Will the revised secondary curriculum give teachers the freedom to break with tradition?

Why an elitist A-level lobby is undermining the 14-19 Diplomas

What students really want from HE

How the Government is hiding the real truancy figures

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* Nominated for the Outstanding Education Reporting of the Year Award or the Ted Wragg Award for Sustained Contribution to Education Journalism, July 2007. John Izbicki nominated for both. Mike Baker runner up Outstanding Education Reporting of the Year Award 2007, winner Ted Wragg Award 2006.
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Ian Schagen of NFER reports on research into whether the mobility of children from service families impacts on their progress and that of other pupils.

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The leading partners in government, Sinn Fein’s policy to end selection is opposed by the DUP.

Though the leading partners in government, Sinn Fein’s policy to end selection is opposed by the DUP.

Answers to written Scottish parliamentary questions include those covering young people not in education, employment or training, pre-school provision, grant-aided expenditure, dyslexia, the National Child Protection Line and services for children with disabilities.

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Scottish Executive launches *Skills for Scotland*
Getting in under the radar

As Chancellor, Gordon Brown provided unprecedented amounts of money for education, funding a huge number of policies designed to raise standards. As papers presented to the British Educational Research Association conference in September argue, there is not much evidence that, apart from the extra spending, many of these policies made any real difference. After a decade of high spending, the public are looking for evidence that the investment is paying off. While standards have risen under Labour, as they did under the Tories in the decade before 1997, some media comment denies this and public opinion is sceptical. As Prime Minister, Gordon Brown has to show that Labour is delivering.

The Conservatives are in a difficult position. Tony Blair pinched their more distinctively ideological clothes, much to the irritation of his traditional supporters. While David Cameron has rescued the Tories from oblivion, though some of his own parliamentary party seems to find it difficult to acknowledge this, the Conservatives are not yet trusted on education. The policy group under Stephen Dorrell, a highly respected former Cabinet minister, has produced mixed results in its interim and final reports. They have been a strange combination of original thinking and ignorance, with a sprinkling of daft ideas in among the interesting ones.

There are some big issues to be resolved. Perhaps the most challenging are the two linked areas of 14-to-19 provision and adult skills. Details of the first five diplomas have now been announced and, as Ian Nash reports in this issue, they are much as expected. Yet this policy remains deeply flawed because of the Government’s (and the Opposition’s) determination to retain A-levels, which in reality condemns diplomas to second best.

With skills, the Leitch report underlined the scale of the problem, as did the House of Commons Select Committee report, Post-16 Skills. As we reported in our last issue, the second volume of that report contains ample evidence to suggest that overcoming the challenges Leitch identified is at best problematic. In its response the Government has got it half right, which is better than any previous administration, but, as Ian Nash shows, that still leaves serious weaknesses. That is particularly so in England. The Scots and the Welsh have a much more coherent approach to lifelong learning, as outlined in Opportunity Scotland and, for Wales, The Learning Country. It is centrally imbedded in their policies for education and learning in a way that, for historical and cultural reasons, is not the case in England.

Yet while the challenges are great, so are the opportunities. In both policy and practical terms, much is possible. The use of new technology to do things in different ways could be enormously liberating for individual learners. Brian Stevens outlines one possibility in his article in this issue.

Over the last 200 years England in particular has lagged behind its international competitors. As the recently published OECD report, Education at a Glance 2007, reviewed in this issue, shows, even today we have not yet reached the OECD average in far too many areas. From the reports of the House of Commons Select Committee on the Education of the Lower Orders in the Metropolis, and Beyond, published in 1816 and 1818, there has been a string of reports that, like Leitch, identified the problems and proposed solutions. Most were ignored. The penalty for this, and in particular the failures in technical and vocational education, was and is high, as the historian Correlli Barnett depressingly hammered home in Education for Industrial Decline, a chapter in The Audit of War, the second volume in his magisterial Pride and Fall quartet, and in Education for Industrial Defeat, a chapter in the final volume, The Verdict of Peace.

Looking to the future

Speaking at the National Foundation for Educational Research’s symposium at the BERA conference, the head of its Statistics, Research and Analysis Group, Ian Schagen, said that data does not speak for itself. “Data on its own is pretty damn useless. It is analysis that makes it useful.” Analysis is also essential for understanding research in general and developments in policy.

From this issue you will notice a change in Education Journal as we increase our capacity for analysis and the reporting of research. In the biggest changes to the magazine since we started just over a decade ago, we have put together a team of five national journalists – Mike Baker, John Izbicki, George Low, Ian Nash and John O’Leary – whose years of experience at the BBC, the Daily Telegraph, Education, the Guardian, the Independent, The Times, the TES and the THES and their unvilled contacts will be used to good effect reporting and analysing the full range of education policy.

“From this issue you will notice a change in Education Journal as we increase our capacity for analysis and the reporting of research.”

Our specialist team of writers includes Chris Waterman (who is also executive director of the Association of Directors of Children’s Services) reporting on children’s services; Professor Ken Reid (who is also deputy principal of the Swansea Institute of Higher Education) reporting on Wales; John Dobie OBE (former Director of Education in Edinburgh) covering Scotland; and Nick Kent (editor of Education Parliamentary Monitor) reporting on Westminster.

Over the next few issues we will be expanding our research section and will include reports from a wider range of universities. For analysis of research we will be working with three organisations in particular. These are NFER, whose director, Sue Rossiter, will write regularly for Education Journal, the London University Institute of Education and the British Educational Research Association.

A senior civil servant recently described Education Journal as the magazine that gets in under the radar. We have just increased our capacity to do this, to report on what is happening and why, on what works and what does not. With so much happening and so much at stake, there will be plenty to analyse and report on.
The new secondary curriculum

Mike Baker

"T"his is a very expensive exercise in giving schools and teachers permission to do what they think is right for their children."

That was the (very much off-the-record) summary of the newly launched secondary curriculum for England as whispered to me by a senior government adviser. The occasion was the launch by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority of its revised secondary curriculum. There was perhaps some hidden significance in their unusual choice of location: Lord's Cricket Ground.

Perhaps the architects of the new curriculum, to be phased in at key stages 3 and 4 from September 2008, knew they could expect some bouncers from the fiery defenders of the traditional curriculum. And maybe their choice of this most traditional of English settings worked. Certainly the Schools Minister, Lord Adonis, who also attended the launch, was keen to emphasise that the new curriculum retains all the key subject knowledge of its predecessor.

Indeed, the Government's news release welcomed the new curriculum as if it was a return to the past rather than a step towards modern, personalised learning, claiming it would allow greater "focus on the basics and stretch the high achievers".

But was the minister over-egging it? Surely, the main thrust of these changes is to increase flexibility, reduce subject content and break down subject divides, not to return to the "three Rs".

After all, the chief executive of the QCA, Dr Ken Boston, was unequivocal about the old curriculum: "The traditional approach has been exhausted, it will work no more."

The interesting question is this: were ministers hoodwinked into supporting a more progressive curriculum than the one they thought they were getting? Or were they simply under-playing changes that they quietly welcome, but which they fear they cannot be seen to support. Whatever it is, what are we to make of the 'new secondary curriculum'? In an accompanying booklet, entitled What Has Changed and Why, the QCA says the aim is to "give schools greater flexibility to personalise learning" by reducing the prescribed subject content. Whatever spin ministers put on it, that is pretty unequivocal. So, instead of content we now have "key concepts", which are defined as the "main ideas that learners need to understand in order to deepen and broaden their knowledge, skills and understanding".

Out-of-classroom learning

The idea is also to encourage teachers to make links between previously discrete subjects, several of which now share "key concepts". The new curriculum also specifically incorporates out-of-classroom learning, including visits, community involvement and extended schoolday activities. In short, it is Chris Woodhead's nightmare. It is a cross-curricular, skills-based, flexible and emphatically child-centred curriculum. It prefers "learning experiences" to lessons and "focused support" to streaming or setting.

This is a very idealistic document. It hopes that "engagement with learning will increase" and that pupils will "enjoy school more and their behaviour and attendance will improve".

Sometimes in education one senses that there are only really two basic approaches (albeit with endless variations). Either you believe children respond best by being tied to a fixed, almost timeless diet of required knowledge or you believe they should be given greater freedom to follow their own learning-styles and interests.

Of course, it is a terrible oversimplification to describe the initial national curriculum as the former and the new, revised curriculum as the latter. But it does feel as if the change of approach could be that fundamental. Whereas the background to the introduction of the national curriculum was a lack of trust in the autonomy of teachers and schools, this reform grows out of a conviction that schools could, and indeed should, innovate more.

Its supporters believe the current curriculum is neither modern nor world class and fails to offer a route into successful adult life. They also believe that teachers have become unnecessarily, and unhelpfully, timid about curriculum design because of their fear of league tables.

It is hard to blame the teachers; after all, for almost two decades now, schools have been encouraged, even coerced, into sticking closely to the prescribed curriculum.

Nevertheless, it is to the credit of the QCA that it now wants schools and teachers to be co-designers of the curriculum, relying on the grass roots to know what works best for them. And, more even than trusting teachers, this curriculum reform is about listening to pupils, recognising that they know what works best for them. All of this is a logical extension of the Gilbert Review, with its advocacy of personalised learning.

It is also in tune with the proposals made in January by the then Education Secretary, Alan Johnson, in the consultation paper Making Good Progress, which recommended that children should take national tests when they are ready rather than at the end of each key stage.

If testing really is to become a measure of each child's progress, rather than a means of ranking schools, then there is a chance that schools will feel able to innovate to introduce personalised learning.

But the Government cannot quite summon the nerve to go all out for personalised learning and "testing when ready". In his start-of-term letter to all headteachers, the Schools Secretary, Ed Balls, couched his endorsement of Making Good Progress largely in terms of making sure no child falls behind.

This betrays a concern to see all children making tick-box progress at the same, steady rate. Genuine personalised learning is not like that: pupils need to be free to make progress, at their own pace, in fits and starts. The main concern should be that they get there, not that they keep up with government targets.

The further progress of the revised secondary curriculum will be fascinating; it may prove more of a tug-of-war than a game of cricket.
Government efforts to create world-class specialist 14-19 Diplomas are fatally undermined – not by the obviously hostile forces of opposition but by a number of armies willing to fight a war of attrition all the way to 2013. Just as Puritan landowners coalesced with the Levellers under Oliver Cromwell in the English civil war, so too, an elitist A-level lobby share common ground with “egalitarian” groups who see little but fragmentation and division in the new diplomas.

My own inquiries in response to this summer’s exam results, details of the first five Diplomas and invitations to bid for the second round of the 14-19 Gateway process, showed that at least four groups were still digging in. Even if they are not out to kill the thing, they certainly intend on seeing their own often competing interests survive.

First, those who offer existing high-status vocational courses, such as the BTECs, fear the Government may try to push them aside in favour of its new baby – just as they tried with GNVQ.

Secondly, many of the curriculum subject specialists have looked again at the specifications and first five Diplomas and see a lack of real vocational content in many of them.

Thirdly, many people in FE – with a strong vested interest in the first two groups – see the Diplomas as having turned into a “schools initiative” – watered down so that travel and tourism can be taught by a geography teacher with only three or four days training for the necessary skills.

Fourthly, and most trenchant – the Levellers in the troops – are the supporters of the Tomlinson principle that you can’t just reform the vocational side and leave A-levels alone. Most prominent amongst these are Dr Ken Spours et al, at the University of London Institute of Education. They are the ones who served on Sir Mike Tomlinson’s 14-19 review and/or produced a formidable body of research evidence to back the scrapping of A-levels.

The four groups shared a common notion during my discussions with them, which both Education Secretaries – Ed Balls and John Denham – need to think about. It was summed-up by one professor at the Institute of Education who said: “The question is not whether or not the Diploma will be excellent but whether it will be fit for purpose.” In other words, however good, it won’t add anything significant to the stock of qualifications.

Then there are the elite voices sharing this ground who see only one “fit-for-purpose” exam. The Daily Telegraph last month said: “Dumping A-levels will harm results.” The authority it chose to back its assertion was a study by Professor Peter Davies of Staffordshire University, which suggested widespread take-up of the International Baccalaureate would harm results as students would not focus on their strongest subjects.

With six years to the full roll-out of the Diploma, other assessment ground is already being fought over. Alongside the rise of the IB (16-19), we have the International GCSE (14-16), which the Independent Schools Council says should not be excluded from the overall school-rating figures since this penalises many of its members.

Apprenticeships

Then there are the burgeoning apprenticeships. Bill Rammell, higher education minister, repeatedly asserts: “This is not a second-rate option” and “it offers an alternative route to HE”. But, as soon as GCSE results were published in August, some private training interests painted a very different picture, saying: “If you did not achieve five A*-C GCSEs, try an apprenticeship.”

One persistent problem is that it is not clear who the Diplomas are for. Ken Boston, chief executive of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, said in a speech to the QCA annual review last year that those who do them may go into industry-based training, “equally, they might take medicine at Oxford, or read classics at Cambridge.”

Unfortunately, this view is not shared by Oxford. One admissions tutor said: “I don’t think we can take on Diplomas when we can’t even distinguish between one A-grade at A-level and another.” Moreover, moves to toughen A-levels and make clearer distinctions among the best students would only serve to further undermine 14-19 Diplomas.

A leading policy consultant on 14-19 education and training said he was never convinced the Diplomas were ever more than a device to ditch Tomlinson. “They [ministers] didn’t know much about HNDs when they invented Foundation Degrees and they were not aware of the breadth of FE vocational provision when they invented the Diplomas.”

This fundamental lack of awareness showed through – to the widespread disappointment of people in further education – in the first big state of the nation statement (a letter) from John Denham to FE and adult education leaders earlier this month.

His focus was overwhelmingly about higher education and how to get their students there. Even then, it emphasises conventional HE and makes no mention of other FE-based routes to degree-equivalent level 4 qualifications.

Not until he is two-thirds of the way through the 1,100-word letter does he say: “I would also like to take this opportunity to say a little about the key priorities for further education.” And then the message is essentially about skills.

It would be nice to be able to dismiss this interpretation as an aberration, an ill-judged and somewhat disappointing letter, written in haste by an adviser and casually signed by Denham. Unfortunately, it is a reinforcement of earlier statements on policy. For example, when I asked Baroness Morris why FE colleges did not feature in the new departmental names, she replied tersely: “They do! They are in skills.” So, the function of colleges, overriding all other functions is to deliver the skills element of 14-19 Diplomas and prepare people for industry. Where does this leave the Diplomas? Far from being “the” world-class alternative to A-level, it looks like being yet another in the qualifications jungle that will be denser than ever come 2013.

Ian Nash is part of Nash & Jones Partnership (www.nashandjones.co.uk)
Measuring quality has become an obsession at all levels of education in the UK. While schools fume over exam league tables and Ofsted reports, universities have a variety of indicators to worry about. The one that really matters for most of them is the Research Assessment Exercise, which comes around next year and carries serious money. But, since the arrival of top-up fees and increased reliance on still higher charges for overseas students, no university can afford to ignore the annual student satisfaction survey, which came out this September.

There was considerable scepticism – which I shared – about the value of the National Student Survey, when it was launched three years ago. Final-year undergraduates, whose views are canvassed, would have nothing to measure their experience against – unlike the Quality Assurance Agency panels, whose admittedly burdensome subject reviews were seen off by the vice-chancellors. There were tales of manipulation of the data in Australia, which provided the model for the English survey, and fears that a low response rate would render many of the results unrepresentative.

Teething problems
There were teething problems – many students felt pestered as the pollsters pursued them for a response and there were boycotts at some of the most prestigious universities. Oxford and Cambridge were among about a dozen institutions missing from the first survey, having failed to achieve the required 50 per cent response rate. In the latest edition, however, only Cambridge is missing from the institutional table and it is expected to reach the threshold next year. Nationally, the 177,000 replies represented more than 60 per cent of final-year undergraduates.

A new, more user-friendly website (www.unistats.com) will soon enable sixth-formers to compare courses, and the results form an important part of university league tables. With interest in the survey growing, vice-chancellors are wielding the big stick over departments that produce low scores and preparing their excuses for external consumption: students are said to have unrealistic expectations about the amount of individual attention they can expect in a mass higher education system and are easily swayed by their surroundings.

Not that there was much need to be defensive: an overall satisfaction rate of 81 per cent – up on last year – would delight most businesses. And only continuing criticism of the feedback given by academics attracted much adverse comment. For those prepared to delve more deeply into the results, however, there were other important findings. Black and minority ethnic students, for example, were less satisfied than others, prompting a request from Lord Triesman, Quality Minister at the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, for follow-up reports. Since another report published on the same day by Universities UK showed that BME students are increasingly concentrated in a limited number of institutions – predominantly in the London area – race is likely to be a growing concern in higher education over the coming months.

“There was considerable scepticism ... about the value of the National Student Survey, when it was launched three years ago.”

Close inspection of the vast array of data in the NSS suggests a seriousness of approach by respondents to confound those original sceptics like me. While the aggregated results show sufficient consistency over the three years to command confidence, there are big variations in scores both between and within universities. On my son's course, for example, nearly 90 per cent were satisfied with the teaching; but only 34 per cent thought the library resources good enough. At Oxford, 81 per cent were very satisfied with the library; but only 16 per cent felt the same about the clarity of criteria used in marking.

The real message of the NSS, however, is that students have a clear view of what they want out of higher education – and it is not necessarily what the Government and its advisers think is good for them. Although the Open University has dominated all three surveys and Oxford did well on its belated debut this year, the universities that have done consistently well are those of small to medium size, with good (but not outstanding) research, modern facilities and strong teaching. Such universities became known as the “squeezed middle” as successive education secretaries urged greater specialisation and growth, but it seems that all-rounders are popular after all.

League tables
League tables can be produced from the survey in a number of different ways. The Vice-Chancellor of Buckingham University produced an entertaining conspiracy theory in The Times for the choice of the official version – to keep his private institution from embarrassing his state-funded rivals. But, whatever method is used, the likes of Exeter, Leicester, Loughborough, East Anglia and Aberystwyth still make the top ten.

Although the 22 NSS questions focus on courses, students appear to take a wider view of what satisfies them. The Open University (top in the official version) is plainly being rewarded for outstanding personal service, but other leading scorers such as Buckingham and St Andrews benefit from a tight-knit community, where students rely on the university for their social, as well as academic, life. Even at Oxford, the basic unit of student life is the college, rather than the much larger university.

Of course, higher education is not going to turn the clock back and divide into smaller, generalist institutions. Nor would applicants welcome this – they still flock disproportionately to the big city universities. But the main lesson to be drawn from the survey is that one of the strengths of the UK system is its diversity – and policies which threaten that do a disservice to the consumers who now pay their way to a greater extent than ever before.

John O’Leary, Editor of The Times Good University Guide
Dearing to rescue languages

George Low

Lord Dearing is one of the outsiders likely to be wheeled into Gordon Brown’s “government of all the talents”. If he does not reach the inner circle of advisers along with Admiral West, Digby Jones and Shirley Williams, he will almost certainly be drafted in to advise Alan Johnson in his new job at the Department of Health.

Why? Because he did such an admirable job for Johnson at the DfES with his report on modern languages, which was published in March this year. Dearing is an exceptionally gifted former civil servant who knows both the ways of Whitehall, the weaknesses of Westminster and the foibles of the trade unions. Dearing and Johnson first met when the latter was an upcoming postal workers’ leader and Sir Ron was then head of the Post Office. It was to his old boss and friend that Alan instinctively turned as Education Secretary, when he was in trouble with the catastrophic collapse of modern languages at key stages 3 and 4 in the secondary curriculum.

Johnson did not look for help in vain. Dearing’s main recommendation was that languages should be compulsory in school from the age of seven, through secondary school and up to the age of 14. But he stopped short of insisting they should remain compulsory at GCSE and up to the age of 18. Dearing said: “Pupils need to have the flexibility and desire to succeed and teachers need greater training and support. Employers can also play their part by showing their commitment to learning languages so our future workers are equipped to compete in the global market.”

This was exactly what ministers and the DfES wanted to hear. It enabled Johnson to throw his weight behind the report because it was clearly in line with the Government’s own primary language policy and did not involve much additional expenditure on repairing the damage in secondary schools. “We are embarking on a renaissance in languages in schools and beyond,” he said. “Lord Dearing’s report recommends a number of thoroughgoing measures, including the creation of more opportunities for overseas visits and work experience and a further commitment of financial resources to the Routes into Languages programme, which aims to increase the take-up of languages and wider participation.” Johnson could thus pose as ‘the champion’ of languages in the media – before he was despatched to cure the ills of the health service.

The plan for the renaissance will be to create specialist primary schools – with languages as one of five subject areas (arts, music, languages, science and sport/PE). The idea is to widen the language base – with a bigger choice of languages on offer to primary children including Japanese, Punjabi, Mandarin and Latin. A pilot project is being launched in three local authorities – Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Derbyshire – under the command of languages campaigner and former secondary head, Peter Downes.

Carousel of languages
Primary pupils from the age of nine will be offered a carousel of six languages to taste in their last two years of primary, so that they will be able to continue with the language of their choice at secondary school or else take another one of the list. “This way all the children will have been taught to the same level by the time they transfer,” says Downes, “and will have experienced several languages. The ideal is for several primary schools to get together to teach the project and feed the same secondary school.”

