

Sutton Trust submission to the House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee on Social Mobility and Education and Access to the Professions

June 2009

Introduction

- *The Sutton Trust has been running for over ten years now and improving social mobility through education is the core of what we do. We don't believe that education alone is important in the debate on how to improve levels of social mobility in the UK, but we do believe that it is one of the critical factors. It is also an area that is amenable to policy reform.*
- *We also believe that opening up access to the professions is vital – we are particularly interested in 'top end' mobility, who secures the most prominent and powerful positions in society. But addressing low mobility in the UK overall, is of course, much wider than that. That is about addressing the inequalities in our education system which start pre-school and widen to higher education. There is some evidence suggesting that the UK suffers particular 'stickiness' at the top and bottom extremes of the income ladder. That is why we are interested in both the outcomes of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, but also non-privileged children – those outside the top 10 per cent of family earners.*
- *We believe there is good evidence that social mobility overall in the UK is lower than in many other developed nations. International comparisons suggest that higher mobility is associated with higher spending on education in countries, and so we are particularly worried about the prospects for equality of opportunity during a global recession and potential cuts in education budgets. Saying this, we also believe more could be done to target resources on policies and programmes that work in enabling children from all backgrounds to fulfil their academic potential.*
- *This summary was produced in response to questions posed by the Children, Schools and Families Committee as part of a session on social mobility on 5 June 2009.*

- **Social mobility levels in the UK, and the relationship between family background and educational attainment -- the latest evidence**
- *The overwhelming body of evidence – economic, social and educational – suggests that social mobility in the UK has levelled out for the most recent generations. The most recent study we commissioned from the London School of Economics for example showed the same gaps emerging in educational inequality (measured by cognitive scores) in the early years in the Millennium cohort as the cohort of children born in 1970.*
- *The UK remains extremely low in terms of income mobility when compared with other similar nations. The UK and USA come bottom in a league table of 11 developed nations for which data is available. To put this into perspective, social mobility (for those born in the 1960/1970s) is nearly half in the UK of that in Canada or Denmark. Another way of looking at this is to say a grandparent in the UK has the same impact on the outcomes of their grandchild as a parent does in Denmark on their own children.*
- *A recent German study meanwhile showed that England had the strongest association between children's test scores at age 13 and family background than any other country reviewed.*
- *Recent research by Bristol University cited in the Government's recent White Paper on Social Mobility does suggest a weakening of the association between family background and GCSE attainment in 2006. This is to be expected given that more children are now getting better GCSE results, but as a result a key question unanswered is whether good GCSEs will become a poorer signal of who prospers in later adult life. So as with other papers, we will not know for sure what the implications are for mobility levels until these children have grown-up. Furthermore, the Bristol research shows no weakening in association between family background and post 16 education attainment (A-levels and degrees), and a strengthening association for pupils not in education, employment or training (NEETs).*
- *We also believe that there are some indications that top end mobility (who makes it into the very top income groups or professional positions) may have declined for more recent cohorts of adults, after the post-war boom in mobility (discussed in detail later on in this summary).*
- *We have commissioned a number of research projects that will add further evidence to this important issue – including more recent international comparisons of the test scores of children and their association with family background, and the tracking of attainment gaps through the life-course for a range of different countries.*
- *We are also trying to gauge the impact of the current economic recession and limited education budgets on future mobility levels.*

Implications of constraints in public expenditure on education on the narrowing of attainment gaps

- *A paper presented at the Trust's social mobility summit last year showed a correlation between education spending and levels of social mobility across a range of different of countries: as you might expect, in general higher levels of education spending are associated with higher levels of mobility. Another paper argued that increased public expenditure and particular interventions have narrowed attainment gaps.*
- *There are strong arguments for investment in education during a recession – the 'opportunity costs' of people not going into work are less as there are fewer jobs available. In the US, a significant strand of the stimulus package has been targeted at education in stark contrast to the UK.*
- *Our concern is that during an economic recession with limited education budgets the 'arms race' of social mobility could escalate further. The Government's recent White Paper on Mobility argued that there could be a new upward wave of social mobility as the UK prospered in the global economy. However, the economic downturn means this is now highly unlikely. In many ways we face a zero sum game in which people compete over a fixed number of opportunities.*
- *The economic recession for example is likely to increase demand for post-16 education, but university places are set to be frozen at current levels. There have been some reports that leading companies are narrowing the number of universities they consider when selecting graduates. Meanwhile more parents may be less able to pay independent school fees, increasing competition for places at leading state schools. There are also some reports of parents not being able to pay for early years support.*
- *The key is to target resources on pupils most in need and on what works – i.e. evidenced-based policy making. There are schemes that are proven to work, both here and in the US (Reading recovery and Everyday Maths for example) so our focus now needs to be on introducing those things more widely, particularly to schools serving disadvantaged communities. We shouldn't be shy about ruthlessly targeting disadvantage and funding programmes that benefit the poor more than the better off.*
- *A recent economic analysis by the consultants BCG found that educational programmes supported by the Trust produced benefits worth an average £15 for every £1 spent on projects, ranging from university summer schools to early outreach schemes.*
- *We are considering commissioning a further project to assess the cost-effectiveness of a series of radical approaches to improve mobility through education. These include: reforming the school calendar to shorten summer breaks; giving priority to children on Free School Meals in all school admissions; awarding substantially higher salaries to teachers in disadvantaged schools perhaps through a pupil premium for FSM pupils; encouraging universities to identify potential students earlier in school through a modified version of a US percent schemes which leads to a guaranteed place for poorer students.*
- *Finally there is also a cost attached to doing nothing – failure to invest in education and mobility now will mean addressing other costs in future – social problems, crime, disaffection, lack of competitiveness in the global economy.*

