifically as part of a social justice agenda. There is no doubt this is an important move. As the Times Educational Supplement (2010) reports, although the sum to fund the Pupils Premium is less than the £7 billion first mooted, in relation to the cuts to other government departments in the recent 2010 Spending Review the commitment to the £2.5 billion fund is significant. And, this fund constitutes a redistributive policy, given that the money is not additional, and hence while the policy will increase the budgets of some school, those with lower numbers of pupils on free school meals will lose out. The policy was envisaged by the Sutton Trust (2010a) as mitigating the segregational consequences of marketisation by incentivising schools to take FSM pupils. Nevertheless, there is scepticism as to whether the sums allocated are sufficient to achieve the desired impact.

Although the Pupil Premium will provide extra funding to schools where young people on free school meals (FSM) are concentrated, there are concerns that:

- the money may not reach the pupils concerned
- the money is insufficient
- the money is insufficient to incentivise the most successful schools to take additional FSM pupils

Research from the Sutton Trust (2012a) alerts to a danger that, given Pupil Premium funding is not ring-fenced (and in a challenging budgetary climate for schools), in many schools the money is being used to filly budget deficits in other areas rather than being spent directly on the children that generated the funding. The Government has acted to mitigate this risk: since September 2012 schools have to publish online information about the amount of pupil premium money the school receives and how it is being spent, as well as its impact. Ofsted is also sharpening its focus on how schools spend the funding (Sec Ed, 2012).

However, there are further arguments that the sums allocated[31] do not reflect the estimated costs necessary to equalise disadvantaged pupils' educational needs with those of their peers (Sibieta, 2009). The OECD (2010d) observes that the premium is 'relatively low in an international perspective and it is not clear that it will cover the extra costs of admitting disadvantaged students.

As the OECD notes, this risk of insufficient funding is exacerbated by the counter-incentive of high-stakes accountability measures in the UK context. League tables and other performance indicators, along with rising floor targets, mean that there are very strong potential consequences for schools whose exam achievement dips. Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and other vulnerable groups may be seen to compromise a risk in this regard, and hence the disincentives (driven by

[30] He elaborated that only the USA and Luxembourg are more unequal. Reported in *The Telegraph* (2012a).
[31] The Pupil Premium increased from £488 per pupil for 2011/12, to £600 per pupil in 2012/13, and will rise to £900 per pupil in 2013/14 (see DfE, 2012d).

accountability measures) may outweigh the pupil premium incentive in admitting such pupils. Indeed, an OECD working paper on reforming education in England (Braconier, 2012, p.16) warns that if the "perceived deprivation funding is lower that schools' perceived costs, they may engage in 'cream skimming', trying to dissuade disadvantaged students and recruit more able students."

The Government is seeking to improve transparency by publishing data on the progress of individual schools in closing gaps in attainment for FSM pupils; a move welcomed by Braconier (2012). Moreover, its commendable effort to reframe school league tables to mitigate perverse incentives in the current system is to be strongly welcomed. It remains to be seen what effect this may have on reducing social segregation.

Clearly it is early days for these policies and their level of impact will be clearer in coming years. However, our analysis suggests that in addition to incentives such as the Pupil Premium, the Government needs to take further firm steps to act against social segregation in the education system (see ASCL publications on *Promoting Social Mobility* www.ascl.org.uk/promotingsocialmobility).

Work experience/school-to-work routes

A further concern relates to different levels of understanding, guidance and support students can access in negotiating their school-to-work routes. Middle-class families tend to have extensive knowledge and/or networks to provide information concerning the different range of professional jobs available, relevant university degrees and the perceived quality of different university offers, and of the Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications needed to access these university courses and future careers (Vincent & Ball, 2007; Perry & Francis 2010). Working class young people and their parents are aware that they often lack such knowledge (Norris, 2011). This lack of understanding can have a bearing on crucial decisions about which GCSE courses to pursue, which in turn have a bearing on course choice at Level 3. Universities are committed to being more transparent about their qualification preferences for university admissions (e.g. Russell Group, 2012; Universities Scotland, 2012; The Russell Group, 2012), but even so, many families may not realise there is an issue (or think so far forward from decisions taken in Year 9).