“We are living in a modern world, where children all learning French and going to France for a day is no longer relevant,” Downes maintains. “We will need a much wider languages base as a country in the future.” The project is being evaluated by the University of Manchester and the report will be published at the end of this year. If it is successful it will be rolled out nationally over the next few years. The combination of Dearing and Downes is a formidable one. But will the renaissance happen? Even the optimists admit that it will take time to give birth. Meanwhile, the wretched decline in languages at secondary level continues, and now there is a further fall-off in classes and enrolments in both the further and adult education sectors. Research carried out by CILT shows that fewer than half of UK FE colleges are offering languages with vocational courses, even for travel, tourism and business, and fewer than one per cent of all students are taking a language with their vocational courses. In adult education the reduction in foreign language and ESOL courses is equally dire.

Even before the carve-up of the DfES into two departments there were contradictory views of languages across government – with the Home Office trying to cut back on ESOL spending and Ruth Kelly telling all immigrants and long-term residents to learn English. The Leitch report scarcely recognises the need for developing language skills over the next few years.

Meanwhile, the CBI has woken up to the fact that languages are important for the economic prosperity of the country and vital for the success of the Olympic Games. Foreign language skills will be essential to keep the world’s media supplied with information, for public information, health and security, transport and customer service.

Employers have finally realised that foreign languages are a vital part of a ‘business friendly’ environment and 30 per cent of bosses, big and small, are not satisfied with the current output of competent linguists from schools, colleges and universities. More than 300 languages are spoken in London today, but recent research from Goldsmiths College has shown the importance of second and third generation immigrants retaining and developing their mother tongues. One in seven children in primary schools across the country now speaks a first language other than English and in London the figure is many times higher.

This reservoir of language capacity is a precious national resource – for improving educational standards overall and for survival in the global economy. Those politicians, like Ruth Kelly, who insist “Let them all speak English” should remember the wise words of former West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt: “I sell in English, but I buy in German.”
First of the new-style doctors
Some thought that allowing youngsters without the usual collection of A-levels or other high-falutin achievements to study medicine a screwball idea. I am delighted to report that those of little faith have been proved decidedly wrong. The Extended Medical Degree Programme (EMDP) started at King’s College London and aimed at pupils from low achieving schools in the London area, has proved an overwhelming success. There are now 200 students, many of them black, in this remarkable programme and the first batch of new doctors have graduated with honours that earned high praise from Gordon Brown. The six-year EMDP was launched in 2001 and now takes 30 additional students into the School of Medicine each year. The course director, Dr Pamela Garlick, said the students make up over ten per cent of King’s medical student population. “The best of them are consistently in the top 15 per cent of their whole year group in exam results,” she declared. Ironically, none of them would have stood a chance of going to universities or colleges over the past 20 years has been “consistently and substantially” greater in Scotland than in England. Overall levels of attainment were also higher in Scotland. What is more, Scottish working-class youngsters “consistently outperformed their English peers”. Visit www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk.

Marketing’s as old as the hills
If you thought that public relations and marketing have been comparatively recent inventions, you’d be very wrong indeed. Two academics at the University of Wolverhampton have produced a fascinating book showing that the art of retailing and advertising goods for sale date back several centuries. Whether a company wanted to sell a suit, a kitchen or a holiday, each would receive ample plugs in the newspapers of the day. More than 200 pages are crammed with fine examples in word and illustration dating from around the 17th century. There is, for example, a tradecard of Charles Lillie, a perfumer “At the City of Barcelona, the Corner of Beaufort-Buildings in the Strand, London” which contains a long list of Perfum’d Waters, Soaps and Wash-balls, Cosmeticks, Aromaticks etc. Another leaflet publicises proprietary medicines, such as Freeman’s GRAND ELIXIR for Purifying and Purging the Blood. A tradecard, dated 1745 proclaims Thomas Townshend to be a Chymist in Ordinary to his MAJESTY at the King’s Arms and Golden Head, Hay Market, who attracted customers from as far afield as Shropshire. Some advertisers were not afraid to falsify their marketing. An original painting by Humphry Repton of a View from my own Cottage was “improved” by carefully erasing an ugly fence, a man behind it, a stagecoach and a shop with wildfowl hanging from its awning. The new version added lots of colourful flowers – idyllic for anyone interested in buying a house there. The research that went into the writing of Perceptions of Retailing in Early Modern England by Dr Nancy Cox and Dr Karin Dannenh of the university’s History and Governance Research Institute is a must for historians and scholars of economic and social history. There’s a rub: its price, which reflects the amount of work that has gone into it, is £50.

And finally...
According to a blog, which appeared shortly before universities were due back for the new academic year, half of what the average student learns in the first year “will be outdated by their third year”. The student who wrote this blog added: “I do History. Everything I learn is outdated the moment I learn it, and was probably outdated for many decades before that point. This is why History is the best degree. We know we’re learning useless information. We don’t delude ourselves like everyone else. History = happiness.”
Signposter is for individuals – an everyday tool for living, learning and earning!

Brian Stevens
Director of FEdS Consultancy and of Signposter

The Signposter Programme provides through its system, quick, electronic access to personalised information on a rich range of lifestyle choices, chief amongst which is information on learning and employment opportunities.

The i-portfolio (Intelligent Portfolio) is the heart of the search engine that draws down personalised information from a growing range of external information providers. It is owned by the individual, secure to the individual and the repository of the individual’s personal information:

- This is a service free to all individuals, regardless of age or stage.
- It can be used without cost by organisations partnering with Signposter Ltd as an additional service they can provide for their clients or students or employees.
- It is for an individual to use throughout a lifetime of learning and development.
- The Signposter Programme does not see itself in competition with other portfolios or learning logs. They are for the most part relevant to a particular stage of a person’s development (in school or in a company).
- There is no other system combining learning and employment with a range of other lifestyle choices and which is a tool for lifelong development.
- This is the only system that uses the personal information to drive the search engine, which returns increasingly personalised information the more the system knows of the individual.
- Signposter is for individuals rather than for organisations. But it will bring benefit to the organisations too. Signposter seeks partnerships, which would provide an added service to those systems and allow the individual to take their learning and development details through to the next stage.
- Beyond the significant database of portfolios, the Signposter Programme will not build any databases of information. It has no need to; there are large numbers of fine databases in both the private and public sectors. The Signposter Programme is creating business partnerships with those information providers so that the Signposter search capability can access the information wanted for any transaction by an individual.

- The Signposter Programme is creating a powerful network; it has no interest in owning existing territory. It is a catalyst helping the individual to reach a rich range of personalised information.
- The Signposter Programme is built on a multi technology platform. Individuals will be able to access the system through PCs, PDAs, mobile telephones and digital TV.
- There is no intrusive advertising or marketing on the system beyond what individuals choose to access –

“There is a confused and confusing part-provision of information provided by an increasing number of initiatives, some of which relate to each other but most of which do not.”

and there is no direct access to any individual holding a portfolio on the system.

- At this early stage the focus has been on the 14 to 24-year-olds but the programme will be developing quickly to embrace all people at all ages.

The background to the Signposter programme

The Signposter Programme has been developed by FEdS Consultancy from around the year 2000 from the initial concept of Advancement that has its origins with UCAS. The focus of that original concept has remained steady and tight.

The original concept has been developed By FEdS Consultancy, who created Signposter Ltd, and icom Ltd, a media and technology company also created specifically for this purpose, into the business concept called the Signposter Programme. FEdS has worked closely with UCAS, initially with the LSC and numerous other partners. Oracle has played a significant development role since the very early stages. Fujitsu have also been involved in the early stages. Nokia has more recently joined that partnership.

There is a confused and confusing part-provision of information provided by an increasing number of initiatives, some of which relate to each other but most of which do not. This led to the fourth recommendation of the Morrison Report, commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills in July 2002 to create a network, which is coherent for the individual customer:

“A plethora of organisations and products exist to inform, guide and enable learners to progress. These include course information services, job search agencies, careers services and records of achievement. However, there is no single agency that rationalises all of these functions and delivers a single pathway that learners can take that begins at course registration and takes them right through into work. “Which Way?” is our working title for such a tool. We recommend that Government supports the development of a single learning-to-work support and guidance routemap.”

The 2004 Which Way? Review showed that not much had changed in the intervening two years.

We now have the important development of MIAP (Managing Information Across Partners), the IS-Index and e-portfolios.

But, because the fields of learning and employment are subject, in the former case, to being completely devolved and, in the latter case, to being partly devolved, and because the fields of learning and employment both spread far into the private sector, it would not make sense to conceive of a network centrally controlled by the Government in Whitehall.

The development of a national, virtual infrastructure of interlocking services would make sense if we could provide the most complete and
coherent access to information and advice on learning and employment opportunities for individuals throughout the UK and across the public and private sectors. The Signpost Programme will, we hope, play a significant part in the realisation of this concept.

What are the opportunities for the signpost programme?

In England we have a dysfunctional information, advice and guidance service – and we have never had such a service for individuals throughout their lifetime of development. More generally, we have lost the lifelong learning vision set out in 1998 by David Blunkett’s The Learning Age. This is not the case in either Scotland or Wales. In both, lifelong learning remains the core principle of all developments in formal and informal learning; in Wales The Learning Country remains the touch point for all policy developments; in Scotland Opportunity Scotland has not only been fundamentally reviewed, but in March 2007 the Scottish Executive published International Lifelong Learning: Scotland’s Contribution. In both these countries there are all-through guidance services – Careers Scotland and Careers Wales.

“The Signpost Programme seeks to help enfranchise those not in employment, education or training specifically as well as provide the right inspiration for every individual at whatever level to ... make the most of their potential.”

Yet the provision of careers education is a statutory requirement in England under the Education Act 1997. However, there are no national requirements for the delivery or outcomes of careers education. Further there are no required qualifications or competences for careers teachers/co-ordinators. Two-thirds of careers staff in schools do not have any formal training or qualifications. In short, supporting young people to plan for their future has no status in education in England.

In England there is no intellectual leadership in this area of our national life. The Guidance Council could have provided that, but has now disbanded. CRAC is taking a strong position towards providing that.

Lord Leitch in his report Prosperity for All in the Global Economy – World Class Skills has seen the need for a guidance service for adults to enhance the already fine service that has been developed by Learndirect. With the emphasis in Christine Gilbert’s report Learning 2020 on the personalising of learning, and with the development starting in September 2008 of the new specialised diplomas, we have an even greater need for a service, which provides information and advice and guidance.

In the Government’s response on the implementation of Lord Leitch’s report, published on 18 July 2007, it affirmed that the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and the Department for Work and Pensions will work together to create a joined up employment and skills system. The departments will merge the information and advice services of Learndirect and Next Stop providers into a new universal adult careers service in England working in partnership with JobCentre Plus. The new adult careers service will ensure that everyone is able to access the help they need to take stock of where they are in achieving their goals and ambitions and to get the support they need to advance themselves and achieve their full potential.

The remit for this new service is expected to be released in October 2007 and the service to be ready for the Autumn of 2009.

Signpost will be seeking also to link to the new TV service produced by the DWP’s JobCentre Plus, in partnership with Looking Local, for anyone that has access to Sky, Cable or Broadband-enabled Freeview boxes. It will offer viewers the opportunity to view thousands of job vacancies at the touch of a button

This initiative provides job seekers with another means of ensuring they can access the 400,000 jobs that job centres across the country are advertising.

And the Chancellor who, with the Education Secretary, at a major conference in London in February 2007 to encourage businesses to sign the skills pledge, pointed out that in the future skills will be the only route to prosperity and jobs. Of 3.4 million unskilled jobs today, by 2020 we will need only 600,000.

David Freud’s report for the Department of Work and Pensions, Reducing Dependency. Increasing Opportunity: Options for the Future of Welfare to Work, published in March 2007, set out the imperative to act: “To achieve its 80% aspiration, the Government will need to target its welfare strategy at tackling all of the inactive groups. It will require about one fifth of the ‘economically inactive’ population into work. This would include 300,000 lone parents (relative to a current population of 780,000...
claiming Income Support); one million more older people in work (relative to 20 million people aged over 50 in total) and reducing the numbers claiming incapacity benefits by 1 million (relative to 2.68 million). It also has significant implications from the perspective of the most socially disadvantaged – the 3.1 million people who have been on benefits for more than a year. To achieve the 80 per cent figure would imply reducing that total by 1.3 million people, or 42%.

To get anywhere near addressing seriously these issues we have to have a system of providing information, advice and guidance to all individuals, at whatever age or stage, and which they can rely on throughout their lifetime of development.

By providing a UK-wide service free to all individuals of whatever age or stage and through not only computer but also mobile technology, the voluntary code of practice to regulate the use of additives in school drinks would lead to overwhelming influence by the food industry.

Teen bribery

Teenagers from disadvantaged backgrounds will receive £40 per month to spend on “positive activities” of their choice, the Government has said. Thanks to a £14.5 million initiative, nine local authorities around the country will take part in a pilot to encourage 20,000 disadvantaged young people in years nine to 12 to take part in activities of their choice, including trips to the theatre, sports, music, dance, drama and outdoor pursuits. However, each activity will have to have “sufficient educational activity” to be able to “improve a young person’s wellbeing”. Beverley Hughes, Young People’s Minister, said: “Some young people tell us that they have to overcome difficult obstacles in order to access youth activities … These are much more likely to be young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who cannot afford to take part and face the prospect of having nothing to do. That’s why these pilots are so important in testing different ways of extending the same opportunities to all – opportunities which are not only fun, but can boost young people’s confidence and consequently their chances of doing well in life.”

Term time holidays

The Government has urged parents to avoid taking their children on holiday during term time, after official figures showed that more than 5.4 million school days were lost due to holidays during the Autumn 2006 and Spring 2007 terms. The figures, which now give schools the reasons for school absences, reveal that an estimated 530,000 days were lost due to unauthorised holiday taken during term time, while 4.9 million school days were lost as a result of authorised holiday over the two terms. Currently, schools are able to grant up to ten days’ authorised holiday on a discretionary basis, but guidance to schools states that this should not be an automatic right for parents, and that heads should consider how seriously the holiday would affect the child’s educational progress in their decision.

Food Trust

The School Food Trust has been accused of making a u-turn in its new regulations aimed at providing healthier drinks in schools. The Children’s Food Campaign claimed that the Government’s food watchdog has succumbed to pressure from the food industry, after the trust agreed to allow children to drink “combination” drinks, containing water, fruit juice and/or milk, in school canteens, rather than restricting them to the “pure” drinks that had initially been proposed. Campaigners said combination drinks were “additive-laden” and warned that plans for a

Skills focus

The Scottish Executive has announced plans to create a single skills body from Careers Scotland and Learndirect Scotland, to create a “national focus on skills”. Speaking at the launch of Skills for Scotland – A Lifelong Skills Strategy, Education and Lifelong Learning Secretary Fiona Hyslop said: “This will not only bring a new focus for skills but also create real direct benefits to the individual customer and sustainable economic growth as well as strengthen links with local government. I expect to have a shell organisation set up by the start of 2008 with a more formalised body in place by the end of this financial year. This strategy sets out our objectives to develop a lifelong learning system centred upon the individual but responsive to employer needs.”

Multi-faith commitment

Representatives of Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh faiths have unveiled a joint declaration and shared vision of schools with a religious character. Faith in the System sets out a commitment “to build bridges to greater mutual trust and understanding and to contribute to a just and cohesive society”, as well as promoting greater respect of the differences between different faiths and different types of schools. ASCL general secretary Dr John Dunford said: “The next step should be the establishment of a national curriculum for religious education to ensure that all faith and non-faith schools teach an agreed syllabus.”
In March 2006, the Welsh Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills made a commitment to undertake a National Review of Behaviour and Attendance (NBAR) to support existing activity and to shape and develop the future approach to these challenging issues. A steering group was formed to take forward the review, to establish a true picture of the situation in Wales, to consider good practice in tackling attendance and behaviour issues and to produce clear recommendations to the Welsh Assembly Government. The steering group consists of representatives of key stakeholder groups across Wales, supported by colleagues from Estyn and the Children’s Commissioner’s Office for Wales.

The review was undertaken in accordance with the Welsh Assembly Government’s vision for the future development of policy and provision for children and young people in Wales as exemplified by The Learning Country: Vision into Action. At the time, the review team were conscious of the ever-changing societal demography within Wales. Not least was the disproportionate number of pupils emanating from working class backgrounds when compared with much of the rest of the UK and the growth of a multi-ethnic culture and the rise in single parent families.

**Specific tasks**

Specifically, the review group were given four specific tasks by the Minister:

1. To explore ways in which parents, children and young people and the community as a whole can be more effectively supported and engaged in the promotion of positive behaviour and attendance.

2. To identify effective practice in promoting positive behaviour and attendance and ways in which this practice could be embedded and disseminated in schools and local authorities across Wales.

3. To identify the effective use of multi-agency partnerships in tackling issues of poor attendance behaviour, including consideration of regional models.

4. To identify potential new Wales-only legislative measures which could be sought under the Government of Wales Act 2006 that would assist in promoting discipline and attendance, with specific consideration given to education provision for excluded pupils.

This article is based on the interim report, the result of the first six months work between January and June 2007. The report presents the group’s shared values and covers the work to date on: methodology and progress to date; disaffected and disengaged young people; improving children’s and young people’s attendance and behaviour; exclusions, alternative provision and the wider curriculum;

“It is evident that large numbers of existing professionals have received little or no training for their roles in managing attendance or behaviour. This includes headteachers, deputy headteachers, middle managers, classroom managers, classroom teachers...”

reintegration; training and professional development.

Inevitably, much of the work undertaken during the first six months is scene-setting. In the second stage of the review, the group intends to undertake a much more consultative series of exercises involving children and young people, parents, teachers and key stakeholders with contributions from both health and social services professionals.

The interim report is to a large extent promulgated from ideas generated by four working groups established during the first phase of the review. These groups of nominated professionals and stakeholders (including colleagues from the voluntary sector) meeting at venues throughout and across Wales, decided to adopt a child-friendly approach. The first group considered issues affecting the behaviour and attendance of all children and young people in school. The second group focused on children and young people who cause low-level disruption. The third group considered children and young people at risk of exclusion. The final group concentrated on children who were being educated outside school settings and who had serious histories of disruptive behaviour, non-attendance or both.

Extensive evidence was obtained from the results of these four working groups. This evidence was collated, disseminated and discussed by the steering group and forms much of the basis for the details contained in the interim report.

It is already clear from the work to date that certain issues stand out. First, the majority of schools in Wales are orderly and well-managed.

**Little or no training**

Secondly, it is evident that large numbers of existing professionals have received little or no training for their roles in managing attendance or behaviour. This includes headteachers, deputy headteachers, middle managers, classroom teachers, education social workers, education welfare officers, classroom assistants, learning school mentors – as well as members of the voluntary sector; and health and social services and notably, many parents whose coping skills may be inadequate.

Thirdly, it is equally clear that although there is adequate guidance on managing exclusions from the Welsh Assembly Government, in practice, the implementation processes vary considerably from authority to authority. Significant school variations in the policy and practice of managing actual and potential exclusions also exist. In addition, it has become clear to the steering group that there are a number of pupils who are out-of-school for a variety of reasons, whose very existence is not being properly monitored and who are not receiving an appropriate education.

Fourthly, although some excellent alternative curriculum and out-of-school provision exists, this too tends to vary from authority to authority. In
some parts of Wales, there are presently too few places available.

Interim report
The interim report provides details of the evidence gathered to date on issues such as school leadership; school ethos and culture; personal and social education (PSE); parental participation; linking communities with schools; the purpose of exclusion; pre-exclusion requirements; the concept of exclusion per se; alternative provision; the wider curriculum; off-site provision; post key stage 3 initiatives including 14-19 curriculum; off-site provision; post key stage 3 initiatives including 14-19 curriculum; alternative provision; reintegration; the concept of exclusion per se; the role of magistrates’ courts; the strengths and disadvantages of truancy sweeps; the recommendations of the NFER Review into the role and effectiveness of the Education Welfare Service in Wales.

Parental groups
Questionnaires have been drafted for use with selected parents and parental groups and with pupils in Wales. These data will be analysed during the autumn. A two-day conference of leading officials from England, Scotland and Northern Ireland will be held in September to consider existing policy and practice on behaviour and attendance throughout the rest of the UK and to compare this with policy in Wales and the evidence emanating from the various consultation exercises.

The steering group is mindful of how much further work needs to be undertaken during the second stage of the review. The Review team hopes to present its final report by the end of March 2008. It will make a significant number of recommendations for the Welsh Assembly Government and for professionals to consider. The interim report is being circulated this month as part of the consultation exercise to schools and professionals.

Bringing history to life

Professor Jack Lohman
Director of the London Museums Hub and director of the Museum of London

The content of history lessons has been discussed a lot over the past few weeks. A recent Ofsted report showed that less than a third of pupils study GCSE history and the Government has recently published plans for an overhaul of history lessons. History is a vital subject, not only in teaching children valuable themes and lessons from the past but also in fostering an understanding of citizenship and identity. Children engaging with history through their teens and into their adulthood are given the tools to help unravel the complex and ever-changing relationships that make up society and understand their own place within it.

“Museums are increasingly working in partnership with schools to help bring the history curriculum to life.”

Museums are increasingly working in partnership with schools to help bring the history curriculum to life. In addition to our outstanding national museums, a rich network of non-national local museums exists in the UK, 250 of which are in London. These museums provide a valuable service for schools, enabling them to harness a wide variety of resources which tell stories and unlock mysteries from the past, challenging and engaging young people in their studies.

Over the past four years, the groundbreaking Renaissance in the Regions initiative has been transforming museums across the country. With an injection of support from central government, museums have been able to offer unprecedented support to schools in teaching history in stimulating and inspiring ways.

Overcoming barriers
Small museums, particularly in cities, often have to overcome many barriers to attract children and non-traditional audiences. They have developed innovative activities and creative exhibitions to bring history to life for children and young people of all ages and abilities. Interactive work with computers, video conferencing, drama, role-play and storytelling are just part of an expanding range of creative projects dedicated to this aim.

In London, key partnerships between schools and local museums have been extremely successful – for example, the Horizon School partnership with the Geffrye Museum in Shoreditch. As part of the London Museums Hub education and learning programme, the museum is building on the success of its 12-year partnership with Horizon school, which caters for children with special educational needs and is continuing to extend and develop innovative projects for young people with learning difficulties or disabilities.

Schools that work closely with museums see a much higher engagement with history by children, as well as a whole host of other important life skills, including an appreciation of other cultures. Recent research from the London Museums Hub showed that 97 per cent of teachers rated visits to Hub museums as important to their teaching. And 71 per cent of pupils said their museum visit had given them a better understanding of the subject they were studying.

“Small museums ... have developed innovative activities and creative exhibitions to bring history to life for children and young people of all ages and abilities.”

History envelops us in our surroundings and through the people we meet everyday. If it is brought to life at a local level, in a vividly stimulating and motivating way, it can enlighten children to the past, and to the diverse world they live in today.
Ben Hartshorn
Enabling Effective Support, South West Regional Co-ordinator

The Primary National Strategy Excellence and Enjoyment asked “how well are we doing and what more can we aim to achieve?” We teach our children to read and write, to add up, to run faster and jump higher, but is that all that success in education is about?

If you talk to headteachers, school staff and governors, many will tell you that in their schools, success has an added dimension to it. They will say that it is embedded in their school’s ethos, and this dimension – the global dimension – includes valuing diversity, being outward-looking, tolerant and respectful to one another.

The national strategy goes on to ask “what must we do to continue improving?” and “what will it look like when we have succeeded?” In the south-west of England, using funding from the Department for International Development (DFID), seven teachers have conducted in-depth surveys in successful schools with strong global dimensions to answer these questions.

Policy context
We live in a time when there is much government interest in educating young people for the globalising world they will inherit. Under Gordon Brown, HM Treasury and DFID jointly launched The World Classroom: Developing Global partnerships in education, to encourage schools in the UK to link with those in developing countries.

DCSF places emphasis on Aim 2 of the national curriculum, which “should develop pupils’ commitment to sustainable development at a personal, local, national and global level” in their recently launched Sustainable Schools strategy.

The QCA is also making this work central to their review of the secondary curriculum. They have identified several ‘curriculum dimensions’ to provide a focus across the whole curriculum (not just specific subjects). These are: enterprise, creativity, cultural understanding and the global dimension and sustainable development.

The teachers in this project wanted to document how schools have driven and responded to this policy environment. They, like many of us working in education, want to show that the time spent supporting schools on the global dimension – working with teachers, managers and pupils – has positive benefits.

By highlighting the creativity and energy put in, and the results achieved, the teachers believed they would be able to provide those with a stake in improving the education of our children with a picture of:

- what a strong global dimension looks like;
- the impact this has on staff, pupils and local and global communities;
- how this success can be achieved.

The findings have been drawn together in the report, A Global Dimension – Change your school for good.

They show that a strong global dimension, by which we mean a focus on and commitment to the eight key concepts described in the DfES guidance document Developing the Global Dimension in the School Curriculum (DfES 1409-2005DOC-EN) – including global citizenship, social justice, sustainable development, interdependence and human rights – has a positive impact not just on standards, but on an enriched curriculum, the enthusiasm and creativity of staff and the attitude and behaviour of pupils.

It has been possible to identify a range of ‘success factors’ in schools with a strong global dimension:

Whole-school ethos

At the core of what the school does, the global dimension is embedded in school policies and ethos, reflecting a belief that education is about the whole child and their part in our global community as well as academic success.

Effective leadership

Commitment from and active participation of senior leaders, including governors, will ensure that the global dimension impacts on all areas of the school and the wider community.

Community involvement

Progress is achieved by fully involving visitors from the local and global community, voluntary organisations, business and elsewhere.

To achieve this success, the report shows, typically takes five to seven years. The starting point is often overseas travel by a member of staff, usually the head or another senior leader, which impacts on their willingness to embrace a global dimension in their school.

During this time, the school needs continued and coherent support from a wide range of external services to maintain interest and momentum. The voluntary and community sector is a major source of this support.

The report gives examples of the enthusiasm of young people for global issues, and shows that, given the opportunity, they will take actions to support solutions to those issues.

Conclusion

Global education is good education. It is about success, both academic and social. It is also about engaging with our world as global citizens, willing to take action in support of our local and global communities. Those yet to begin need the motivation to get started and our report provides a glimpse of the rewards that can be achieved. Schools already working towards a whole-school global dimension need planned and sustained support.

Most importantly to some schools, a strong global dimension contributes to more learners engaged with education and enthusiastic about their experience of school. It empowers young people to be active global citizens.

This study shows that schools can be the centres for the change we all want to see in our communities. Young people can be the driving force towards more sustainable lifestyles that place poverty reduction and the environment at the top of our list of priorities.

For a print copy of the report A Global Dimension – Change your school for good, email your contact details to coordinator@globaldimensionsouthwest.org.uk. For a PDF, visit www.globaldimensionsouthwest.org.uk.

The report has been funded as part of the ten-year commitment from DFID to the Enabling Effective Support initiative, to help young people shape the globalising world they will inherit by building capacity within the UK’s education systems to meet the challenges of preparing tomorrow’s global citizens through voluntary and statutory collaboration.
Aimhigher – widening participation in higher education

Viv Wylie
Aimhigher regional director (West Midlands)

The Government’s decision to split the DfES in two was a bold move. Broadly welcomed by the sector, the division places increased emphasis on specific facets of the education agenda. The newly formed Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) addresses the need for the UK to improve its skills base in order to stay economically competitive, as highlighted in last year’s Leitch report. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) meanwhile, is clearly focused on an integrated approach to raising standards in schools and children’s services. With the DIUS remit comprising universities and adult education, while the DCSF is centred on schools, the obvious question now concerns the future of those elements of the wider education agenda which do not sit neatly under any one department.

Aimhigher is the national programme designed to widen participation in higher education. Originally a DfES initiative and funded in partnership with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Aimhigher is a key example of a programme whose reach spans all education sectors. Since its inception in 2004, Aimhigher has worked in close partnership with universities, colleges and schools to engage young people from disadvantaged groups and encourage and support their progression to higher education. The breadth of the programme is considerable. Aimhigher’s work is focused on the delivery of a series of targeted interventions, coordinated by partnerships at a regional and area level. These interventions are aimed at raising the aspirations and achievement of young people from poor backgrounds and of disabled learners who have demonstrated their potential to progress to higher education.

Aimhigher’s success is founded on its institutional partnerships, bringing together different parts of the educational world in a range of innovative activities from masterclasses in HEIs, to capacity building in local communities, which involves working with parents and supporting vocational and work based learners in FE colleges.

Peer mentoring
One of the most effective and popular methods of widening participation is peer mentoring. Many young people from lower socio-economic groups do not have a positive role model in higher education they can relate to, and, as a result, do not consider it as an option. Aimhigher puts these young people in touch with current university students, recruited as higher education ‘ambassadors’ to provide ongoing support to their mentee. To achieve a successful relationship, both mentor and mentee must be from similar backgrounds in terms of ethnicity or community. The activity can be delivered in a number of different modes, including e-mentoring, which is appropriate for rural isolated learners.

“Since its inception in 2004, Aimhigher has worked in close partnership with universities, colleges and schools to engage young people from disadvantaged groups.”

Another example of the initiative’s partnership approach is its summer schools programme. The scheme has been running under the Aimhigher banner for four years, and has grown steadily – during last year alone approximately 10,000 pupils went to over 250 summer schools offered in more than 100 higher education institutions. Aimhigher summer schools are designed to provide disadvantaged young people with a unique experience of life as a university student. Many of the scheme’s beneficiaries have a limited understanding of higher education when they apply, but post-event evaluations demonstrate that the experience can result in a significant increase in confidence and a determination to progress.

Creating such relationships is not always a straightforward process, involving as it does common understandings around strategy and implementation. However, Aimhigher is built on an extensive live network that embraces educational institutions and training providers, local authorities, Connexions, local and regional LSCs, regional development agencies, businesses, charities, and voluntary groups. These relationships have helped the programme develop new approaches to widening participation. Aimhigher’s healthcare strand, for example, spans all regions and works with vocational learners, HEIs, FEcs, IAG professionals, the NHS, and other healthcare providers to promote educational pathways to employment in the healthcare sector. These partnerships are not just concerned with delivery. They are also involved in targeting learners and in planning and evaluating specific work.

Positive findings
The positive findings from this year’s set of higher education performance indicators, published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), demonstrate the real progress that initiatives to widen participation are making. In the West Midlands and other regions we are seeing a sustained rise in applications to HE by learners from our most disadvantaged communities, which coincides with the Aimhigher lifecycle. While Aimhigher can only claim a contribution to this overall progress, there is also growing evidence of the success of individual programmes of activity at the local level which would seem to validate this claim.

The Aimhigher agenda clearly underpins the aims of both the DIUS, in driving a knowledge-based economy, and DCSF, in enabling all children and young people to achieve their full potential. The work of Aimhigher therefore plays a crucial role in assisting the two departments to deliver their individual remits. It also provides a unique brokering function embracing the work of both departments, creating a virtuous circle between universities, colleges and schools and the external organisations that support them. It is to be hoped that going forward, the DIUS and DCSF will work together to sustain the wider view and support the virtuous circle.
The Children Act 2004 was a ground-breaking piece of legislation in a variety of ways. Outcomes for children is where the emphasis lay, with the appointment of a children’s minister and the urgent need for all services to co-operate with each other. All local authorities were also required to appoint a lead member and a director responsible for children’s services.

The most serious omission in the Act, which the Government did not accept, was that schools were not included in the list of those with a duty to cooperate to deliver these outcomes.

However, most schools took the five outcomes very seriously, particularly as they informed the structure and scope of Ofsted inspections. The duty placed on schools (in the Education and Inspections Act 2006) to promote the wellbeing of children and to promote community cohesion underlined the broader duty of schools to all pupils.

Gordon Brown took no time at all to underline his commitment to the children’s agenda at national level, re-badging the DfES as the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and appointing one of his first lieutenants from the Treasury as Secretary of State.

While children’s services authorities were busy integrating services, changes to the structural arrangements for schools appeared to be moving in another direction. The commitment to choice and diversity between, rather than within, schools (with most secondary schools having a single ‘specialism’), the creation of Academies, independent from the local authority, and the active promotion of trust schools – all this seemed to sit uneasily alongside the ECM agenda.

The most serious omission in the Act, which the Government did not accept, was that schools were not included in the list of those with a duty to cooperate to deliver these outcomes.”

However, the much tighter admissions code and the roll-out of extended schools should ensure that schools are more closely involved with the communities they serve.

Post-16
But what about education 14-19, and in particular post-16? The major challenge facing England, focused on education, but with implications for the future of the economy and society, is how to deliver an education from 14 through to 19 that will engage every young adult.

At 16, young adults have a variety of choices; depending of course on what is available in their locality: school sixth form; sixth form college; tertiary college; modern apprenticeship; employment with training; employment without training; unemployment.

For the majority of young people, whose sights are set on further or higher education, this is a positive choice and most are adept at sorting out which route at 16 will enable them to move on to the next stage.

For a significant but stubbornly large minority of 16 year olds, however, their aspirations are low, their experience of education poor and their skill levels below par. At 16 they are glad to leave education, for either low-skilled, low-paid jobs or no job at all.

Global employment market
We are competing in an increasingly global employment market, where manufacturing has been exported and an increasing number of skilled and professional jobs have been off-shored (including high skilled jobs such as accounting).

In order to compete with the rapidly developing, but low cost, economies of Asia we have to examine how we can align post-16 provision so that it delivers what the economy needs and meets the needs of every young adult.

The number of players, at government, national, regional and local level illustrates the necessity of co-ordination and co-operation within and between the levels (and between institutions) if we are to establish a well-structured system that will meet the changing needs of the economy and the young people who will be the key to economic success.

There are key challenges. Capital and revenue funding must be distributed to enable the development of a coherent infrastructure in each area of the country (taking account of geography and demography). We must resolve the tensions between the need for local strategic planning and institutional autonomy. We must deliver a coherent curriculum and qualifications framework that engages every young adult and equips them with skills they need.

At the local level, there are already strategic partnerships, children’s trust arrangements, the Children and Young People’s Plan and the Schools Forum (which are already commenting on wider issues than just schools).

“The establishment of a 14-19 forum ... would complement the existing arrangements and provide the means of developing a pattern of provision that meets the needs of all of the young people in an area.”

The establishment of a 14-19 forum, to advise on the planning, funding, organisation and curriculum, would complement the existing arrangements and provide the means of developing a pattern of provision that met the needs of all of the young people in an area.

Such a forum in each area would complement the existing arrangements and would offer a real opportunity – and the mechanism – to plan a coherent pattern of provision offering an appropriate range of options – and positive outcomes - for every young person.
Children’s Health

Arabella Hargreaves

Home holds dangers for Scotland’s passive smokers

A scientific study into the effects of the smoking ban in Scotland found that although the measure had resulted in exposure to second-hand smoke being reduced by 40 per cent, further action was needed to persuade smoking households to implement smoke-free homes and cars. The findings were based on evidence collected from routine health data, and research projects undertaken by government scientists and Scottish universities. Professor Jill Pell, who headed the research team, said that the primary aim of the smoking ban was to protect non-smokers from the effects of passive smoking, although previous studies had not been able to confirm whether this had been achieved. Primary school children as well as adults from 74 postcode areas took part in the research.

OECD brain study

A new publication from the OECD argues that contrary to the myth that everything important about the brain is decided by the age of two, the brain never loses its capacity to learn. The book is part of a project on learning sciences and brain research, which was launched by the OECD’s Centre for Educational Research and Innovation in 1999.

One of the conclusions of the study is that the brain’s ability to change in response to environmental demands depends on not only the type of learning undertaken, but also on the age at which it occurs and the general learning environment. Drawing on evidence provided by neuro-imaging of adolescents, in which high cognitive potential was shown to be combined with emotional immaturity, the report questions the practice of streaming students at a relatively early age. Findings suggest how and at what age the brain processes language and contradicts ideas about right brain and left brain learning and thinking because most skills are not lodged exclusively in one part of the brain. In the case of numerical ability, for example, addition and subtraction are carried out in entirely different regions. The report addresses ethical questions such as the use of brain imaging and medication to enhance education achievement in conditions like dyslexia, which results primarily from atypical features in the auditory cortex and is now identifiable at a very young age.

No sex talk please, we’re fathers

Fathers are refusing to talk to their children about sex in case it spoils the limited amount of time they spend with them, according to Parentline Plus. Instead, it was being left to mothers. The problem was particularly acute among divorced or separated fathers. Parentline said that research had shown that teenagers who talked to their parents about sex were more likely to delay having intercourse, had fewer partners and were more likely to use contraception. Parentline said that fathers could be particularly effective in talking to their sons, to encourage them to behave in a responsible way.

Although teenage pregnancies had fallen in the past decade, the progress appears to have stalled. In 2005, 7,464 girls under the age of 16 became pregnant, a rise of 283 on 2004. Britain’s teenage pregnancy rate is currently twice as high as Germany’s, three times as high as France’s and six times as high as that of the Netherlands.

Better than welfare?

Under a new incentive scheme in New York, mothers on welfare are being paid to take their children to the doctor and dentist, keeping them in school and signing them up for a library card. The Opportunity NYC programme is a privately financed project the city officials believe could become a taxpayer-funded welfare system after its two-year experiment. Linda Gibbs, the deputy mayor in charge of the programme said that the goal was to find innovative ways for families to break the cycle of poverty. Opponents have denounced the scheme for paying people to fulfil their moral duty to their children.

Antisocial behaviour

Research published recently in the Journal of the American School Health Association examined whether there were differences in the frequency of both antisocial behaviour and societal responses to that behaviour in Victoria, Australia and Washington State, USA. The two states were chosen because, although they are socio-demographically similar, their policy frameworks are different.

Researchers asked pupils in grades 5, 7 and 9 about their behaviour and how society responded to it, and the frequency of antisocial behaviour, school suspensions and police arrests in the two states was analysed. Few state differences in student-reported antisocial behaviour were found, although frequencies varied across behaviour type and grade level. But there were differences in societal responses across grade levels. Grade 5 Washington students reported higher rates of school suspension and older Washington students reported more arrests.

“Contrary to the myth that everything important about the brain is decided by the age of two, the brain never loses its capacity to learn.”

The rates of student antisocial behaviour were similar in both states, although young people in the United States experienced more school suspensions as a consequence of their misbehaviour. Researchers found that while schools suspensions had a positive short-term effect on the problem, in the long term they actually increased the likelihood of further antisocial behaviour occurring after a 12-month period.

French farce

An article published in The Lancet revealed that an untested treatment for autistic children with psychiatric problems is routinely used in France. The therapy, which is called packing, involves wrapping a child tightly in wet sheets that have been placed in the refrigerator for up to an hour. Once the children are encased in the damp cocoon with only their head left free, psychiatrically-trained staff talk to them about their feelings. Although some psychiatrists insist that the treatment produces therapeutic results, critics argue that it is cruel, unproven, potentially dangerous and that it shows just how far France has fallen out of step with the international medical community in its understanding of the condition.
t is not often that the Association of Directors of Children's Services makes the front page of the national press, partly because it is such a new organisation, having been formed earlier this year, and partly because its excellent links with ministers and senior civil servants means that it usually operates behind the scenes. Yet at the end of August The Times splashed across its front page a story critical of the Government's plans for a huge database of all children in England and Wales, based on an ADCS letter to the DCSF.

Under the headline “Huge database will be open to abuse, say critics” the paper reported that “senior social workers” have warned of their “significant” concern that the new ContactPoint system could be used to harm the children whom it is intended to protect. It quoted Richard Stiff, the chairman of the ADCS Information Systems and Technology Policy Committee, as being concerned that confusion over who is responsible for vetting users and policing the system “may allow a situation where an abuser could be able to access ContactPoint for illegitimate purposes with limited fear of any repercussions”. The paper said that security fears were fuelled by the admission that information about the children of celebrities and politicians is likely to be excluded.

The system is costing £224 million to build and a further £41 million a year to run. It was rushed through parliament without publicity in July, despite the warning of a House of Lords committee so obscure it is quoted in the media even less often than the ADCS. The Lords’ Select Committee on Merits of Statutory Instruments concluded that “the enormous size of the database and the huge number of probable users inevitably increase the risks of accidental or inadvertent breaches of security, and of deliberate misuse of the data (eg, disclosure of an address with malicious intent), which would be likely to bring the whole scheme into disrepute”.

The ADCS gave warning that changes made to the rules after consultation could leave the system open to abuse. “The Association of Directors of Children’s Services has written to Christine Goodfellow, the official in charge of the new database, to register its fears over security,” The Times reported. ADCS warned that ministers could be placing “unreasonable and perhaps undeliverable expectations on local councils” by asking them to guarantee the accuracy of data over which they have little control.

**Education at a Glance**
The annual OECD report Education at a Glance generated a lot of media coverage, though there was little agreement on what the main story was. This is not surprising, as the report is vast with over 400 pages of statistics. Reporting in the Guardian, James Meikle concentrated on higher education, which was the main focus of the report. He reported that Britain’s higher education system had recorded “impressive growth”, yet it was expanding less rapidly than those of many of our competitors. He quoted many of the figures to be found in our review of the report on page 32, while giving a good analysis of what lay behind them.

This was based on the many questions James had asked at the press conference launching the document, for journalists were given both a fat book to read, a substantial briefing note, a short press release and a slide presentation by Andreas Schleicher, the head of the OECD’s Indicators and Analysis Division, which sometimes went further than the data in the book. The excellent Andreas, who is also the man behind the OECD’s PISA reports, patiently took the struggling hacks through the statistics.