Careers advice and guidance historically has not always been good at addressing such inequalities (Hutchinson et al, 2011; Hinds, 2012). However, it can play an important role in providing information and broadening horizons concerning school-to-work routes, and as such can have a particular role in supporting social mobility (Balaram & Crowley, 2012; Hooley et al, 2012). Experts show that careers education (rather than discrete advice and guidance) must be instilled much earlier than previously (preferably from primary education), and be fully embedded in the curriculum, encompassing a diverse range of activities (Hooley et al, 2012; Huddleston et al, 2012). Private schools are shown to be good at providing such high quality activities for pupils from an early age (Huddleston et al, 2012).

Work experience placements

An element aimed at informing and preparing young people for the workplace is work experience and work experience placement. Work placement has been part of the English educational system since the 1970s. Students (typically aged 15) engage in one or two weeks experience of a workplace during term time. It was made a statutory requirement at Key Stage 4 in 2004, but annulled by the Coalition government in March 2011. Funding for the coordination of work experiences ceased as schools bear the full costs of funding work experience placements (Mann, 2012). In 2009-10, over half a million of young people (aged 14-19) had a work experience placement organised by their schools or colleges (Mann, 2012). There are concerns that schools may gradually phase out the

provision of work experiences, since it is no longer centrally funded or a statutory requirement (Association of Teachers and Lecturers, 2012).

Yet, the value of work experience for young people is undisputed. Work placements can foster students' confidence and aspiration through first-hand experience of the adult workplace (Hatcher & Le Gallais, 2008). Early exposure to work can reduce the risk of young people not in employment, education or training (Wolf, 2011), and experiences of particular work can be a prerequisite for university admission, such as for degrees in veterinary, medicine and dentistry (Mann, 2012). Top employers are increasingly *only* recruiting graduates with relevant work experiences, especially those who already had work experiences with their company/institution (Milburn, 2012). However, the growing emphasis on the importance of work experience is equally worrying as a) school provision is becoming less certain, and b) the type and quality of work placements experienced by young people can be shaped by social inequalities such as gender[32] and social class (Francis et al, 2005; Osgood et al, 2006; Hatcher & Le Gallais, 2008), and in turn hamper social mobility.

Students in state schools tend to be encouraged to identify and secure their own work placements (Francis et al, 2005; Hatcher & Le Gallais, 2008). It is estimated that half of all work experiences were established through young people's (or their families) existing social networks (Mann, 2012). Social capital is crucial in securing valuable and relevant work placements, but students from different socio-economic backgrounds have different types of contact (Bourdieu, 1986). Students from higher socio-economic backgrounds are likely to have social networks informed by university-educated parents in professional jobs. These students tend to have at their disposal family contacts in the professional working world and they often secure more meaningful and prestigious work placements than students from lower socio-economic groups (Hatcher & Le Gallais, 2008). Students from lower socio-economic groups are likely to experience semi or unskilled manual work placements, and are less likely to have work experiences in IT, legal, media and medical professions (Francis et al, 2005; Milburn, 2012). Moreover, Francis et al found that where placements were secured for students by the educational institution or Education Business Partnership, these tended to be more stereotypical in terms of gender and social class than the students' original choices. Thus, work placements can reproduce social class inequality and reinforce the status quo in terms of the types of workplace experienced by young people, as working class pupils tend to get working class placements and middle class pupils get professional work experiences (Hatcher & Le Gallais, 2008; Mann, 2012).

Internships

The rapid increase in the practice of unpaid appointments to provide experience, particularly for graduates accessing elite routes, has raised a series of concerns around exploitation of young people by employers, and the anti-meritocratic implications given that it tends only to be wealthy students that can afford to work for free (internships are also concentrated in London, where the cost of living is high) (Milburn, 2012). Yet such opportunities can provide a valuable 'foot in the door' to employment, with employers more likely to employ candidates with whom they are familiar (Milburn, 2012), and work experience providing often essential capital on young people's CVs.