Richard Garner, education editor of the Independent, focused initially on statistics of primary class size, which are larger in the UK than in almost all other OECD countries. Only Brazil, Chile, Israel, Ireland, Japan, South Korea and Turkey are worse and of those only Ireland is in Europe. At the same time the gap between the private and state sectors was higher than in any other OECD country. He quoted the NUT general secretary, Steve Sinnott, as saying: “Levels of support for youngsters from deprived backgrounds must be raised. State school classes must be brought down to private school levels.”

Reporting for The Times, Nicola Woolcock chose secondary school exam statistics to lead on under the headline “Britain overtaken in world exam league tables”. The paper ran an editorial on the report, concluding that “the broad, albeit impressionistic, conclusions of this report are that education is a good investment both socially and economically but the UK does not enjoy a pre-eminent position among international peers when it comes to educational standards.”

**Tory policy**
The Conservative Party’s policy group on public services, chaired by former Cabinet minister and Shadow Education Secretary Stephen Dorrell and former HMCI Baroness Perry, published its final report at the end of August.

It was trailed in the Sunday Times in an article written by David Cracknell, the paper’s political editor, rather than its education correspondent. “Tories to let parents set up schools” was the headline. The story predicted that the Dorrell/Perry report would recommend that parents should be allowed to establish schools funded by the state but would be independent of the local authority. They would have to be non-selective, which is a change for the Conservative Party, and parents would have to demonstrate that a significant number of local schools were under-performing, but otherwise, as Cracknell admitted, this is a right that parents already have under Labour legislation. According to this report, the Tory ideas were a continuation of the Blairite “escape routes for the few” ideology.

Dorrell wrote an article in the same issue of the paper that set a rather different tone. His argument was the professionals, whether teachers or doctors, should be encouraged to reclaim what he called “a strong and independent professional ethos”. The command approach from politicians may have been necessary once, but now it was time to trust the professionals. “The killer virus in public services,” Dorrell wrote, “is the thought that doctors and teachers may not need to accept responsibility for what they achieve.” He complained that with politicians attempting to run services by administrative fiat, the professionals felt increasingly disengaged.
OBITUARY

Mike Bannister

John Francis Watts, 1926 -2007

John Watts, one of the foremost educationists of his generation, died peacefully in his sleep on 14 May 2007, after a long encounter with Chronic Lymphatic Leukaemia. His contribution to the development of secondary education and to the teaching of English was unrivalled. A rare combination of theorist and brilliant practitioner, he inspired – with seemingly effortless authority – countless young people, teachers, governors and parents. His love of the arts, and his intellectual energy were, to the last weeks of his life, prodigious.

Following service in the British Army of the Rhine from 1945 to 1949, John graduated in English and Philosophy at Bristol, before teaching English at Sawston Village College, Cambridgeshire. In 1957 he became head of English at Crown Woods, one of London's flagship comprehensives, with 2000 pupils on roll. In 1964, John was appointed Head of Les Quennevais School in Jersey, where he established an effective community school with an inclusive approach to the curriculum. He underpinned this with a programme of visiting speakers and musicians, to strengthen cultural ties with the mainland.

Language across the curriculum

In 1971 John was appointed lecturer at the University of London's Institute of Education, providing support and supervision to teachers in training. In association with James Britton, Nancy Martin, and Harold Rosen, he worked on the hugely influential Language Across the Curriculum project. In 1972, he was elected chairman of the National Association for the Teaching of English and, later in the same year, he was appointed head of Countesthorpe Community College in Leicestershire.

Opened the previous year, the central concept of Countesthorpe's elegant and revolutionary design was to promote the extension of good primary school practice through individualised learning and open up the school's resources to the whole community. Children and adults would study in parallel, learning how to learn.

The setting of new parameters for the school's democracy, and an accidental fire that immobilised the administrative wing, were two of many serious challenges at Countesthorpe, but each one revealed new strengths in John, both as leader and manager. He fought hard to re-establish confidence in the founding principles of Countesthorpe, within the community and the governing board, and the end result was a vibrant, open school, with high performance and morale. Where Countesthorpe led, others followed, at Madeley Court in Telford, the Abraham Moss Centre in Manchester and Stantonbury Campus in Milton Keynes. Secondary education was evolving; its "Secret Garden" opening to the world.

"John Watts, one of the foremost educationists of his generation, died peacefully in his sleep on 14 May 2007, after a long encounter with Chronic Lymphatic Leukaemia."

In 1981, John spent the first of his retirements working as consultant to a number of LEAs and also teaching B.Ed. students at Warwick University. Then, in 1983, he was invited to take on a fire-fighting role at Dartington – the pioneering progressive school in Devon – whose life-affirming philosophies had informed, to some degree, the early thinking behind Countesthorpe. A serious crisis relating to the management and care of pupils had been taken up by the tabloid press and staff morale was damaged. John steadied the teaching force and brought matters to order. He assisted in the appointment of a new headteacher and stayed on for a time as chair of the Dartington School executive. Following this, in 1986, John moved to the Community Education Development Centre in Coventry, where for five years he was teacher, mentor and consultant to mature students in the field.

In 1991, John finally did retire to a quiet corner of Suffolk, where he devoted his time to his family, natural history, poetry, making music with local choirs, and reading. Here he wrote two volumes of poetry, Hearings (1992-1993) and A Sense of Suffolk (2007). In 1997 he was awarded the Pevsner Prize. During his career he wrote several popular texts: Encounters (1-3) (Longmans 1969-71), Early Encounters, International Encounters & Twentieth Century Encounters (Longmans 1979), Teaching, The Countesthorpe Experience (Unwin 1977), Toward an Open School (Longmans 1980), and innumerable contributions to educational books and journals. He taught summer schools at Calgary University in 1979, 1981 and 1983.

Unfailingly optimistic

Those who worked with John Watts through the years speak of an amiable and unfailingly optimistic personality who seemed to raise the aspirations of all around him. He was a demanding manager, who harboured a real concern for the welfare of colleagues, and when the hard work was over he would enjoy their company, the music, laughter and conversation. John was a natural performer, who would delight in reworking the songs of Flanders and Swann, or tripping The Lambeth Walk like any Pearly King. His great love was the French horn; guest and performer by turns, he was a mighty friend and a well-rounded man.

Born in Edgware, the son of a dentist, John Watts was educated at West Buckland in Somerset. He was humanitarian in outlook, widely read and much travelled, a linguist, a raconteur, a serious thinker. Who else, in his very first years of teaching, would bring off an outdoor production of Antigone and follow that with A Version of Tamburlaine? Who else, in his 81st year, would re-read Gibbon and publish a volume of poetry, beautifully crafted and so sublimey evocative of the Suffolk landscape?

John Watts believed passionately that young people – each and every child – should be fired with the excitement of learning. From the start of his professional life, maybe after witnessing the horrors of a war-torn Europe and certainly after his collaboration with the eccentric genius of Henry Morris in Cambridgeshire, John recognised the importance of three-way compact, based on mutual respect between the home, the school and the pupil.

John is survived by his wife Madeleine (married 1985), his stepdaughters Vanessa and Chloe, and by Tim, Jane, Chris, Ben and Toby, the children of his former marriage to Elizabeth (m. 1949). He has 12 living grandchildren and three step-grandchildren.
Parent craft and home cooking

John Izbicki

Not many miles from our shores stands the magnificent cathedral of Rouen, one of France’s truly beautiful old cities. This church was painted many times by Claude Monet and readers who are fortunate enough to stand in front of it as dusk turns to dark on any night of the week will be able to witness one of the most remarkable shows of son et lumière. For some 20 minutes, the entire cathedral will have the various Monet versions superimposed upon its ancient walls accompanied by an exciting and original musical score. The show is repeated several times each night and is punctuated by the oohs and ahs of many scores of onlookers.

This masterly cultural offering was just one of several things that made a positive impression on me during a wet August’s visit across the Channel. Let me mention two or three others: All along Normandy’s many superb beaches, councils have introduced a campaign to improve both literacy and enjoyment to all holidaymakers. Simply called Lire à la Plage (reading on the beach) booths surrounded by comfortable seats and deckchairs have provided more than 8,000 books, ranging from adult thrillers to easy-to-read publications for youngsters – all available free of charge to be borrowed for the day and “consumed” there and then.

Bicycles

The second is another campaign – this time to help the environment and eliminate noxious petrol fumes. Paris has introduced thousands of bicycles which may be borrowed and used by young and old alike. There is a small charge for a plastic card, a little like a credit card, which is inserted into a machine where the bikes are stored. Cycles may be dropped off at any of the many depots dotted about the city. Later, the user may borrow another bike to ride back or elsewhere. The choice is yours. Still in Paris, Metro station platforms at the Louvre are magnificently furnished with replica statues, ornaments and paintings, a delight on the eye.

Wouldn’t it be great to introduce any or all of these ideas here in the UK? I gave this some thought but, alas, it did not take me long to dismiss them all. Why? Because I fear that each would not last very long. Books would be torn up, scribbled all over, or simply stolen. Bicycles might be ridden away never to be returned or stored. Statues at tubes near the Tate or British Museum would almost certainly be vandalised.

The art and cathedral project is slightly different. But again, I cannot see it lasting for more than a few days without some young “artists” adding their own spray can graffiti to the walls.

What is it with our young men and women? The unbelievably vicious and cowardly murder of 11-year-old Rhys Jones, shot while playing football with his mates at Croxteth, Liverpool, at the height of the summer holiday, was not a one-off killing. It was just one of eight murders and 17 attempted murders among more than 550 gun crimes recorded by the Merseyside police so far this year. Most of them have been laid at the feet of teenagers. And that’s just in the Liverpool area. Add Manchester, Birmingham and London and the statistics become astonishing and frightening.

“Nationally, one child in 12 aged 12 – 15 is now ‘vulnerable to violent crime’. Of these one in 24 is black, one in 28 is white, one in 23 is male and one in 33 is female.”

Nationally, one child in 12 aged 12 – 15 is now “vulnerable to violent crime”. Of these one in 24 is black, one in 28 is white, one in 23 is male and one in 33 is female. One young person in four is taking illegal drugs, including heroin, cocaine, crack, ecstasy, LSD, magic mushrooms and tranquilisers. So what’s to be done? One cannot lay the blame at the feet of our teachers. They have quite enough on their proverbial plates. So what about parents? That’s getting nearer the mark. Far too many parents couldn’t care less what their young sons and daughters are up to. Perhaps it would be an idea if the parents of every boy or girl who gets into any kind of trouble with the police, ranging from graffiti scrawling to drug taking and pistol or knife touting, were to be sent to compulsory schooling and taught something about parentcraft and decent home cooking. (Recent reports on certain additives to drinks and foods that cause hyperactivity among children present nothing new; I was reporting on them from Paris 20 years ago!)

A fond farewell to Bill

Everyone knows that Bill Deedes (Lord Deedes, whose life spanned 94 glorious years) became the model for William Boot, hero of Evelyn Waugh’s novel, Scoop. It was a character that suited him admirably; for Bill was the complete and thorough journalist, even after he became Tory MP for Ashford, Kent, and a minister serving four Prime Ministers (Churchill, Eden, Macmillan and Douglas-Home). In 1964 when I started at the Daily Telegraph and he was Minister without Portfolio, I would see him several times a week, typing feverishly to produce one or more little gossipy pieces in the office of Peterborough, the daily diary column. He simply could not give up journalism. In 1974 he took on the mantle of editor but continued to write leaders and leader page features, always retaining his modesty. Later he pirated my faithful secretary, Ettie Duncan, who had worked with me for 10 years, but I never held it against him. She was, after all, the best PA in the house. In 1981 she confided in me that Hilary, Bill’s wife, had begged her to try to persuade her workaholic husband to retire in 1983 when he reached 70. It was not to be. Indeed, poor Ettie died of cancer in 1993 and Hilary in 2004. But Bill continued to slog on, campaigning against landmines alongside Princess Di, and writing delicious pieces from South Africa, Australia – and anywhere else where there was action. He was immortalised in his own lifetime by Waugh and later by Private Eye’s superb series of Dear Bill “letters” (supposedly written by his constant golf partner, Denis Thatcher). Now he lives on through his immense collection of articles. Ever the gentle man, I shall miss him greatly. He can never be replaced.
No holding back

Professor Colin Richards

On 2 September David Cameron argued in a right-wing broadsheet that “failing” year 6 pupils should have the option of repeating their last year at primary school. His schools secretary, Ian Gove, later commented in a television interview that failing to have the necessary skills by age 11 would “hold children” back and then proceeded to recommend exactly that – holding large numbers of children back – at least to age 12 or possibly later!

This ill thought-out suggestion, running counter to the experience in most of mainland Europe and to twentieth century English experience of promotion by standards, is based on a number of fallacies. One is that English primary education has failed to deliver on “standards” – unproven partly because neither politicians nor most professional associations have ever been clear what “standards” are. The second fallacy is that level 4 at age 11 is the “expected” level nationally. It may well be the Government’s “expected” level but it has never been accepted by the majority of year 6 teachers: the closest to such an agreement was the consensus behind the 1987 TGAT proposal that level 4 should be the “average” level – a very different notion. A third fallacy, exposed by the likes of Black and William is that national test results are reliable when the reality is that up to 30 per cent of children are wrongly allocated to particular levels.

The fourth fallacy is that children achieving “only” (note the word) level 3 do not know how to read, write or add – an insult to the children concerned, for some of whom level 3 represents a massive achievement. A last fallacy is that only by achieving level 4 can pupils “access” (whatever that means) secondary education. At present all children achieving level 3 do access secondary education, some with more success than those achieving a spurious level 4 as a result of excessive test cramming. That is not to deny that in general there is a relationship between achieving level 4 or above and success at age 16, but that relationship is an association, not a causal relationship – neither the DCSF nor the Conservatives appreciate the difference.

Accepting such fallacies, the Conservative Party is considering what is known elsewhere as grade repetition. What effect will repeating one year (possibly more) have on children’s self-esteem and motivation already damaged by “only” having achieved level 2 or 3? Will it make them more or, what is more likely, much less amenable to school discipline (beloved of politicians) at age 12 and even more so two or three years later? How will the extra influx be accommodated in schools, by Ofsted in inspections and by the DCSF in published performance tables? How will Conservative parents react to their children being “held back”? How will secondary schools react, or will they too be able to require pupils to repeat a year or more, or perhaps be able to send back their poorly performing year 7 or 8 pupils for an extra dose of primary education?

Nevertheless, there are some sensible proposals for improvements to education emerging from the Conservatives’ policy review group but these may well be overshadowed, even “held back”, by the publicity given to this retrograde proposal.

Book reviews

Dealing with creationism

Demitri Coryton


This book addresses the issue of how science teachers can teach evolution in a society where a significant part of the community believes in creationism (i.e. a literal belief in the story of the creation of the world as told in the biblical book of Genesis).

In the United States, where this book is published, this is a serious problem and for American readers this book is a valuable contribution to overcoming the difficulty scientists have of knowing how to engage children from a fundamentalist religious background and introduce them to scientific theories that they and their parents would want to reject.

With the possible exception of a few teachers in the academies run by British creationist Sir Peter Varady, this is not an issue in Britain. The British view creationism as loony, which it is. It is an inescapable fact that the world was not formed 6,000 years ago in six days by God, nor has man walked the earth at the same time as dinosaurs, as creationists believe. British people look with incredulity at their American cousins, with a certain smugness that such nonsense could not catch on here. How could a people who have been so successful in harnessing science, the first to put a man on the moon, be so gullible as to come to believe such an absurdity?

This book doesn’t explain why but, more importantly for American readers, it shows how to deal with the problems that such beliefs create.

It is edited by Leslie Jones, an American biology lecturer at Valdosta State University in Georgia, and Michael Reiss, professor of science education at the University of London Institute of Education and a priest in the Church of England.

For British readers it is the second chapter, on the history of creationism, written by Randy Moore, Professor of Biology at the University of Minnesota, that will be the most interesting. As Moore explains, Charles Darwin’s On the Origin of Species was published in 1859. By the 1890s evolution was featured prominently in virtually all best-selling high school text books in America.

Flat Earth

In March 1922 Kentucky became the first American state legislature to vote on a proposal to ban the teaching of evolution in state schools. A proposed Bill was defeated by only one vote. Such a reactionary move is perhaps understandable when you consider that this happened only a few weeks after a teacher in the same state was fired for teaching that the earth is round. A year later the state of Oklahoma passed the first law banning the teaching of
Towards an anthropology of testing

Professor Colin Richards


Only an anthropologist from a different planet who is totally unacquainted with the mysteries of the English education system could validly and objectively assess the absurdities and perversities surrounding our current testing regime. Warwick Mansell, TES correspondent, is the nearest we have to that anthropologist. He is a self-styled ‘outsider to teaching’ who is able to observe and comment with a measure of detachment not given to those of us embroiled professionally in the day-to-day business of schools. In this important book he comments incisively, pointedly and memorably on what he terms “the tyranny of testing”.

The title (with its sub-title) says it all, though it would have been even more telling had a question mark be added after ‘Numbers’. Citing up-to-date research and other evidence he has unearthed himself, he catalogues the educational implications of placing so much emphasis on test results as the sole or main criterion for determining educational standards and quality. He invents the term “hyper-accountability” and argues that it is a “a political, not an educational, process” that needs radical change. He provides a very compelling case using language which parents, policy-makers and teachers can readily understand and citign graphic examples that are frighteningly convincing.

His book focuses on pupils, not on teachers and illustrates how ministers, civil servants and government quangos “put their own interests, in defending this regime, above those of the pupils”. He illustrates how test and exam results are being used to define what constitutes good schooling and good teaching at the expense of the long-term interests of pupils. He discusses the invidious effects of test preparation on anxious children and on the narrow curriculum they are too often offered as the time for national testing looms. He attacks the way hyper-accountability has corrupted course work, exam boards and government guidance, choice of courses for GCSE, targeting of pupils and the taking of re-sits. He goes beyond offering a well-informed critique to suggest possible ways forward to policy-makers.

In a short but very important chapter he lists a large number of crucially important aspects of education that exam and testing statistics ignore. He comments: “The question is not whether there should be accountability but whether the current form is working to the advantage of pupils and the country as a whole.” He answers with a convincing negative judgement.

The book deserves to be widely read and acted upon. More particularly, its publisher needs to bring out a shorter paperback version very quickly with that question mark in the title. After all, what the book does most eloquently is to place a huge question mark on our tyrannous testing regime.

Colin Richards is a former senior HMI and emeritus professor at Cumbria University.
Music Lessons

Culled from school essays on music

“Handel was half German, half Italian, and half English. He was rather large.”

“John Sebastian Bach died from 1750 to the present.”

“Beethoven wrote music even though he was deaf. He was so deaf he wrote loud music. He took long walks in the forest even when everyone was calling him. I guess he could not hear so good. Beethoven expired in 1827 and later died from this.”

“Henry Purcell is a well known composer few people have ever heard of.”

Alternative meanings

The Washington Post asked readers to take any word from the dictionary, alter it by adding, subtracting or changing one letter, and supply a new definition:

1. Sarchasm: The gulf between the author of sarcastic wit and the reader who doesn’t get it.

2. Reinterarnation: Coming back to life as a hillbilly.

3. Foreplay: Any misrepresentation about yourself for the purpose of obtaining sex.

4. Inoculate: To take coffee intravenously.


6. Karmageddon: End of the world due to a build up of bad-vibes.
The Organisation for European Cooperation and Development launched its *Education at a Glance* 2007 report at the Over Seas League in London in September. The idea that any book of over 400 pages of statistics could ever be productively used at a glance is questionable, but this comprehensive annual volume is a gem eagerly awaited by the OECD’s band of devotees in education.

**Trends**

There are a number of trends tracked by the report, which we review on page 32. (See also media coverage on page 22.) While Britain leads the way in pre-school provision and does well in some aspects of tertiary education, overall there are rather too many areas where our performance is average and where we are being overtaken by others. In the UK there is also a big gap between the state and private sectors. As John Bangs, assistant secretary education at the NUT observed, the report showed that “strategically, investment in education pays but in England the gap between state and private provision has a long way to go”.

### Aspects of the future...

The first major event in the academic year is the annual conference of Aspect, which now boasts a membership of over 4,000 school improvement professionals working within CSAs or as independent consultants.

This year’s conference in York, ‘Closing the Gap: School Improvement and Every Child Matters’ focused on the need for school improvement professionals to get fully engaged with the fast developing ECM agenda.

David Chaytor, Labour MP for Bury North opened the conference with a tour d’horizon of the new political landscape under Gordon Brown. Having played a key role in the Commons committee examination of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, he was able to demonstrate some very sharp insights of his own on the inter-relationship between the standards agenda and the ECM agenda.

**Inaugural speech**

Vinod Hallan, in his inaugural speech as president of Aspect, began by looking at the global picture, charting the progress that the emerging economies of China and elsewhere in Asia were making in narrowing the gap between themselves and the West.

The implications of the faster rate of progress in the emerging economies are clear: to retain our competitive edge we need an education system that is world-class but this depends on reducing the inequalities within our system.

Referring to new research carried out with EMIE at NFER, Vinod identified five key drivers for success that had been identified in Beacon authorities:

- committed leadership at all levels
- passion and a drive for improvement
- innovation
- knowledge and capacity
- being a learning organisation.

He ended by looking at a local level, citing the progress that Tower Hamlets had made as one demonstration that the achievement gap can be closed.

The conference also saw the launch of *Learning - the Key to Integrated Services*, a review of the development of the ECM agenda and the role of school improvement professionals in developing the agenda. Quoting the ‘no standards without ECM and no ECM without standards’ mantra, the report underlines the imperative to engage schools fully in the wider agenda, signalled by the new duties on schools in the Education and Inspections Act 2006 to have regard to the well-being of children and to promote community cohesion.

**Clear message**

The clear message for Aspect members is that they, alongside other professionals, need to think outside of the box of narrow professional roles, becoming better acquainted with socioeconomic factors and the whole range of services that shape children’s lives.

Hot topics on the fringes of the conference included continuing concern about when the health sector would be more proactive in contributing to the children’s agenda, the continuing plethora of plans and the need for a more reflective approach to policy making.

After a dinner followed by a rousing after-dinner performance by York City Gospel Choir, the second day of the conference was strictly back to business, with keynote speeches from Jane Haywood, chief executive of the Children’s Workforce Development Council, and Jon Mager, national director for regional support for the national strategies.

Jane Haywood, of the CWCD, spoke about the rapid development of the organisation, which is the sector skills council for half a million workers in children’s services, early years and educational psychologists.

**Workforce reform**

The challenge of leading workforce reform across such a diverse but fast growing sector was considerable, with a key need to establish a common language and common understanding across the sector. An integrated qualifications framework was one of the top priorities for the council.

Jon Mager sent the delegates home with plenty to think about, in terms of the future working of the national strategies. There would be closer working with Aspect and other national partners to ensure quality across the full range of school improvement activities, with local authority school improvement teams a key element in the developing landscape.

As Chris Berry, director of Professional Development at the Virtual Staff College, said in her closing remarks as conference chairman, delegates had been provided with a range of keynote speeches and seminars that had linked national perspectives to practical implications for school improvement professionals.
NFER: Research and inquiry are key parts of creating a learning-centred school

Opening the National Foundation for Educational Research’s annual practical research for education conference in London, its director, Sue Rossiter, said that “research can clarify problems and what we can do to solve them”. Research was an important tool in looking at evidence-based practice. She was happy about the reorganisation of the education departments that took place at the end of June and looked forward to working with new partners to expand NFER’s work.

Professor Peter Early, director of the London Centre for Leadership in Learning at the London University Institute of Education, delivered a keynote address on the importance of research to practitioners. He said that practitioner inquiry was “a fundamental part of a learning community,” citing the work of John MacBeath and Graham Hanscomb. It improved practice and was an important part of continuing professional development.

“Conviction politicians tended to ignore research to follow their convictions, but he thought that was not always a good thing and cited Margaret Thatcher and Adolf Hitler as two admittedly very different examples of conviction politicians.”

Prof. Early acknowledged that global forces had created major changes in education systems. It was now up to schools to take the main responsibility for developing the quality, motivation and organisation of their people. Schools had to manage and develop their human resources. School leaders needed to create a culture of learning, for both staff and pupils, where investment in people was given the priority it deserved. This does mean the focus is less on the leader and more on shared leadership. This fits the emerging theory of leadership, which is learning-centred.

This is an inclusive leadership distributed throughout the school. School leaders had to be up-to-date and demonstrate a commitment to professional development, to be “lead learners promoting a learning climate” and evaluating the progress of teachers’ development. “This is the essence of learning-centred leadership.” Prof. Early stressed the importance of creating a culture “where learning is seen as central to everything that is done”. Engaging in research and enquiry was a key part of creating a learning-centred school.

Commenting on research in general, Prof Early said that the research community had to engage with politicians, who did not always understand the limitations of research. “There is a need to educate ministers that some questions are just not research questions.”

Research informing policy
Andrew Morris, a research consultant to the CfBT Education Trust, spoke of the key role research should play in informing policy, rather than being used to evaluate policies that have been implemented with little or no reference to evidence. Research knowledge was a starter, but to be effective it has to be transformed into something useful. “This is very weak in education compared to other areas,” he said, though Britain was better than most countries in using educational research effectively.

He compared the situation to that of research in health. In education, he said, “we see only a few peaks. It is very disconnected.” The National Education Research Forum was put in place to address this problem but its abolition last year was an indication that it had not succeeded. In social care there is an organisational excellence model where research permeates institutions.

Mr Morris observed that governments tend to go by hunches. He gave the example of Tony Blair invading Iraq because he thought it was the right thing to do. Conviction politicians tended to ignore research to follow their convictions, but he thought that was not always a good thing and cited Margaret Thatcher and Adolf Hitler as two admittedly very different examples of conviction politicians.

Mr Morris saw delivery as the big problem. “As practitioners, let us expand what our role is. We need to be part of R&D as well as users of research.” He posed the question of how was change going to happen with more people involved in research. He thought it would be gradual, and that “we are better informed and equipped than we were ten years ago,” but there was no extra funding available. “Those in R&D must make the case to budget holders.”

Literacy assessment
Marion Sainsbury, Head of Literacy at NFER, gave a presentation about the impact of e-assessment on schools. She said that there had been a huge advance in technology and that e-assessment was the way of the future. She went through the various stages of the research about the development of new e-assessment techniques, explaining the benefits and pitfalls for students and teachers.

“There is a need to educate ministers that some questions are just not research questions.”

The result of e-assessment used in research has helped to identify different kinds of reader. She thought that this sort of information about students would be very useful to teachers who are trying to adapt their teaching to different groups in their class. Well-informed feedback was crucial. Assessment for learning was bringing assessment back into the classroom.
ADCS conference: Closing the performance gap remains the challenge

After years of bashing local government and reducing its powers, the launch of the Every Child Matters children agenda four years ago led ministers to realise that they needed local government more than they thought. While school autonomy was the mantra from Downing Street, cooperation across institutions and agencies was increasingly the message from Sanctuary Buildings.

The growing importance of local government in the Government’s thinking was apparent from the number of senior civil servants who spent time at the twice yearly conferences of ConfEd, the professional association for LEA officers. ConfEd is no more, having been replaced by the Association of Directors of Children’s Services earlier this year, but at the new association’s inaugural conference just before the summer break an even closer pattern of cooperation could be seen.

Three of the directors-general from the new Department for Children, Schools and Families attended the conference, as did Beverley Hughes, Minister of State for Children, Young People and Families. Mrs Hughes spent quite a lot of time at the ADCS conference in Manchester, where she is a local MP, talking to small groups of directors of children’s services, a use of her time that was much appreciated by the local government officers.

The merger
ADCS is a merger of ConfEd, itself based on the old Society of Education Officers and a couple of smaller organisations, and the children’s part of the Association of Directors of Social Services. The SEO and ConfEd had always been broadly based membership organisations while ADSS had restricted its membership to directors. ADCS follows the SEO/ConfEd model.

The new association has two presidents for its first year, one each from the education and social services traditions upon which it draws. These are John Coughlan, director of children’s services in Hampshire, and John Freeman, director in Dudley. Mr Coughlan opened the conference by telling his members that they were “doing a job that has never been done before. We need to take forward the service”. He observed that the conference “coincides with something extraordinary happening in education”.

He was referring to the very unusual experience of seeing central government copying the organisational model of local government, which the splitting of the DfES had resulted in.

The DCSF now had a structure that looked much more like that of a children’s services department. Beverley Hughes had the good grace to acknowledge this, telling the conference that “central government has finally caught up with the integration agenda that local government has followed for some time”. She said that the success of local authorities in working together with other agencies had helped to make the case in Whitehall for her new department.

In his opening remarks to the conference, co-president John Freeman said children and young people had never had such a high profile in government. He welcomed the switching of billions of pounds of funding for 16 to 19 college provision from the LSC to local authorities. “I am genuinely optimistic about the way things are going,” he told the conference. “We have huge challenges, but we are going in the right direction.”

Beverley Hughes said, “We have to raise our game nationally, regionally and locally. We need to identify where data and evidence show we will get good outcomes.” She said that the Government now sees the role of local councils as “leaders of provision”, which is a rather different emphasis to that of commissioners of services that some in the Blair administration had favoured.

In the discussion that followed, Poole DCS, John Nash, raised the respect agenda. He said that the fear of crime was turning into fear of young people and thought that this perception had to be changed. Deborah Absalom, DCS of Bexley, raised the difficulties that school autonomy could create. “We can not shape our job without impacting on others,” she said.

If the minister brought political clout to the conference, the real stars were the double act of Ralph Tabberer and Tom Jeffries, directors-general of children and schools respectively. Mr Jeffries started his presentation by referring to the tension between “the supposedly competing agendas” of children and standards before repeating the now well-known refrain that there could be no ECM without schools, and schools could not succeed without ECM. It was the same message he had given four years previously at a ConfEd conference, when doing a similar double act with the then DG Schools, Peter Houlden. The difference then was that the two agendas were in conflict, with the standards agenda being backed by Downing Street and therefore in the ascendancy. With Ralph Tabberer now DG Schools and Gordon Brown, whose old department, the Treasury, had published the Every Child Matters report, now Prime Minister, Tom and Ralph is a much more believable double act than Tom and Peter was then.

Huge opportunity
Mr Jeffries referred to “a huge opportunity to move beyond the false dichotomies that have derailed the debate so far. Together we are dealing with a whole system of developing children’s services” in what he called a “continuum of support and services”.

The model of lead professionals leading multi-agency locality teams “was not discernable” when ECM was published four years ago.

Ralph Tabberer said the focus was on raising standards, but that every group needed a different approach. The standards debate addressed this, but ECM was “a richer agenda that looks deeper”. He said that there were fewer weak schools, but he was not convinced that it was the disadvantaged who were lifting schools over the floor targets.

“The advantaged children are where the gain is.” There were more strong schools, but there was not enough sharing between schools. Referring to the “navigating the tail of low performance”, he saw the degree of variance “across our universal services” as one of the continuing problems. There was also too much variance between local authorities. “Variance is the thing we have got to tackle,” he said. “We need richer strategies to close the gap.”
BERA: Research shows key government policies over the last 20 years didn’t work

Demitri Coryton
Reporting from the BERA conference in London

The annual conference of the British Educational Research Association was held at the London University Institute of Education at the beginning of September. The conference was formally opened by Professor Geoff Whitty, director of the Institute of Education and outgoing president of BERA, who in introducing the Schools Minister, Lord Adonis, acknowledged him as the one minister who was prepared to interact with the research community. “Research is always on his radar,” the professor said. While it was true that even the most research-friendly policy makers did not always heed research evidence, Lord Adonis was always prepared to listen.

In a short speech Lord Adonis talked of over 100 research projects his department had commissioned, stressing his commitment to strengthening the research base. “We can only do this with good links with the research community,” he said. He referred to the DCSF and DIUS joint research conference and the research forum being created.

While Lord Adonis may be the education researchers’ best friend in government, he would not have been heartened by some of the papers presented at BERA questioning whether government policies worked. Researchers from Staffordshire and Cambridge universities claimed that an analysis of GCSE performance showed that the Government’s flagship specialist schools policy had made no difference, being no more effective than ‘bog standard’ comprehensives. The only exceptions were schools where the specialism is sport. They perform slightly worse than all other types of school. Previous research has suggested that specialist schools perform slightly better than other schools, but this research looked at a more recent run of results than any previous analysis.

Another paper, by Rebecca Allen of the London University Institute of Education, found that the Tory predecessor of specialist schools, the grant maintained schools introduced by Margaret Thatcher and Kenneth Baker, had also failed. In her paper she observed that “the assumption that autonomy from local authorities is desirable is implicit in many strands of recent government reform… This study suggests that there is no reason to believe that these new policies in autonomy will lead to improvements in pupil exam performance” since former GM schools had performed no better than schools that had chosen not to opt out of the local authority system.

A paper by Joannie Leung of the University of Toronto Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, one of a large number of researchers from the Commonwealth at the BERA conference, studied education and markets in England and Ontario. She concluded that “there is no evidence to support that education markets do achieve their purpose of raising attainment.” Moreover, there is no conclusive evidence that choice and competition raise educational standards: at best, the empirical results are mixed. On the other hand, markets in education have serious repercussions on issues of inequality.

There were four keynote addresses. Professor Herbert Marsh of Oxford University spoke on his research on self concepts in which he addressed diverse theoretical and methodological issues with practical implications for research, policy and practice.

Professor Pamela Munn, the new president of BERA, is Dean of the Moray House School of Education at the University of Edinburgh. In her presidential address she spoke of her interest in the relationship between research, policy and practice. She will be writing an article on this for a future issue of Education Journal.

Professor Stephen Ball of the Institute of Education, whose book Education Policy (Routledge) was published earlier this year, gave his keynote address on the privatisation of education and education policy and research. He argued that through advice, consultancies, lobbying, research and other forms of influence the private sector is now a key agent in the education policy process, yet it is often hardly visible and goes unacknowledged. He will be writing an article based on his presentation and his book in a future issue of Education Journal.

Professor Susan Groundwater-Smith is director of the Centre for Practitioner Research at the University of Sydney. Her presentation looked at recent initiatives in practitioner research in education in England, Europe and Australia.

NFER

One of the most interesting symposiums of the conference was presented by the National Foundation for Educational Research on the subject of optimising the impact of research on policy. Ian Schagen, head of the Statistics, Research and Analysis Group at NFER, presented a paper on national and international performance data and government policy. Speaking to his paper, Dr Schagen told the symposium that data did not speak for itself. “The more data you have the more confused you will get. Data on its own is pretty damn useless. It is analysis that makes it useful.” He added that it was good analysis that was the key. “Simplistic analysis can be just plain wrong.”

Victoria White is research manager for the chief adviser on School Standards Unit at the DES. She presented a paper on the Schools Research Action Plan of the DCSF Schools Directorate and how far the six objectives of the plan were being met.

Professor Judy Seeba of Sussex University and Dr Mark Rickinson of Oxford University presented a paper on knowledge mediation and brokerage within the policy process. Prof. Seeba said that the old DES had once been described as a research-free zone and praised as “phenomenal” the work that Victoria White had done in stimulating the interest of ministers and senior civil servants in research. Yet researchers were only one group of people sitting at the table and they were the least influential. Those with the greatest influence in the Cabinet were political special advisers followed by partisan think tanks, with academics at the bottom of the list.

More detailed reports on papers delivered at the BERA conference will be published in future issues of Education Journal.
Anne Jarvis: A tireless campaigner remembered

George Low

The National Union of Teachers is to set up an annual award for someone who has excelled in campaigning for educational excellence and equality for all children “with principle and passion”. It will be named after Anne Jarvis, wife of former NUT general secretary Fred Jarvis, who died on 19 April this year, aged 77.

Announcing the prize at a memorial celebration for Anne Jarvis at the London University Institute of Education on 18 September, NUT general secretary Steve Sinnott described the former Barnet teacher as a tireless campaigner and defender of comprehensive education. “She enjoyed a partnership in activism with her husband Fred. But she did not always share his ideas, and sometimes even voted against the National Executive as a Barnet teacher. But she was a beautiful woman, kind and generous, and with a beautiful heart and soul.”

Alison Moore, leader of the Labour Group on Barnet Council, recalled her service in local government. “Why did she become a councillor? Because of her passion for politics and social justice. She became chair of the education committee and was enormously popular in all schools. She made a huge contribution to developing early years education and childcare. She also served as a school governor.”

Former Education Secretary Estelle Morris said Anne Jarvis and her generation of campaigners had opened up opportunities for women such as herself. “I met her as a minister under David Blunkett and thought she would praise us for what we had done. Instead she told us we had not done nearly enough. She didn’t compromise. She really believed in the old-fashioned concept of public service – and never gave up.”

Thanking the NUT for setting up the award in his wife’s name, Fred Jarvis quoted an obituary in the Guardian, which had said: “It is the Anne Jarvis’s of this world who keep the education system working…She was utterly selfless and always wanting to help. But she combined that with a certain steeliness and living by her principles.”

Anne’s campaigning zeal began early, after she left her convent school in Abingdon and went up to Oxford in 1948 to read PPE. She was soon treasurer of the Socialist Club and chairman of the NUS (where she met her future husband Fred).

After taking a diploma at the London Institute, she became a teacher, and soon a parent, in North London. She became a disciple and almost a missionary for the creative use of language in primary English.

Ajay Kumar was one of many diverse and disadvantaged pupils who responded to her creative use of language. He now lectures in art and the history of art at Goldsmiths University College and Anne was his lifelong teacher and friend.

Tim Brighouse, former CEO of Oxfordshire and Birmingham and London commissioner, remembers her mocking pen at work in the TES and Guardian.

Not all her causes succeeded. Her advocacy of comprehensive education in the era of New Labour did not carry the day. She found herself “disdained by the mighty of her own side”, Whitehall insider Peter Hennessy recalls. But she stuck fast to, and defended, a broad and idealistic view of education for all, in the spirit of R.H.Tawney.

Conference round-up

The Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (MBF) are hosting a series of training days for Peer Mentor Co-ordinators in Southampton (17 October), Liverpool (7 November), Exeter (21 November), Wolverhampton (5 December), London (16 January 2008), Bristol (30 January), Sheffield (13 February), Northampton (27 February), and Carlisle (12 March). Training has been developed to cater for the different needs of Pre-16 Co-ordinators (in secondary schools) and Post-16 Peer Mentoring Co-ordinators and will equip delegates with the skills required to set up and deliver an effective and successful scheme best suited to their institution. Cost: £90 pp (inc. a copy of the MBF’s Training Resource). For more information contact Carla Sleaford at Carla.Sleaford@mandbf.org.uk or telephone 0161 787 8600.

www.mandbf.org.uk
www.peermembership.org.uk

To book online, please visit: www.mandbf.org.uk/no_cache/news/events/mbf_peer_mentoring_events/


These conferences will explore personalised learning through the lenses of learning and support. They will look at how to embed assessment for learning and how to use summative assessment for diagnostics. They will investigate how to develop effective intervention strategies with other services and how to involve parents in supporting learning. Speakers include Professors Dylan William and Guy Claxton.

ASCL Cymru Annual Conference
6-7 December 2007, Metropole Hotel, Llandrindod Wells. This information-sharing conference includes workshops on current issues, including funding and collaboration 14-19, plus an update on the latest initiatives from the Welsh Assembly government. It is an ideal opportunity to network and pick up ideas from colleagues around Wales. Keynote speaker is Jane Hutt AM, Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills.

ASCL Primary Secondary Transition
Wednesday, 27 February, 2008
National Motorcycle Museum, Birmingham.

ASCL holds its annual conference in Brighton from 7 to 9 March 2008 on the theme of leading professionals.

The NUT holds its annual Easter conference in Manchester from 21 to 25 March 2008.

The NUT holds its annual National Education Conference at its training campus at Stoke Rochford Hall, Lincolnshire, from 4 to 6 July.

ASPECT holds its next conference on 28 and 29 August 2008.
The annual education report from the OECD gives a snapshot of education across the industrialised world and some emerging economies. This year the emphasis was on higher education, though one area reported on where the UK does particularly well was in pre-school provision. The UK spends more on pre-school provision than any other member of the OECD.

Yet overall it is a different picture. Many of the tables show Britain making little progress in recent years. This is because the UK has now been overtaken by countries that were behind us. There are too many tables where the UK position is around the OECD average, a snapshot that can be misleading as it masks the fact that Britain is standing still while other countries race past. Internationally there has been considerable growth in university level qualifications, an area where the UK has been falling behind.

“For those entering higher education, the UK is now just below the OECD average, though our completion rates are better than those of most other countries.”

There has been expansion in the UK, but other countries have expanded more. As Andreas Schleicher, head of the Indicators and Analysis Division of the OECD Directorate of Education, said at the UK launch of the report, “the educational landscape keeps changing dramatically in terms of higher level skills”. In 2000 the UK had one of the highest levels of HE output, ranked third in the OECD. By 2005 there had been little change in Britain, but advances by other countries left Britain in tenth place with what had become a performance at about the OECD average.

For those entering higher education, the UK is now just below the OECD average, though our completion rates are better than those of most other countries. In 1998 the proportion of the UK’s age cohort that went to university (what the OECD refers to as tertiary type A programmes) was 48%, significantly above the OECD average of 40%. In 2005, the year covered by this volume, the British rate had gone up to 51% but the OECD average had risen to 54%.

Higher education

Many countries now have two thirds of their young people entering higher education, with a few reaching 85 to 90 per cent. The report lists Australia, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Sweden and the USA as countries with more than 60 per cent of young people entering university. In some Asian countries, like Korea and Turkey, 80 to 95 per cent of young people aspire to enter HE, even though in some, like Turkey, the numbers who will actually make it to university are low. In the UK aspiration is at one of the lowest rates of the OECD.

The report looked at the effect on the job market of increasing numbers of people going into higher education. Internationally, the financial rewards for completing higher education remain high, despite the rapid growth in the number of those obtaining qualifications. In the UK, the earnings advantage of graduates over those with upper secondary qualifications is 77%, which the OECD rates as “very high”. Only five OECD member countries have higher differentials, these being the Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Portugal and the USA. Both for graduates and for those with upper secondary qualifications, the increase in the number of graduates has been economically beneficial. Those who feared that increasing the percentage of the population going into higher education would simply depress the earning capacity of graduates have been proved wrong.