Current Policy Approach

In response, it is commendable that the government is taking a lead to eliminate work placement inequality facilitated by social networks with a proposal to scrap all informally arranged placements

[32] Work placements are highly gender-stereotypical (Osgood et al, 2006). For instance, less than 5% of mechanical, construction and engineering work experiences were undertaken by girls and less than 21% of placements covering education, training and community care were boys (Francis et al 2005).

or internships at Whitehall (Milburn, 2012). Although the government has published a 'Common Best Practice Code for High Quality Internships' (in 2011) to promote fair access and equality in work placements, the guide remains at the discretion of employers and has no legal obligations. In relation to careers advice and guidance, though the evidence supports Hind's (2012) conclusion that there has never been a 'golden age' in terms of provision to support social mobility, the recent move by the Government to hand responsibility for careers provision to state schools (with no ring-fenced budget, or commitment to face-to-face provision) presents a danger concerning prioritisation and resourcing (Hooley et al, 2012)[33].

Access to Higher Education

A university degree is fast becoming the minimum requirement for many employers, particularly large corporations. University graduates are more resilient to unemployment than non-gradates, particularly during times of economic recession (OECD, 2012). People with university degrees can on average expect to earn 'at least £100,000' more than those without during their working lives (Hinds et al, 2012). Upward educational mobility in tertiary education is commendable in the UK. Over 60% of young people whose parents are not highly educated (defined as those without 5 good GCSEs) are expected to be in post-compulsory education, and 41% of 25-34 year-olds have higher educational qualifications than their parents (OECD, 2012). This is better than the majority of OECD nations, and for the OECD, this indicates mobility, at least with regard to educational opportunity.

Yet despite these encouraging indicators, access to UK higher education continues to be segregated by socioeconomic status. In 2010, 18% of state school students who received FSM (at age 15) entered university (by age 19), compared with 36% of non-FSM students (BIS, 2012); hence FSM students are half as likely as their non-FSM counterparts to enter university. Furthermore, young people from the richest fifth of families are three times more likely to go to university than are those from the poorest fifth, even though such differences have been attributed to prior attainment (Anders, 2012). For instance, FSM students tend to achieve lower A-level grades than non-FSM students (DfE, 2011c). Government plans to provide an additional funding of £2,500 for FSM students who have secured university places and achieved at least grade Cs in their English Baccalaureate are welcomed (Clegg cited in Guardian, 2012a), however expected numbers of recipients are very low, and this initiative does not address the reasons for the lack of supply, or the issues around university admissions.

Some researchers have suggested that low rates of participation in further and higher education among poorer students are connected to a complex combination of personal, social, economic, and cultural factors which lead many working-class young people to believe that university is not for 'people like me' (Archer et al, 2003; Reay et al, 2005; Archer et al, 2007). For example, pupils with GCSE results above the national median who have been eligible for FSM are less likely to go on to higher education than more affluent students with the same results (National Equality Panel, 2010). Only 49% of students from the poorest fifth of families say they are likely to apply to university, compared with 77% of the richest fifth (Sodha & Margo, 2010). Although young people from disadvantaged backgrounds do not necessary lack aspirations towards post-compulsory education (Strand & Winston, 2008; Crawford et al, 2011), their knowledge of how to realise their educational and career aspirations may be limited (Kintrea et al, 2011)[34].

[33] ASCL has, in partnership with SeEd, provided a best-practice resource for schools in providing careers education; see SecEd (2012).

[34] These issues of aspiration and in/experience underpinned the creation of Aim Higher – now scrapped – which sought to encourage young people from lower socio-economic groups to go to university through a range of activities such as mentoring, master classes, roadshows and summer schools (see Passy & Morris, 2010).

Access to higher education also varies considerably between different school types. Although students from non-selective state schools tend to achieve higher class degrees at university (including at highly selective universities) than private and selective state school students with similar A-levels and GCSE results (Sutton Trust, 2010b; Kirkup & Morrison, 2011), the latter students are much more likely to attend elite universities. While 69% of A-level students from non-selective state schools progressed to university, this figure rises to 87% for private and 89% for selective schools. More worrying, only 22% of non-selective state school students were admitted to the 'most selective' universities in 2010 (defined as 'the top third of HEIs when ranked by mean UCAS tariff score from the top three A level grades of entrants'), compared to 65% of private and 60% of selective state school students (BIS, 2012).

As selective schools have very few FSM students (Sutton Trust, 2005), the probability of students from low socio-economic backgrounds to be admitted to elite universities diminish further. Only 0.8% of Oxford and Cambridge students received FSM, compared to 47% and 43% that were privately educated, respectively (Sutton Trust, 2010c). A number of Russell Group universities have less than 2% of FSM students but over 30% private school students (e.g. Bristol, Durham, Newcastle and Nottingham, *see* Sutton Trust, 2010c). Only six universities in England – all post-1992 universities and all in London (East London, Greenwich, London Metropolitan, London South Bank, Middlesex and Westminster) - have intakes of FSM students greater than 18% (Sutton Trust, 2010c). In sum, private school students are over 22 times more likely to enter a highly selective university (or 55 times for Oxbridge) than state school children entitled to FSM (Sutton Trust, 2010c). This probability reduces to six times when compared to non-FSM state schools students. As Gove himself pointed out in his speech to the Conservative Party conference in 2010, more young people from independent school Westminster alone attend the 'best' universities than the entire cohort of young people on free school meals (Gove, 2010).

Admittance to elite universities is important because top employers are increasingly only recruiting from top universities. Around 70% of graduate recruiters were found to target fewer than 20 elite universities – primarily Russell Group members – even though there are over a hundred UK universities (Association of Graduate Recruiters, 2008). As stated earlier, these elite universities tend to have the lowest proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Milburn, 2012). David Willetts, Minister of State for Universities and Science, recently criticised graduate recruitment programmes for prioritising applicants from just six elite universities (The Telegraph, 2012b). In other words, prosperous and high status jobs are going to graduates of elite universities, but these are disproportionately likely to be students from advantaged backgrounds. Inequality of access into higher education, particularly elite universities, can therefore reproduce social position and impede social mobility.

Current policy approach

Fair access to higher education is further complicated by the recent rise of tuition fees in England. Although spending per tertiary student has increased by 72% between 2000 and 2009*,* such growth was mainly driven by private sources as the share of public expenditure on tertiary educational institutions fell from 68% to 30% in this period (OECD, 2012). The National Scholarship Programme was introduced to placate concerns that university education, after the tuition fee rise, would be only affordable to the affluent. The government will provide eligible students bursaries of up to £3,000, which will be equally matched by the participating university so that the eventual value of the award is up to £6,000 (HEFCE, 2012). Students are still liable for fees of up to £3,000 (as universities can charge up to the maximum of £9,000), which can be covered through a student loan.

Some have argued that the new funding system will benefit the poorest 29% of graduates and increase social mobility in the long-run, even though the average graduate will be worse off (Chowdry et al, 2012). Such predicted benefit to low earning graduates is primarily based on the assumption that they will eventually default their student loans over a 30 year period, as outstanding loans are then written-off. Yet, students from the poorest backgrounds are more averse to debt and low earning graduates tend to pay off their loans earlier (Leunig & Wyness, 2011).

The AimHigher initiative to inform and encourage young people from poorer backgrounds to consider university has been ended. However, universities with fees over £6,000 (i.e. the vast majority in England) are required to recruit a certain proportion of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The threat of financial penalty if such expectations are not achieved – or significant efforts shown to that end (HEFCE, 2012) - comprises a strong motivation for universities to work pro-actively with schools to increase access. However, the extent of universities' commitment and energies/innovation to this end has been frequently queried (Guardian, 2012b). Moreover, the Government policy to allow unlimited recruitment of AAB or ABB students is also hindering access for disadvantaged students (Atherton, 2012), who are less likely to achieve these grades. Places not requiring such grades in leading universities, traditionally providing routes to access for students with non-traditional backgrounds (including mature and/or disadvantaged students) are squeezed due to the competitive impetus for such universities to become 'all AAB' universities.