Internationalisation

The report notes the increasing internationalisation of higher education. The number of students enrolled outside their country of citizenship has increased from 600,000 in 1995 to 2,700,000 in 2005. Of the top ten countries that are the most popular destinations for overseas students, five are in the Commonwealth. The USA comes top, though its share has fallen from 26% to 22% over the last five years. The UK comes next, with 12%, followed by Germany (10%), France (9%), Australia (6%), Japan (5%), the Russian Federation (which has made big gains over the last five years and now has 3% of the market), Canada (3%), New Zealand (3%, up from 0.5% in 2000, another country to make a big gain, which given its small population is a major achievement) and South Africa (2%).

In most OECD countries, upper secondary education (which in most countries is to the age of 17 to 18) is becoming universal. In the UK, a comparatively large share of the adult population did not complete upper secondary education. These people face considerable and increasing difficulties in the labour market.

The OECD noted a huge increase in spending on education, with the average across the OECD being 42%. The report notes: “While significant additional investments in education will be important, it is equally clear that

“Internationally, the financial rewards for completing higher education remain high, despite the rapid growth in the number of those obtaining qualifications.”

more money alone will not be enough. Investments in education will also need to become more efficient.”

The UK has increased spending on education considerably over the last decade, especially at school level, though starting from a low base. Spending on UK education institutions rose from 4.3% of GDP in 1990 to 6.1% in 2003, before falling back to 5.9% in 2005. This is just above the OECD average of 5.8%. Spending per pupil in the UK is at the OECD average for primary, secondary and tertiary levels, though pre-school spending is higher than anywhere else in the OECD, while primary class sizes are very large compared to those of other countries. In the OECD, only three Asian countries – Japan, South Korea and Turkey – have larger primary school classes than Britain. In addition, British 7-to-8-year-olds have the eighth longest intended instruction time at 890 hours, compared to an OECD average of 793 hours.
Pupil Referral Units: Establishing successful practice in pupil referral units and local authorities. HMI 070019. Published by Ofsted, Alexandra House, 33 Kingsway, London WC2B 6SE. Tel: 08456 404040. September 2007

In 2005/06 over half the PRUs inspected nationally were good or outstanding, but one in eight was inadequate. HMI and additional inspectors visited 28 PRUs in 22 local authorities between October 2006 and March 2007. The PRUs were selected from those whose overall effectiveness had been judged by Ofsted to be good or outstanding in the previous two years. The majority of them provided primarily for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Others were designed specifically for pupils with medical needs and one was solely for young mothers. Several catered on the same site for pupils with different needs.

During the survey, Ofsted inspected good and outstanding PRUs at Key Stages 3 and 4, as well as holding discussions with the LAs to identify factors contributing to success. These PRUs had much in common. Staff conveyed to pupils that they were offering a “second chance” or a “fresh start”; they had high expectations, set challenging tasks for them and anticipated what support they would need. It was essential to have a well designed curriculum that allowed pupils to improve basic skills where necessary and re-engage them in learning.

For older pupils, who often stayed for over a year, accreditation and work-related learning were important for motivation. All the PRUs made sure personal and social development was emphasised. The PRUs generally monitored personal development well but academic progress less so.

To provide an appropriate and well balanced curriculum almost all the PRUs inspected had to overcome limitations in their accommodation. This was achieved by working with local schools and using community facilities well. Partnerships with schools and other agencies were used effectively.

LAs worked closely with the PRUs to develop links with partners, support leaders and contribute to staff development. All the authorities visited could describe how the PRU contributed to a continuum of provision for pupils with social, emotional, behavioural and medical difficulties. However, some LAs had a gap between intention and practice, so children and young people often stayed in a PRU for an indefinite period. Not knowing the length of the placement made longer term planning difficult and opportunities to reintegrate pupils into mainstream schooling were limited.

Although all the LAs had clear admission policies and protocols that specified the details schools should provide, in practice PRUs generally received little information, particularly about pupils’ academic achievement. LAs’ monitoring and evaluation of provision in PRUs varied in quality and too often lacked the necessary focus on pupils’ progress.


Following the Government’s pledge that, by 2010, “all children should have access to a variety of activities beyond the school day”, the survey aimed to inform the expansion of extended services through identifying and assessing the factors contributing to effective provision of such services in schools and children’s centres. The survey was carried out between April 2005 and March 2006 and included 20 settings across all phases in 16 local authorities.

It found that almost all the provision was effective in meeting the range of needs of children, young people and adults in the local community. In half the settings visited, the impact of extended services on most outcomes for participants was good or better. Leadership and management of the provision were at least good in over half the settings, and all the schools and children’s centres visited were committed strongly to providing inclusive services.

The report identifies good practice and the difference it made to those involved in the extended services. It also shows the ways in which agencies and individuals worked together to provide effective services. The major benefits of extended services were the gains children, young people and adults made in their self-confidence and the development of more positive attitudes to learning and to what they might achieve. However, the possible impact of services on standards and achievement was not always monitored. Services were effective in meeting the Every Child Matters outcomes for children, increasing their awareness of healthy eating and the importance of taking regular exercise as well as enjoying a range of activities and achieving greater confidence in their abilities.

Leaders and managers of settings offering effective extended services were very committed and had a clear idea of what they wanted to achieve for their communities. They liaised appropriately with local groups and agencies to ensure a coordinated approach to provision. Good planning built on the outcomes of consultations with children, young people and adults, and with other agencies. However, very limited spending periods for some grants constrained the breadth and depth of these consultations. They also affected significantly the sustainability and success of some services. The most effective leaders and managers developed a programme of services gradually to suit the particular needs of their community.

Local authorities played an important role in developing comprehensive strategic plans which took account of extended services and the five outcomes for children. They did not always provide consistent guidance to settings or evaluate thoroughly their individual plans for developing the services. The systems for measuring the impact of extended provision on children and young people were not usually in place in local authorities or in most of the settings. Local authorities were also important in helping settings in a cluster to work together.
**Academy for Sustainable Communities**

Academy for Sustainable Communities: Work Plan 2007-08, August 2007, download free from www.ascskills.org.uk/pages/resources/article?news.resources.id=619272-2888-4A7D-9EE4-9CDF0D124A97

**Council of Europe**


**DCSF**

2006 Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey, DCSF RR009, August 2007, download free from www.dcsf.gov.uk


Cost Benefit Analysis of Interventions with Parents, DCSF-RW008, August 2007, download free from www.dcsf.gov.uk


Improving Behaviour and Attendance: Guidance on exclusion from schools and Pupil Referral Units, August 2007, free from www.teachernet.gov.uk


**DCMS**

Getting Back on Track: Pupils who make slow progress in English, Maths and Science in key stage 3, August 2007, download free from http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk

Helping Keep Your Child Safe in Sport, August 2007, download free from www.culture.gov.uk

Improving Behaviour and Attendance: Guidance on exclusion from schools and Pupil Referral Units, August 2007, download free from www.teachernet.gov.uk

**DIUS**


**Document Digest**

Streamlining University/Business Collaborative Research Negotiations, August 2007, download free from www.dius.gov.uk

**Scottish Executive**


**Select Committee on Education**


Sustainable Schools: Are we building schools for the future?, HC 140-I, August 2007, download free from www.publications.parliament.uk

**Sustainable Development Commission**

The following is a selection of documents received by EMIE at NFER from local authorities, as they appeared in the EMIE publication Synopsis 45. Unless documents are described as available from the originating authority, these can be supplied to readers of Education Journal at the cost shown for paper copies, which includes p&p, or freely as an email attachment. Please state your preference when ordering.

Contact emie@nfer.ac.uk with the document numbers of the items you require plus the number of the Education Journal edition in which they appear. Cheques should be made payable to NFER and sent to the address below.

EMIE at NFER provides a range of information services, free at the point of use, for those working in or with local authority children’s services and education departments. Go to www.nfer.ac.uk/emie and request a username and password to access the full range of our resources. If you are an independent consultant, or work with another organisation concerned with education or children’s services, then you are eligible for our new subscription service: please request a password as above and take advantage of our free trial period now.

EMIE at NFER, The Mere, Upton Park, Slough, SL1 2DQ

Buckinghamshire children and young people’s interview guidance

Buckinghamshire November 2006

Guidance for organisations when carrying out interviews with children and young people.

The guidance begins by pointing out that one of the objectives of the Children and Young People’s Plan is to involve children and young people in decisions which affect their lives. This interview guidance has been produced in order to support organisations in achieving this target using a consistent and effective approach. It is based on the feedback received from children, young people and staff who have been involved in staff interviews or have supported children and young people in this process. The guidance is divided into two sections, one for children above, and one for children below, the age of thirteen, each dealing with preparation, the interview and feedback. Interview request forms are included.

7 pages £1.50 per copy
Document BUCK24729

Children and young people’s services: good practice examples in Cambridgeshire

Cambridgeshire November 2006

This document highlights examples of good practice in innovative working with children, young people and families, all of which show the partnership approach in action.

The examples are organised in terms of the five ECM outcomes, with some addressing two or more of the outcomes. They are also cross-referenced to the relevant Children and Young People’s Strategic Plan and the JAR key judgments. Under the being healthy heading there are examples of good practice in the Fostering and Adoption Clinical Psychology Service, CAMH Service, health drop-ins and multi-systemic therapy for anti-social behaviour. Staying safe highlights a multi-agency pre-birth protocol, occupational therapists involved with SEN student needs assessments, racist bullying of young travellers, forums for young people in care, support for young mothers, a successful children’s centre, attainment improvement for BME, gypsy and traveller children, the International Education Service.

Achieving economic wellbeing includes a guide for practitioners regarding homeless young people, a job shop for NEETs and a project for young people at risk of exclusion.

19 pages £2.30 per copy
Document CAMB24730

Loss, bereavement and critical incidents

Harrow November 2006

Guidelines for schools when responding to everyday occurrences of loss or bereavement and to critical incidents.

The section on loss and bereavement considers the needs of different groups of children, reactions to grief in children and proactive working with bereavement and grief. The section on responding to critical incidents gives guidance on an action plan broken down into immediate and short term action and action in the longer term. Extensive appendices are concerned with: religious beliefs associated with bereavement; recent examples of involvement from the Educational Psychology Service; suggested reading and other resources; the Emergency Planning Team; critical incidents process map; suggested action plan in response to a critical incident; checklist for a critical incident; useful contact numbers; emergency log proforma.

49 pages £5.90 per copy
Document HARR24738

Extended services on or around school sites and children’s centres

Leeds February 2007

An annual progress report on extended services during 2006. This begins with the targets that had been set for schools to provide the core offer of extended services. It provides background on the national and local authority objectives and methods for extended services.

There follows a report on progress so far in Leeds with recommendations for future developments. A section on data and evaluation provides statistics on the provision of the core offer in extended services. This section also contains a review of types of provision, with examples.

42 pages £5.00 per copy
Document LEED24745

Children and young people’s services performance handbook

Suffolk April 2007

This handbook brings together a wide range of information and performance data relating to children and young people in Suffolk.

It is structured around the five ECM outcomes, with two additional chapters on looked after children and children with learning difficulties or disabilities. The selection of data relates both to the ECM outcomes framework and to the priorities identified in Suffolk’s Children and Young People’s Plan.

Analysis at sub-county level, by areas or clusters, is provided where available. Wherever possible, the data relating to children and young people in Suffolk is compared with data from comparator authorities and national figures, to help place the outcomes in a wider context.

The report begins with a description of the data sources and a review of demographic information. For each ECM outcome, a range of performance data is provided with various comparisons presented in tables and charts with analysis and commentary.

141 pages £16.95 per copy
Document SUFF24746
The following is a list of papers from recently published academic journals. The following information is given for each journal: the title. On the next line is the publisher | volume/issue number | date of publication | number of issues per year | ISSN | personal subscription rate | institutional subscription rate.

**Comparative Education**

**Routeledt** | 142/2 | May 2006 | 4 | 0305-0068 | £241 | £734


Accomplishing Lessons in Postcolonial Classrooms. In Arthur and Peter Marti

School Autonomy in the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina: evidence from two school districts. M Fernanda Astiz


Inequalities in School Systems: effect of school structure or of society structure? Vincent Dupriez and Xavier Dumay

Policies for Disadvantaged Children under Scrutiny: the Dutch policy compared with policies in France, England, Flanders and the USA. Sjoerd Karsten

**Distance Education**

**Routeledt** | 271/1 | May 2006 | 3 | 0158-7919 | £70 | £217

Research on Distance Education: in defence of field experiments. Philip C Abrami and Robert M Bernard

One family’s home schooling experience. Nicole C Green

A Flow Theory Perspective on Learner Motivation and Behaviour in Distance Education. Li-Fen Liao

Using Interactive Radio to Enhance Classroom Learning and Reach Schools, Classrooms, Teachers, and Learners. Charles Potter and Gordon Natindo

The Introduction of Online Learning. Hemlata Chari and Margaret Haughey.

Validated Competencies for Distance Teaching. A Aubteen Darabi, Eric G Sikorski and Robert B Harvey.

**Educational Review**

**Routeledt** | 582/2 | May 2006 | 4 | 0013-1911 | £198 | £736

Pupil Consultation: the importance of social capital. David Pedder and Donald McIntyre

‘I Get Bored When We Don’t Have the Opportunity To Say Our Opinion’. Fetini Mitsoni.

Consulting primary school pupils about the social conditions of learning. Diane Reay

Student participation in creating better school environments. Julia Flutter


Children, Young People and Civic Participation: regulation and local diversity. Michael Wyness

Student Voice and the Perils of Popularity. Jean Radduck and Michael Fielding

**Educational Research**

**Routeledt** | 48/2 | June 2006 | 3 | 0013-1881 | £66 | £197

Can a Picture Ruin a Thousand Words? The Effects of Visual Resources in Exam Questions. Victoria Crisp and Ezekiel Savyeri

The Teacher’s Role When pupils Work on Task Using ICT in Project Work. May Britt Postholm

Research on the Effects of Team Teaching upon Two Secondary School Teachers. Syh-Jong Jang


An Examination of Perceptions of Parental Influence in Attitudes to Language Learning. Brendan Bartram

Teaching Controversial Environmental Issues: neutrality and balance in the reality of the classroom. Deborah R E Cotlon

**European Journal of Special Needs Education**

**Routeledt** | 21/2 | May 2006 | 4 | 0885-6257 | £94 | £296

Segregation, Integration, Inclusion – the Ideology and Reality in Finland. Joel Kivistamaa, Kirsti Klemela and Risto Rinne

Cognitive Processes Related to Counting in Students with Special Educational Needs. S Carrasumada, R Vendrell, G Ribera and M Monserrat

Prospects for Inclusive Education in European Countries Emerging from Economic and Other Trauma. Vesna Radoman, Virxhill Nano and Alison Closs

Student Teachers’ Perceptions about Inclusive Classroom Teaching in Northern Ireland prior to teaching Practice Experience. Jackie Lambe and Robert Bones

Classroom Activities and Engagement for Children with reading and Writing Difficulties. Margareta Sandstrom

Kellinund Katrin Wenerstrom

Preferences of Students with General Learning Difficulties for Different Service Delivery Modes. Anastasia Vlahou, Eleni Didaskalou and Effi Argyrakoudi

A Pilot Study of Factors Affecting the Process of Integration in Greek Nursery Schools. Giorgos Barbas, Maria Birbili, Petros Stagiopoulos and Sotiria Tzvinikou

**Improving Schools**

**Routeledt** | 9/1 | June 2006 | 3 | 1365-4802 | £43 | £255

Positive Self-worth is Not Enough: some implications of a two-dimensional model of self-esteem for primary teaching. David J Miller and Teresa Moran

Re-engaging Disaffected Pupils in Learning: insights for policy and practice. Kathryn Riley, Steve Ellis, Wendy Weinstock, Jim Tarrant and Sherry Hallmond

What is ‘Specialist’ about a Specialist Department in a Specialist School? A Case Study Focussing on Dilemmas and Contradictions in ‘Partnership’ requirements. Anne Sinkinson

Development of School-based In-service Training under the Indonesian Mathematics and Science Teacher Education Project. Eisuke Saito, Sumar Hendayana, Harun Imansyah, Ibrahim, Kuboki Isamu and Tachibana Hideharu

A Qualitative Investigation of the Factors Influencing the Implementation of Reform Efforts in Science Education. David Todd Campbell.

Building Teacher Leadership in Hertfordshire. Joanne Mylles and David Frost

**International Studies in Sociology of Education**

**Routeledt** | 16/1 | June 2006 | 3 | 0962-0214 | £57 | £361 Special Issue: Education, Assessment and Selection (Part 1)

The Impact of Modernisation Programs on Academic Teachers’ Work: a Mexican case study. Blanca Arciga Zavala

Promoting Access to Higher Education and Identifying Access Students: how useful is research on participation by socio-economic group? Julie Bernard


What Counts as a Reasonable Adjustment? Dyslexic Students and the Concept of Fair Assessment. Sheila Riddell and Elisabet Weeden

**Publisher details**

Routeledt, PO Box 362, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX14 3WB.

Sage Publications, 6 Bonhill Street, London EC2A 4PU. Tel: 0207 374 0645.


Research notes

Michael Marshall  
Research Editor

In this month’s research section, Professor Ken Reid, deputy principal at the Swansea Institute of Higher Education, gives us the harsh truth about truancy in secondary schools. He argues that official statistics on attendance have been flawed, because they failed to take into account categories such as specific lesson absence and post-registration truancy. He claims that the actual school absence figure is between eight and 12 per cent and that the Government should discontinue its distinction between authorised and unauthorised absence, as teachers are often unable to distinguish between the two.

The publication of Professor Reid’s article coincides with the release of the most recent official school truancy statistics. The DCSF figures now show schools and local authorities the reasons for pupil absence, on a termly rather than annual basis, to help schools respond to emerging trends more quickly than before. They reveal that, although overall absence has fallen, unauthorised absence has risen slightly.

“[Professor Reid] claims that the actual school absence figure is between eight and 12 per cent and that the Government should discontinue its distinction between authorised and unauthorised absence.”

But does this new presentation of the data solve the problems identified by Professor Reid? As he states in his article: “How many parents actually write ‘My son decided to truant today?’ or ‘I decided to keep my daughter home with me for some company.’ No, most parents write that ‘Jane had a cold!’”

Even with more detailed statistics, the problem of distinguishing between authorised and unauthorised absence remains.

Also in this section, Ian Schagen of the National Foundation for Educational Research reports on the school performance of children from service families. He asks whether, in light of their increased mobility, they progress as expected, and whether they impact on the performance of other pupils. He concludes that, at all stages of education, mobile pupils performed less well than their peers, and that this did have an impact on other children at the school.

BERA

This year’s British Educational Research Association conference maintained the event’s usual high standard by delivering some of the most interesting and up-to-date research in the field of education. Held at the University of London Institute of Education – itself renowned for its high quality education research – all four days of the conference saw a wide range of papers delivered, from analysis of education and markets in the UK to an investigation of why university students deliberately self-harm. A fuller report on the conference can be found on page 30 of this issue and a number of the papers will be reported on in future issues of Education Journal.

In the last issue, I reported on another conference hosted at the Institute of Education, ‘The Dearing Report: Ten years on’. It explored the state of higher education in Britain a decade after the introduction of tuition fees. There were fears at the conference that enormous rises in tuition fees had not seen a corresponding rise in the quality of teaching, contact time or facilities. At the same time, the results of a 2006 Higher Education Policy Institute survey showed that students were often left unimpressed by the amount of contact time they had with their lecturers. Nevertheless, analysis of the latest National Student survey found that, of over 177,000 students, 82 per cent were happy with the teaching on their course and 81 per cent were satisfied overall. Both of these statistics are a one per cent increase on the 2006 survey.

John O’Leary gives a more detailed analysis of the survey on page eight of this issue, but he makes the interesting point that “the universities that have done consistently well are those of small to medium size, with good (but not outstanding) research, modern facilities and strong teaching”. In other words, those universities that focus on research, but not at the expense of the teaching. It seems that, even within the positive results of the National Student Survey, this is still a concern for students after all.

Another related problem, identified at the BERA conference by Dr Anna Vignoles, was that a glut of university students in non-scientific subjects could mean that those graduates will not earn sufficient wages to compensate for the cost of their higher education. The recent closure of departments and widening participation mean that they now face the problem that demand will no longer outstrip supply in the economy. She suggests that tuition fees should vary according to subject and institution to make students realise what different subjects are worth.

Dr Vignoles said: “Statistics show that for recent male arts and humanities graduates, the return to a degree has fallen to zero. In other words, new graduates in these subject areas are earning similar amounts to those with just A-levels … Some graduates in highly valued subjects, such as accountancy, will continue to profit from the amount they spend on their degrees, but others may gain only a small, or even a nil, return.”

“Some graduates in highly valued subjects, such as accountancy, will continue to profit from the amount they spend on their degrees, but others may gain only a small, or even a nil, return.”
The harsh truth about truancy

Professor Ken Reid
Deputy Principal, Swansea Institute of Higher Education

Imagine you were a visitor from Africa and you were desperate to gain some much needed funding in order to ensure that your children could be taught in schools. For example, in Kenya free education ends at 13 and, in one school well known to me, there are presently seven teachers for the 1200 pupils. There is enough food daily to supply a lunch of maize and rice to only 80 of the AIDS-orphaned children. How then would you feel about visiting England and reading headlines such as ‘Truancy spiralling out of control in primary schools!’ The country that made free compulsory schooling available to everybody now has record numbers of pupils skipping classes. Why?

First, we must look at the demographic trends as produced by the Government’s annual set of statistics for England. Now, I am an acknowledged sceptic when it comes to reading official government statistics on attendance. Sadly, I have spent much too much time in examining these data and their associated league tables to believe anything. How, for example, can any official statistics on attendance be correct when they omit such categories as specific lesson absence and post registration truancy? After all, didn’t a study by O’Keefe et al undertaken in London in the early Nineties show that some secondary schools contained more of this kind of absentee than any other single category? What you can say with certainty therefore, is that government statistics certainly do not overestimate the scale of the problem.

Official statistics

Secondly, last year’s set of official statistics on school attendance are probably the worst on record. Yes, there have been a few improvements. For example, the 200 worst-performing secondary schools for attendance in England have improved due to the government initiative on fast-track prosecutions. This meant that parents of pupils whose attendance was causing concern would be automatically fined if their children’s attendance had not significantly improved within 12 weeks. In the worst instances, parent/s could eventually face a jail sentence. The Government claimed that this fast-track initiative resulted in 3,500 of the supposed 13,000 regular truants being returned to class. Across these 200 schools, truancy was reduced by 27 per cent.

Unfortunately, these gains in the worst-performing schools were not matched elsewhere: overall attendance in secondary schools throughout England remained roughly static. Even worse, 36 per cent of all non-attendees now begin their histories of truancy whilst in primary schools and the age of consent is becoming younger and younger. Non-attendance in primary schools in England rose by no less than seven per cent within a year. These statistics came a month after primary test results fell well below government targets.

The Government’s response was to announce the introduction of the fast-track fine and prosecution system into the 1,000 worst-performing primary schools. In these schools, headteachers were asked to draw up a list of persistent truants. Pupils and their parents then had 12 weeks to improve their attendance. Thereafter, parent/s or carer/s automatically received a £50 fine. If this fine was not paid within 28 days, it automatically rose to £100 and, in extreme cases, led to jail sentences.

“How, for example, can any official statistics on attendance be correct when they omit such categories as specific lesson absence and post registration truancy?”

Contrast this worsening position in primary schools with the evidence from 25 years ago. Then, truancy from primary schools was almost non-existent. Imagine having to explain this downward spiral to our African visitor and the reasons for it.

Thirdly, there can be little doubt that the Labour-led administration has taken tackling truancy seriously. Never has there been such a time when so many initiatives have been taking place on attendance at primary, secondary, local authority and at national levels. And, according to a variety of reports, including some from the DfES, Ofsted and the Chief Inspector, some of the results of these endeavours have been pretty impressive. Explicitly, attendance rates have improved significantly in Excellence in Cities (EiC) schools. Sadly, they have also got worse in those that lie outside the scheme. In fact, there have never been so many people throughout England employed on truancy and/or behaviour initiatives. From my visits around the country, I know how hard all these staff are working and some of them have achieved a range of successful outcomes for their ventures. This is part of the patchy nature of the whole enterprise. In some parts of the country, some of the initiatives are working better than others and variations in practice abound. You have only to visit a range of out-of-school units to verify this fact. So, what would happen if all this work stopped overnight? Would rates of truancy spiral out of control?

The obvious fact is that for a host of different reasons there are significant numbers of young people who are presently not very happy at school. And this brings us back to the underlying causes for pupils’ non-attendance.

Proliferating breeding grounds

Fourthly, and herein lies the most salient point, the breeding grounds for non-attendance are proliferating. What are they? Too many I fear to list comprehensively. However, they include adverse home backgrounds, personal safety fears in schools and on-the-way-to-and-from schools, bullying, poverty, literacy, numeracy and special educational needs requirements, poor teaching, the nature of the national curriculum, the outcomes of league tables and testing regimes. In some cases, sadly, it is pupils feeling bored or having little optimism about their later adult lives and, in a lot of cases, too little ambition.

It was interesting to read the DfES press release that accompanied last year’s statistics, announcing the huge improvement in school attendance in the 200 worst attended schools in England. On the very same day, another part of the DfES chose to issue a press release that these very same 200 low-performing schools (measured by exam results and attendance) would be eligible to be taken over and mentored by headteachers from high-achieving schools and, if this failed to work, the schools could be closed altogether. It is
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reports published last year agreed that
both the National Audit Office (NAO) solving this particular equation. Why?
initiatives, there must be more to working on attendance-related breakdown, mental health problems, years due to the increase in familial
speak about the loss of childhood school arena. Others are already
those assembled feeding back the precise information you were hoping to hear.

Further penalties
Fifthly, the prospect of further penalties for parents of non-attenders is beginning to alarm civil liberty leaders and other children-friendly societies. Even headteacher groups are starting to sound alarm bells. The general secretary of the National Association of Headteachers, for instance, expressed his own concern over government tactics. He said that there is considerable potential for worsening relationships between schools and teachers (and especially headteachers) with parents of unconventional children, such as those who play truant. Imposing fines, other forms of fixed penalties and ‘informing’ on pupils’ behaviour and attendance could yet prove to be quite a minefield in the future.

“You could solve this one overnight by discontinuing the difference between authorised and unauthorised returns; as if teachers can really be sure of the difference in any event.”

And, he is right. The Archbishop of Canterbury, no less, has publicly stated that some parents require parenting classes in order to acquire some parenting skills. However, he considers that this should be done outside the school arena. Others are already speaking about the loss of childhood years due to the increase in familial breakdown, mental health problems, the influence of new technology and the changing economic needs of adults.

Sixthly, therefore, the evidence is clear that however hard the DCSF is working on attendance-related initiatives, there must be more to solving this particular equation. Why? Both the National Audit Office (NAO) and New Philanthropy Capital (NPC) reports published last year agreed that

pupils’ attendance in England had not improved in the last 20 years. This was despite the huge range of initiatives estimated to cost £80 million every year; a figure that in reality is a significant underestimate as it excludes a whole range of human resource costs. And what has happened in the last 12 months since their work? Primary attendance has worsened. So has unauthorised absence. And, according to the DfES’ own press release, the new initiatives have come after “a ten per cent rise in the number of pupils missing class without permission.” I wonder how they know that?

Additional funding
It seems the lessons of the NAO and NPC reports are not being learnt. Therefore, the DCSF is to put in yet more additional funding to tackle the non-attendance phenomenon. This time £50 million is to be spent on a pilot project aimed at establishing a range of newly-trained parent support advisers in selected schools in order to target the families of potential and actual truants whose children are aged between eight and 13. Presumably, if the scheme is considered to be successful, it will be distributed across the entire school network. As the initial pilot scheme contains only a small number of pre-determined parent support advisers in selected schools, the Chancellor must be concerned about the long-term costs of this venture. But, who knows, it may actually help.

Seventhly, we all wait with interest to see what differences some of the recently introduced changes to the 14-19 curriculum will make. How many pupils will be able to take real advantage of some of the vocational opportunities? How many more local authorities will seek to expand their existing out-of-school, alternative curriculum and learning schemes? We already know that some of these schemes (such as those in Leeds and Sefton) have been found to be making a difference. The enthusiasm of some of the staff engaged in these alternative learning schemes is for me a constant source of admiration. There is no shortage of ideas and enthusiasm around England. For example, classes at Bridgemark Community Sports College in Gosport, which has had a significant truancy problem, are to be extended. The school will be open from 7am to 10pm with staff working flexible time. E-learning opportunities will be available all night. The headteacher of the school believes e-learning and technology provides a unique opportunity to engage children

(including truants) in individualised learning programmes for their own benefit. Fitness for purpose indeed!

While all of these endeavours are admirable and, to an extent, may work, the DCSF needs to ask itself some basic and more fundamental questions. Why is it that so many primary pupils are becoming disillusioned with school? Why is the onset of truancy becoming younger by year by year? Why are unauthorised absences increasing? Incidentally, you could solve this one overnight by discontinuing the difference between authorised and unauthorised returns; as if teachers can really be sure of the difference in any event. How many parents actually write “My son decided to truant today?” or “I decided to keep my daughter home with me for some company.” No, most parents write that “Jane had a cold!”

And then some even more difficult questions. Why are truancy rates in the UK the worst in Europe by many a mile? Why do we have so many pupils who are third and fourth generation truants? Why have so many punitive schemes failed to achieve their goals,

“According to [the DfES] press release, there are some 55,000 pupils skipping schools daily ... This equates with approximately 0.7 per cent of the school population. What they don’t tell you is that the real absence figure for secondary schools is between eight and 12 per cent.”

even when examined over a 30-year period? Why do children taking holidays in term-time count against schools’ attendance returns? After all, what can schools and headteachers do about it?

Of course, the real irony of the DfES press release lay in the use of the term ‘truancy’. According to them, there are some 55,000 pupils skipping schools daily for reasons of unauthorised absence, which appears to mean truancy. This equates with approximately 0.7 per cent of the school population. What they don’t tell you is that the real absence figure for secondary schools is between eight and 12 per cent; dependent upon which part of the country you live in, your local authority, the individual school
you attend and its socio-economic location. Within some local authorities school attendance can vary from as much as 80 per cent to 90 per cent plus.

And, as my own recent research has shown, you should count the number of primary and secondary schools in some parts of the country, which submit authorised absence rates of ten per cent or more and yet record minimal rates of unauthorised absence. I found this phenomenon occurred at least 12 times in one local authority alone. Presumably some headteachers are adhering to the external pressures being exerted upon them. After all, no-one wants to be at the bottom of a league table. As Malcolm et al found in their 2003 report, some headteachers will do almost anything to minimise or overcome their rates of unauthorised absence. One school even encourages returning pupils to write their own return-to-school notes. Once these are received, their absence is recorded as ‘authorised’.

So, the DfES focuses on the 55,000 ‘truants’ presumably unaware that many of their ‘authorised’ absence returns also include truants, if any meaningful definition of ‘truancy’ was being employed. You are not told that absence rates are often worse in the afternoon than in the morning and that the post registration truancy is a serious problem in some schools. The DCSF would have you believe that everything is under control despite their escalating spending on the non-attendance phenomenon and the rising numbers of staff (in a variety of capacities) working with truants and other types of disaffected pupils.

By now, my African visitor will be completely confused. At his school, some of the pupils run five miles each way every day to ensure they don’t miss anything. Education provides their only real hope in life. For us, all we can do is sit back and wait for next year’s attendance returns and then analyse them again. C’est la vie.

So, is school attendance getting worse or better? It all depends upon your perception. Unless, of course, you’ve got a vested interest.

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Quality time

The chance for fathers to spend “quality time” with their young children has become a middle-class perk, as access to flexible work is largely limited to professional men, claims the Equal Opportunities Commission. Their latest report claimed that a new class divide had emerged between well-off families, where fathers could take full paternity leave and regular time off to see their families, and manual workers, who were locked into a traditional working week. The EOC found that more than 80% of fathers with young children who had professional or managerial jobs had full access to flexible working arrangements compared with 46% of fathers in semi-skilled or manual work. More than three quarters of “better-off” fathers took two weeks of paternity leave, compared with two thirds of fathers on lower incomes. The study, which followed a group of 19,000 children, found that developmental problems at the age of three were more common when fathers had continued to work full-time during their child’s early years.

FE student loans

More than 400,000 students studying FE courses should have access to interest-free student loans, according to research from the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR). Learning for Life: A new framework for adult skills asserts that when the Government reviews HE funding in 2009, adults taking courses in FE colleges equivalent to A-level standard should be given access to student loans on the same basis as HE students. The loans should only need to be paid back after students complete their course and are earning more than £15,000 and interest should be ‘inflation only’.

Face the music

Less than an hour a week is devoted to music in most primary schools and only 13 per cent of primary pupils learned an instrument, according to research from the Institute of Education. The research suggests that student primary teachers are not trained to teach music, the result being that only half feel confident teaching it. The researchers, who analysed questionnaires completed by almost 350 trainee primary teachers, recommend a number of options, including increasing the amount of music training, more professional development opportunities, developing skills through working with specialist teachers, and using specialist teachers to teach music in primary schools. The latest Ofsted report on music education found that although the quality of teaching was good in most schools, fewer than half gave any opportunity to practise it. The EMI Music Sound Foundation recently announced a financial package worth £200,000 for primary schools.

Poor academics

Academics are underpaid and overworked compared with other graduate professions, according to research from the University and College Union. The research claims that academics work longer hours than the average graduate, but earn around three per cent less, a situation which is likely to have a knock-on effect on the quality of UK higher education. The study goes on to say that, on average, academics earn approximately 17% less than other similarly qualified individuals in the accountancy profession, 23% less than lawyers, 24% less than doctors and 49% less than dentists. UCU joint general secretary, Sally Hunt, said: “For too long universities have relied on the goodwill of their staff as workloads have shot up and pay has declined in relative terms. This survey is further proof that this cannot continue.”

Headteachers

The impact of changing headteacher in a struggling school is limited, according to research from think-tank Policy Exchange. Its research examined the extent to which school achievement was affected by a change of headteacher, and concluded that in the first five years there was no clear pattern of improvement. But ASCL deputy general secretary Martin Ward described the findings as “nonsense” and argued against the think-tank’s recommendations: “The recommendation to improve underperforming schools by sacking the whole leadership team is misinformed and contradicts the report findings. The report states that if heads are given wider-ranging powers they will have a greater impact on pupil learning. Therefore, recommending takeover by other schools or private companies and wholesale replacement of leadership teams is illogical.”
Service children, mobility and school performance

Ian Schagen
NFER

Many children of service families attend mainstream schools in the UK, but they tend to be more mobile than the norm and hence their presence in a school raises a number of issues. Do they progress as might be expected? Do they impact on the performance of other pupils? There is a degree of supposition and comment in this area, but little firm research.

The Children’s Education Advisory Service (CEAS) commissioned NFER to explore these issues. It is currently not possible to identify such pupils within the Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC) or the National Pupil Database (NPD), so the direct comparison of the results of service children against those of other similar pupils is not feasible (but this is about to change from 2008). Consequently, and because one of the main features of service children is that they tend to be more mobile than most others, the study has been divided into two phases:

1. An investigation of the effects of pupil mobility on the results of such pupils and on the performance of their schools;
2. Identification of schools with service children or close to armed forces bases, to see if there is any apparent impact on the performance of those schools compared with expectations, or if mobile pupils in these schools have significantly different performance controlling for other factors.

Analysis was carried out using multilevel modelling on existing national value-added datasets. Progress from KS1 to KS2, from KS2 to KS3 and from KS2 to KS4 was analysed using information on outcomes in 2003, with prior attainment and other background information at the school and pupil levels. Having PLASC data enabled pupils' home postcodes to be matched to census-based deprivation and related measures for their local area, including wholly or partly moving households.

Results relating to pupil mobility

The results of the modelling showed that at all key stages of education, mobile pupils performed less well than their peers; the influence of pupil mobility was particularly strong at KS4, where mobile pupils gained lower GCSE scores.

The percentage of mobile pupils at the school also had a small effect on attainment, although this effect differed according to key stage. At KS2, pupils attending schools with a larger percentage of mobile pupils performed less well. At KS3 and KS4, however, the effect of school level mobility on attainment was reversed. At both key stages of secondary schooling, pupils attending schools with a larger percentage of mobile pupils actually performed better than expected, once other factors were taken into account.

This positive association between school mobility and the attainment of non-mobile pupils at KS3 and KS4 was also found in a study of the previous year's cohort.

In areas where there is a high percentage of wholly moving households (i.e. all the members of the household have moved house in the last year) or partly moving households (i.e. one or more, but not all, members of the household have moved house in the last year), pupils performed less well. Pupils who lived in areas where migration is low and a high percentage of households have not moved house in the last year performed the best. These effects were apparent at all key stages.

Schools with service children and near service bases

For all three key stages, there were no overall differences found between schools with service children and other schools, nor were any differences found between schools near service bases and other schools. However, certain groups of pupils attending such schools were performing differently to others. At KS3, pupils who lived in areas which had a large proportion of partly-moved households and who attended a school with service children, performed less well than other pupils in English, but mobile pupils in schools with service children performed slightly better in English than other similar, but stable, pupils. At KS4 a similar finding regarding attainment was found, with mobile pupils in schools with service children performing better than others. However, at KS3, mobile pupils in schools near bases performed less well than other pupils in science.

While we were not able to identify individual pupils as service children, we can make an assumption that mobile pupils in either schools near bases or schools containing service children are more likely to be service children. It may be that some of the findings surrounding mobile pupils in these types of schools relate to the performance of service children – although there seems to be no clear-cut and consistent indication of over- or under-performance by these pupils.

Conclusions and the future

The results of the modelling show that at all key stages of education, mobile pupils performed less well than their peers. The percentage of mobile pupils at the school also had a small effect on attainment, although this effect differed according to key stage. In value-added terms, the performance of pupils in schools with service children was no different from expectations. There was some evidence that the performance of service children might be different from expectations, but with no consistent pattern to these results.

In this research we have not been able to identify individual service children, so it has not been possible to investigate their performance in detail. However, we believe that from next year service children will be identified on PLASC, so it will become possible to carry out a much more powerful analysis comparing their progress with others, and looking for any impact they may have on the schools they attend.

Footnotes

SNP unveils skills strategy

Arabella Hargreaves
Editor, Education Parliamentary Monitor Scotland

Following the publication of the Leitch report, governments throughout the UK have been developing their policies to improve skills standards with policies varying in different jurisdictions. In Scotland the new SNP administration introduced a debate on 12 September on the Scottish government’s skills strategy.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning, Fiona Hyslop (SNP, Lothians) said that Skills for Scotland: A lifelong skills strategy set out the SNP’s ambitions for skills in a lifelong learning context. Although it was a response to the Leitch review of skills, she stressed that it was not a programme for its implementation. Whereas Leitch’s focus was on extending the number of qualifications, the focus in Scotland had to be on supply and the use of skills.

The organisation of support for skills and training development needed overhauling and simplifying. Mrs Hyslop intended to create a national focus on skills by bringing public agencies that supported skills and learning together and by bringing greater cohesion and support to the local delivery of skills development. Careers Scotland would be merged with Learndirect Scotland in an attempt to form the nucleus of a body that was focused on skills, with a much greater emphasis on the needs of the individual.

Careers service
Labour’s former Education Minister, Peter Peacock (Lab, Highlands and Islands), asked if the minister would reconsider the approach to merging the careers service in the Highlands and Islands to allow HIE and the local authorities there to develop a distinct approach to services.

Fiona Hyslop recognised that local delivery mechanisms might be a bit bigger and wider in some parts of Scotland compared with some of the local delivery mechanisms in the central belt and she wanted to build on the synergies that had developed in the Highlands and Islands.

The strategy for emphasising the development of high levels of skills in literacy, numeracy and IT had been supported by the Confederation of British Industry, the Scottish Trades Union Congress and the Federation of Small Businesses. The strategy was also committed to giving young people greater access to vocational education from the age of 14 and the opportunity to build up a wide variety of skills.

Mike Rumbles (LDP, West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) asked the minister whether she accepted that FE colleges and universities, which would be the main drivers of the strategy, would need more resources.

Mrs Hyslop accepted that colleges in particular — and, increasingly, universities — had a central role. But it would be irresponsible to spend hundreds of millions of pounds of taxpayers’ money without knowing the outcome of the comprehensive spending review and the results of the budget allocation from Westminster.

“She believed that, in the past, too much emphasis had been placed on achieving volume targets instead of ensuring that modern apprenticeships met employers’ current and future needs.”

The Scottish credit and qualifications framework was central to her strategy as it embraced both academic and vocational achievements and the potential to recognise prior learning. She believed that, in the past, too much emphasis had been placed on achieving volume targets instead of ensuring that modern apprenticeships met employers’ current and future needs. The modern apprenticeships would be extended to level 2 Scottish vocational qualifications and the current skillseekers programme would be phased out. The move would increase the number of apprentices, help participants to progress to other qualifications such as higher national diplomas and degrees, and help to achieve parity between vocational and academic qualifications. The minister said that although Scotland’s skills and qualification levels were higher than those of the rest of the UK, productivity lagged behind. She agreed with Lord Leitch’s analysis that levels of skills needed to be improved to unlock economic potential, but she did not agree that simply injecting more skills into the labour market would work. Leitch wanted to subsidise employers to badge skills that people already had and to charge employers a levy for training, but in Scotland the focus should be on developing skills and the use of skills.