OFFA has promised a more pro-active approach to ensuring universities meet their widening participation commitments (The Telegraph, 2012e), and The Milburn report (2012) has suggested a series of measures to lever this, including greater use of contextual data to ensure fair access (see also Ebdon, cited in Guardian, 2012c). It remains to be seen whether Milburn's recommendations will be pursued, and whether OFFA's powers will prevail when tested.

So what works in narrowing gaps?

This literature review has focused on explanations for the lack of social mobility, with a strong focus on the role of the education system in reproducing social inequality. Two documents written for ASCL take a more pro-active approach in making recommendations as to how this situation might be reversed. One is written for an audience of school and college leaders, making recommendations as to how they may best lead educational practice to close the socio-economic gap for achievement. The other is aimed at Government and policymakers, drawing on the evidence to list the top ten best approaches to facilitate social mobility, and evaluating the Government's record in these areas to date. As such, these documents represent the constructive counter-points to this literature review: while this document identifies the problems, they draw on the evidence outlined to provide potential solutions.

As such it would be superfluous to reiterate potential ways forward here: instead we direct you to the ASCL documents. However, we conclude by outlining some points of principle that the evidence suggests should underpin policy thinking in extending social mobility. Policymakers need to address what Elliot Major (2012) refers to an "ever-escalating 'social mobility arms race'" (p. 157). In fact, this is the wrong metaphor, as what we are seeing is a prolonged offensive *against* mobility by those already socially advantaged. As Elliot Major explains, as educational opportunities have expanded the wealthy have been better placed to seize these opportunities, and in the same period wage differentials according to level of education have risen, further advantaging those already better off (see also Lindley & Machin, 2012). He concludes that policymakers need to "deliver education reforms...that improve the prospects for the many, not the few" (p. 158).

The following points of principal are articulated to this end.

Points of principal to inform the design of policies to extend social mobility:

- **To facilitate social mobility, as well as movement up the social ladder, there needs to be movement down the ladder to facilitate 'room at the top'.** Downward mobility is also less traumatic if the social inequality within a society is reduced, meaning the consequences of such movement are not so adverse for those affected.
- **Hence as well as acting to support mobility, policies must militate against the forces of immobility.** The many positive and helpful interventions driven by well-intentioned policy work are insufficient to do more than protect the poor against further inequality, without more radical support and/or action against the forces of immobility.
- **Social im/mobility strategies should go beyond the indicator of free school meals (FSM).** The overwhelming emphasis on FSM focuses on hard to reach families, missing the point that socio-economic inequality is much broader than this. There is a consistent correlation between socio-economic group and educational attainment whereby the more affluent their family, the better children achieve. Hence the needs of the broader group of 'blue-collar'/working class families also need to be addressed. Exclusive focus on the very poor/out of work without addressing broader inequalities will have limited impact.
- **Social mixing is generally beneficial**. The positive impact of social mixing in education at all levels is proven. Yet our education system is highly socially segregated. This tendency needs to be acted against, at a system level, and within and between schools
- **Schooling can (and should) narrow social inequality gaps and facilitate mobility, but is only one among several aspects that can impact im/mobility**. Income, the home learning environment, housing and so on remain powerful influences, requiring 'joined up' policies to combat social exclusion.
- **Social inequality needs to be reduced to facilitate mobility**. Meritocracy is unachievable when the starting blocks are too differently positioned; hence more unequal societies tend to have less social mobility.

The Secretary of State for Education has made it his personal mission to effect changes in the education system to lever increased social mobility, and has already taken some radical steps in the right direction. However, a strong body of evidence now exists to show just how much work needs to be done in order to facilitate the social mobility identified as so necessary for the UK's economic and civic future. It is hoped that this document, coupled with ASCL's documents recommending actions for Government and for school and college leaders, makes a positive contribution to that direction.

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