Scottish Enterprise
Murdo Fraser (Con, Mid Scotland and Fife) complained that the government had announced the merger of Careers Scotland and Learndirect Scotland, but it was not mentioned in the skills strategy document. The Conservative Party welcomed the proposal, but believed that it did not go far enough. They wanted a new skills agency for Scotland that would combine the functions of Careers Scotland and Learndirect Scotland, but which would also take on the skills and training functions that were currently exercised by Scottish Enterprise. It would make sense to bring together all the public sector skills responsibilities under one remit, not least from the point of view of streamlining Scotland’s cluttered quango environment. Mr Fraser was also concerned about vocational education. He believed that there was a need to increase the opportunity for all youngsters from age 14 to access vocational training. For young people who lived in more remote areas, there could be skills units in all high schools.

Jeremy Purvis (LDP, Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) said that setting up individual units within schools would divide young people and remove opportunities, especially in rural areas. The way forward was to link secondary schools with the tertiary sector and with the college estate.

Summing up, the Minister for Schools and Skills, Maureen Watt (SNP, North East Scotland), said that the SNP had outlined plans to establish a task group to advise on the best way to ensure that resources allocated for learning outside institutions supported the strategic direction that was set down by government for community learning and development. The SNP also believed that the best way to ensure long-term employability was to inspire, not compel, children to stay in education or training after 16.

With the SNP being a minority administration, it lost the vote on its skills strategy by 47 votes to 72. Only the Greens supported them.
Ending academic selection divides the parties that govern Ulster

Following the restoration of devolved government in Northern Ireland there has been a change of atmosphere since the DUP and Sinn Fein agreed to share power – and it goes beyond those two parties. The standard of debate in the Assembly has improved to the point where it is often higher than that of the Scottish Parliament or Welsh Assembly.

Academic selection

Some contentious issues still divide the parties, although such divisions resemble those in the rest of the UK – academic selection being one of them. The last act of Martin McGuinness (SF, Mid Ulster) as Education Minister, in the hours before the Northern Ireland Assembly was suspended on 14 October 2002, was to announce the ending of selection in the province. He announced that selection would be abolished in 2004, stating: “I am absolutely determined that my decision to abolish the test will not be thwarted by political developments.”

In the event it fell to Labour ministers from Westminster to implement the decision once the Assembly and its Executive were suspended. They proved a great deal less keen to act and the issue is still there for the new Education Minister, Catriona Ruane (SF, South Down), to grapple with.

The date for the abolition of selection has now slipped to 2008, and even that is problematic. When Tony Blair was pushing the Northern Ireland parties to a new agreement to share power, one of the carrots he dangled in front of the DUP, which was the main obstacle to an agreement, was to hold back ending the 11+ until devolved government was restored. The DUP remain opposed to ending selection, but their largest partner in government, Sinn Fein, are as determined as ever to abolish it.

In the first session of education oral questions since the Assembly returned in September from its summer recess, Pat Ramsey (SDLP, Foyle) asked the Minister of Education what the final date would be for assuring the public that academic selection would end in 2008. Mrs Ruane said that the transfer test would operate for the last time in 2008.

While the minister confirmed that the 11+ would be abolished, there is still no agreement on how to do it. The Burns report made recommendations, but neither Martin McGuinness nor Catriona Ruane were able to force it through. Mr Ramsey, whose party is in favour of abolishing selection, asked the minister when she would bring forward a new transfer procedure and confirm that academic selection would not be part of it. Mrs Ruane said that she would engage with the Assembly’s Education Committee, the Executive “and all relevant stakeholders” before informing the Assembly “as soon as the new arrangements were in place”.

Sammy Wilson (DUP, East Antrim), whose party is strongly opposed to ending selection, said that the minister had told the Education Committee on 27 May 2007 that in the absence of any agreed regulations, schools could continue with academic selection, probably through entrance examinations. “If there was no proposal for transfer arrangements from primary to post-primary schools then that was what would happen,” he said.

Mrs Ruane replied that if schools chose to operate independent arrangements that lay outside any agreed system of transfer, “there would be no obligation on the Department to assist with funding”. Basil McCrea (UUP, Lagan Valley) said that it was simply not good enough for the minister “to say that she will take her time and not be rushed. Currently, teachers, pupils, and parents with children in year five, did not know what was going to happen next”. Mrs Ruane said that she would bring forward arrangements that would be in the best interests of all children, and would take the necessary time to do so.

School reorganisations

As any councillor in the UK will tell you, the organisation of local schools is always a hot potato. There is nothing like the threat of closing a school to make it the most popular institution around. The Northern Ireland Assembly debated school openings and amalgamations in mid-September when Sammy Wilson (DUP, East Antrim) proposed a motion critical of the Education Minister, Catriona Ruane. Mr Wilson moved his motion in a personal capacity, he said, and not as chairman of the Assembly’s Education Committee.

While much of the debate was about local school reorganisations, part of it was also another attack on the minister’s determination to end selection. The situation in Northern Ireland is unique within the UK. All the parties in the Assembly except the Alliance are in a huge coalition, though one based on cross-community support rather than a common programme. The DUP and Sinn Fein, as the two largest parties, have to work together yet they disagree on some fundamental policies including the abolition of selection.

Clarification

Mr Wilson called on the minister to “clarify her approach” to the Bain Report on ending selection and on Schools for the Future: a policy for sustainable schools, a policy document published by the previous direct rule administration. He complained that parents, teachers and pupils were in a state of uncertainty about the future, yet the minister had told the Assembly that she would not be rushed into announcing what form of transfer procedure would replace the 11-plus.

In her reply, Mrs Ruane said that the policies involved were complex and that her department needed more time to consult and to get the details right. She said that around half of the recommendations in the Bain Report related directly to the improved planning of schools on an area basis. The relation between schools and further education provision would also be a key consideration in improved planning and collaboration. The motion critical of the minister was carried partly on the votes of the DUP, her main partner in the Executive.
Scottish Parliamentary Questions

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Young People

Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will provide a breakdown of people aged 16 to 19 and not in education, employment or training by (a) local authority, (b) local enterprise company and (c) postcode area in each year since 1999. (S3W-3453)

Fiona Hyslop: The official sources for those aged 16 to 19 not in employment, education or training are the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Annual Population Survey (APS). However, in a research report carried out by the Training and Employment Research Unit of Glasgow University on behalf of the Scottish Executive it was recommended that a combination of School Leavers Destinations Statistics and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) benefits information are used to monitor the change at a local level. It is recognised that this measure underestimates the true number of 16 to 19-year-olds not in employment, education or training however it provides a reliable and consistent measure below the national level. Table 1 shows the number of 16 to 19-year-olds entering negative destinations combined with the number of 18 to 19-year-old benefit claimants by local authority.

Information on school leavers destinations and DWP benefits are not available by Local Enterprise Company. Therefore table 2 shows the estimated number of 16 to 19-year-olds who are not in employment, education or training by local enterprise company taken from the LFS/APS. Data from the LFS/APS are only available by local enterprise company from 2003 onwards. Please note that these estimates are subject to a degree of error. Data on the number of people who are aged 16 to 19 and not in employment, education or training by postcode area are not held centrally.

Table 1: Those Entering a Negative Destination on Leaving School or Claiming a DWP Benefit by Local Authority Area

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<th>Local Authority</th>
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<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
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<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Ayrshire</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>590</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Lanarkshire</td>
<td>1,590</td>
<td>1,410</td>
<td>1,520</td>
<td>1,640</td>
<td>1,590</td>
<td>1,460</td>
<td>1,360</td>
<td>1,330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stirling</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>440</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Dunbartonshire</td>
<td>760</td>
<td>590</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Lothian</td>
<td>870</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>890</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: School Leavers Destinations Survey, Department for Work and Pensions.

Table 2: Number of 16 to 19-Year-Olds Not in Employment, Education or Training by Local Enterprise Company

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Authority</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HIE Argyll and the Islands (HIE Earra-Ghaidheal)</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIE Caithness and Sutherland (HIE Gallaibh agus Cataibh)</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIE Inverness and East Highland (HIE Inbhir Nis agus Taobh Sear na Gaidhealtachd)</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIE Lochaber (HIE Loch Abar)</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIE Moray</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pre-school Education

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how much funding each local authority receives from it to provide pre-school services. (S3W-3569)

Adam Ingram: The Scottish government provides local authorities with block grant for their core revenue services through the core local government finance settlement. A needs-based methodology (otherwise known as grant aided expenditure (GAE)) is used to determine the allocation of that block grant. As GAE is a component used in distributing the total block grant that the Scottish Government provides to local government, it is not a budget or a spending target. It is for each local authority to decide how best to allocate the resulting overall block grant across all their services, based on local needs and priorities.

The GAE allocations for each local authority for pre-school services in 2007-08 is shown in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Authority</th>
<th>Nursery Teaching Staff (£ Million)</th>
<th>Pre-School Education (£ Million)</th>
<th>Local Authority</th>
<th>Nursery Teaching Staff (£ Million)</th>
<th>Pre-School Education (£ Million)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aberdeen City</td>
<td>0.931</td>
<td>6.822</td>
<td>Inverclyde</td>
<td>0.402</td>
<td>2.773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aberdeenshire</td>
<td>1.281</td>
<td>9.959</td>
<td>Midlothian</td>
<td>0.457</td>
<td>3.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angus</td>
<td>0.563</td>
<td>3.775</td>
<td>Moray</td>
<td>0.441</td>
<td>3.249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argyll and Bute</td>
<td>0.416</td>
<td>3.069</td>
<td>North Ayshire</td>
<td>0.727</td>
<td>4.556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clackmannanshire</td>
<td>0.256</td>
<td>1.634</td>
<td>North Lanarkshire</td>
<td>1.893</td>
<td>11.575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dumfries and Galloway</td>
<td>0.666</td>
<td>5.319</td>
<td>Orkney</td>
<td>0.087</td>
<td>0.764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dundee City</td>
<td>0.664</td>
<td>4.698</td>
<td>Perth and Kinross</td>
<td>0.719</td>
<td>5.307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Ayshire</td>
<td>0.617</td>
<td>4.031</td>
<td>Renfrewshire</td>
<td>0.924</td>
<td>5.795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Dunbartonshire</td>
<td>0.536</td>
<td>3.291</td>
<td>Scottish Borders</td>
<td>0.597</td>
<td>4.606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Lothian</td>
<td>0.504</td>
<td>3.197</td>
<td>Shetland</td>
<td>0.119</td>
<td>1.157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Renfrewshire</td>
<td>0.506</td>
<td>3.175</td>
<td>South Ayshire</td>
<td>0.521</td>
<td>3.271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh, City of</td>
<td>2.045</td>
<td>13.686</td>
<td>South Lanarkshire</td>
<td>1.595</td>
<td>10.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eilean Siar</td>
<td>0.121</td>
<td>1.051</td>
<td>Stirling</td>
<td>0.461</td>
<td>3.326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falkirk</td>
<td>0.788</td>
<td>4.980</td>
<td>West Dunbartonshire</td>
<td>0.472</td>
<td>3.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fife</td>
<td>1.897</td>
<td>11.896</td>
<td>West Lothian</td>
<td>1.015</td>
<td>6.303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow City</td>
<td>2.913</td>
<td>19.259</td>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>26.215</td>
<td>177.195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highland</td>
<td>1.080</td>
<td>8.649</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition there are other relevant GAE allocations which go wider than pre-school services. These include Sure Start (£59.912 million), special education (£272.688 million) and childcare strategy (£44.556 million).

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Executive how much each local authority spends per child on pre-school provision. (S3W-3570)

Adam Ingram: Statistics on local authority spend are not collected on a per child basis. The pre-primary education expenditure figures for 2005-06 (the latest year for which figures are available) are provided in the following table. Pre-primary education expenditure includes expenditure on nursery schools, other under 5s expenditure not located in primary schools or special schools, childcare services and registration services.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Authority</th>
<th>Gross</th>
<th>Net</th>
<th>Local Authority</th>
<th>Gross</th>
<th>Net</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>284,484</td>
<td>267,174</td>
<td>Highland</td>
<td>11,478</td>
<td>9,766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aberdeen City</td>
<td>8,689</td>
<td>8,608</td>
<td>Inverclyde</td>
<td>5,224</td>
<td>5,004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aberdeenshire</td>
<td>9,661</td>
<td>9,623</td>
<td>Midlothian</td>
<td>4,855</td>
<td>4,547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angus</td>
<td>4,706</td>
<td>4,602</td>
<td>Moray</td>
<td>4,035</td>
<td>3,899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argyll and Bute</td>
<td>5,252</td>
<td>4,854</td>
<td>North Ayshyre</td>
<td>6,951</td>
<td>6,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clackmannanshire</td>
<td>3,563</td>
<td>2,900</td>
<td>North Lanarkshire</td>
<td>18,916</td>
<td>18,023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dumfries and Galloway</td>
<td>7,592</td>
<td>7,389</td>
<td>Orkney Islands</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dundee City</td>
<td>8,077</td>
<td>7,384</td>
<td>Perth and Kinross</td>
<td>5,380</td>
<td>5,155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Ayshyre</td>
<td>8,824</td>
<td>7,905</td>
<td>Renfrewshire</td>
<td>12,625</td>
<td>12,054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Dunbartonshire</td>
<td>4,776</td>
<td>4,251</td>
<td>Scottish Borders</td>
<td>4,767</td>
<td>4,519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Lothian</td>
<td>5,053</td>
<td>4,472</td>
<td>Shetland Islands</td>
<td>1,365</td>
<td>1,329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Renfrewshire</td>
<td>6,346</td>
<td>5,693</td>
<td>South Ayshyre</td>
<td>5,403</td>
<td>5,157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edinburgh, City of</td>
<td>20,793</td>
<td>19,179</td>
<td>South Lanarkshire</td>
<td>13,391</td>
<td>12,191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eilean Siar</td>
<td>1,587</td>
<td>1,474</td>
<td>Stirling</td>
<td>5,934</td>
<td>5,472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falkirk</td>
<td>8,405</td>
<td>7,269</td>
<td>West Dunbartonshire</td>
<td>8,255</td>
<td>7,630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fife</td>
<td>16,265</td>
<td>15,777</td>
<td>West Lothian</td>
<td>10,454</td>
<td>9,671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow City</td>
<td>45,061</td>
<td>43,826</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: LFR 1 (Education) returns.
Note: Gross expenditure is the total expenditure. Net expenditure is the gross expenditure minus any income, for example from grants, fees or charges.

**Grant Aided Expenditure**

**Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive how it will influence education spending through grant aided expenditure. (S3W-2971)

**Fiona Hyslop:** This government wants a new deal for local government and we are looking to put it in place as part of the on-going spending review. The goal is a strategic agreement on a range of measures that will enable local authorities to deliver a council tax freeze while maintaining and improving frontline services including education and children’s services. It remains the responsibility of each local authority to allocate its total resources including money allocated through the core local government finance settlement. Other than the specific grants contained within the settlement which represent less than 10 per cent of the total and having fulfilled their statutory obligations local authorities are free to allocate the money on the basis of local needs and priorities.

3 September 2007

**Children with Disabilities**

**Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive how it will ensure that any extra money it receives as a result of the UK Government’s recent announcement of additional funding for services for children with disabilities is distributed fairly and in a way that recognises the additional costs of providing viable and appropriate support such children in rural areas, particularly in the Highlands and Islands. (S3W-3280)

**Adam Ingram:** All funding eligible for allocation to Scottish budgets by way of budget consequentials is held centrally. It is then allocated by the Scottish Government in light of all competing pressures and the government’s priorities. At the present time there has been no indication of the status of this announcement on support for disabled children. Rurality is taken into account in the allocation of funding to local authorities through the core local government finance settlement. The grant aided expenditure (GAE) funding mechanism is a needs-based methodology that helps determine the allocation of that funding. Rurality has been identified as a financial pressure for some local authorities and as such it is a factor recognised within the series of indicators that contribute towards the calculation of GAE lines. These indicators recognise the particular needs that are associated with population dispersal.

6 September 2007

**Dyslexia**

**Jamie Hepburn (Central Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it has plans to ensure wider understanding in society of dyslexia.

(S3W-3460)

**Stewart Maxwell:** The Scottish Government recognises that people with dyslexia can be covered by the definition of disability in the Disability Discrimination Act. While we have no plans at present for any specific initiatives to ensure wider understanding in society of dyslexia, our work on disability equality is inclusive of all forms of disability. In addition, the Scottish Government, through Learning Connections, has provided funding to Dyslexia Scotland to organise the first Scottish adult dyslexia conference due to take place in Stirling on 27 October 2007. This conference is intended for tutors and trainers (particularly from literacy work and the STUC) and for adults with dyslexia. This will help to increase understanding of dyslexia within adult literacy and numeracy.

4 September 2007

**Child Protection**

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to review the operation and effectiveness of the National Child Protection Line. (S3W-3560)

**Adam Ingram:** The operation of the Child Protection Line is under review and development through a national working group, whose membership includes representatives from Child Protection Committees (including police and social workers) and out-of-hours and phone-based child protection service providers. See www.scotland.gov.uk/childprotection for further information. We plan to commission a rigorous independent evaluation of the service after it has been operational for 18 months, in August 2008.

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to increase public awareness of the National Child Protection Line. (S3W-3561)

**Adam Ingram:** We are currently considering how best to increase public awareness of the national Child Protection Line and will be discussing proposals with the national working group for this project and with Child Protection Committees.

5 September 2007
Professor Richard Pring of Oxford’s eagerly awaited book on John Dewey is due out from Continuum Books in November. At the British Educational Research Association conference Prof. Pring recalled to Phoenix that many years ago the former Education Secretary, Sir Keith Joseph, had bracketed him with Dewey as the cause of all ills in education.

Prof. Pring was lunching with Sir Keith in Oxford when he found himself on the receiving end of a tirade against progressive educational thinking, which the Tory minister thought was the root of all evil. Sir Keith used to be called the Mad Monk by the satirical magazine Private Eye, and he was certainly an unusual and at times quite a strange man. But as anyone who knew him would testify, he was certainly not mad.

He had a powerful intellect and a degree of honesty unusual for a politician. Phoenix recalls interviewing him for the old Education magazine. To break the ice Phoenix asked what he thought would be an easy question to get the Secretary of State talking. What had Sir Keith achieved as Secretary of State? Any other minister would have rattled off a string of things quite regardless of whether he had had anything to do with them or not. But not Sir Keith. There was a long anguished silence as he tried to think of something. The press officer with him offered a helpful suggestion. “Oh no,” said Sir Keith, “my predecessor Mark Carlisle deserves the credit for that.” In the end Sir Keith concluded that he had not achieved anything and said so.

A week later Phoenix was back at Elizabeth House, the headquarters of the old DES, and bumped into David Hart, then general secretary of the NAHT, in the lobby. “Quite extraordinary,” said Hart. “We found Sir Keith depressed and had to cheer him up. He kept saying he hadn’t achieved anything.”

Inevitably Sir Keith expected a response to his challenge to Prof. Pring and he duly got one. As the professor’s book will no doubt demonstrate, there are myths about Dewey, who in a very long career was even at one time compared to Hitler, that need to be exploded. The book should be a good read.

As you would expect, the National Foundation for Educational Research had a strong presence at BERA. A number of its researchers were presenting papers and the NFER symposium on optimising the impact of research on policy is reported in our conference section. The picture below shows Alison Dawson of NFER, who chaired the symposium, Prof. Judy Seeba of Sussex University, Dr Mark Rickinson of Oxford University, Victoria White of the DCSF, Dr Ian Schagen of NFER and Lesley Saunders of the GTC England, who acted as discussant at the symposium.

The magazine has found a good home with SAGE and the new editor is Dr Linda Hammersley-Fletcher, a lecturer in educational leadership and management at Liverpool John Moores University. As well as her involvement in BELMAS, she is the convenor of the Leading and Managing Schools and Colleges group in BERA and a committee member of the Standing Conference for Research in Education Leadership and Management.

"Good on yer, John."

Picture by Helen Crawley

BERA

Management in Education, the magazine of the British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society (BELMAS), which until the end of last year was published by the same company as Education Journal. When Neil became editor in 1999 so few people were prepared to write for the magazine that about a quarter of its content was material borrowed from Education Journal. He was the third editor in just over a year. He turned it around and proved an extremely successful editor.

The magazine has found a good new home with SAGE and the new editor is Dr Linda Hammersley-Fletcher, a lecturer in educational leadership and management at Liverpool John Moores University. As well as her involvement in BELMAS, she is the convenor of the Leading and Managing Schools and Colleges group in BERA and a committee member of the Standing Conference for Research in Education Leadership and Management.

POETS

The Education Publishing Company, which publishes Education Journal, is primarily a magazine publisher but has picked up the rights to a rather rare book, which we reviewed in our last issue. Humane and Heroic: The life and love of a 19th century country doctor is the story of Dr John Storrs, a family doctor – or surgeon apothecary in the language of the time – who lived and practiced in Doncaster in the first half of the 19th century.

Rights to the book were acquired through the Education Publishing Company of Australia. The author, Dr John Tooth, emigrated to Australia and now lives in Hobart, Tasmania, which is where our Australian offices are. Dr Tooth was in England in September to launch his book.

He went back to his family roots in Doncaster for the launch and then on to London for a ceremony at Guy’s Hospital. He called us on a Friday to say goodbye and told us of a tradition in his adopted land. “In Australia, Fridays are known as POETS days. Pissed Off Early, Tomorrow’s Saturday.”

Good on yer, John.
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