Parental involvement – is this a force for upward mobility?

- *A recent Sutton Trust study found that around half the gap in school readiness between poorer and better off children is due to parenting style and home environment. At the other end of the spectrum, parental attitudes are the most significant factor in students' university choices. So parents are key, but it is often difficult to engage with them effectively.*
- *We advocate proven parenting programmes – PEEP, PALS in the US and Nurse-family partnerships, all of which boast promising results, showing that parental attitudes and behaviours can be changed.*
- *We have welcomed the increased investments in early years by the Government over the last decade, but reviews have suggested that children's centres need to be better targeted to benefit those families most in need. In general we believe that more could be done to bring services to hard to reach families – whether this means establishing centres in local shopping areas as a portal to other services, or incorporating home visits.*
- *In Higher Education, many of the projects we fund try to engage with parents alongside children – getting them to come to graduation celebrations, to take part in sessions, or simply to pick them up from the campus. Getting parents on to a university campus - where they may never have set foot before - can be powerful.*
- *While some moves have been made to involve parents more in schooling, we believe much more could be done in schools which could have a positive impact on the home learning environment.*
- *There is some evidence from the US that the attainment gaps between children emerge during summer holidays, and we are exploring whether this is also the case for the UK.*

Should there be a concentration of investment in the early years – have we got the balance of spending right in the education system?

- *An analysis of the latest education spending figures by the Trust found that for every pound spent per student on HE in the UK, about 80 pence is spent on pupils in secondary schools, and 70 pence is spent on children in primary schools and pre-primary early years provision. It is not clear on purely educational grounds why this should be so: for example why should we spend so much more on our 11 year olds than our 10 year olds? International comparisons also suggest that funding for primary schools compares unfavourably to many similar countries.*
- *We believe that the current system for university grants and loans in England equates essentially to a state subsidy for the middle classes. We believe that a review of funding levels across the education system should be undertaken. If there was no extra money for education overall, we would ask the question as to whether the balance of funding should be shifted towards the early years. In particular, we believe that staff in the early years should be professionalised and paid higher salaries so that they have parity of esteem with teachers.*
- *The powerful analysis showing how early educational inequalities emerge – documented by Leon Feinstein for the 1970 cohort of children, but also shown for the Millennium cohort – reveals that stark gaps in test scores and the educational trajectories of children are present before school has even started. These early test scores are also strong predictors of the future outcomes of children. Research in the US has shown that half of the school attainment gap is present at the start of school.*
- *But we shouldn't throw the baby out with the bath water – interventions are needed for children throughout the life-course. Many of the benefits of early years schemes are lost if interventions cease. Opportunities can be turned around for young people at all stages of their educational careers.*

School Choice

Issues around area-wide banding and random allocation

- *The Trust is not against school choice ideologically, and can see some benefits to this approach to schools. But we are worried about equity, particularly as some evidence from Sweden and the UK suggests that choice can result in more sorting of pupils by background into different schools. So the question for us is, if there is a more choice-driven, market-based system, how you can mitigate those effects and ensure, as far as possible, that the system operates fairly for everyone?*
- *Choice advice and school transport have a role, equipping parents with the skills and knowledge to make informed choices about education, as well as giving children from low income homes the physical means of getting to schools further afield. And there have been some big steps forward on these issues in the last few years. But most critical is admissions – ensuring that schools take a fair share of students from all backgrounds. Otherwise there is a real danger of segregation getting worse and schools that are subject to pressures of competition choosing only to admit easy-to-teach and high-performing pupils.*
- *We are also supportive of the idea of a pupil premium for pupils from low income homes, so that – if we do go down the road of more market-driven mechanisms – these pupils actually become attractive to schools, and those schools with high levels of deprivation actually have more money to spend on teachers and resources.*
- *Finally, in a market-driven system, we also need to think about what happens to those students left in a school when all the middle-class and motivated parents have deserted it. If we are going to let market forces dictate that it should close, what happens to those students as roles fall, teachers leave and resources dry up?*

Random allocation

- *We are not in favour of using ballots on their own, but only when used with other criteria as an oversubscription tie-break. Our rationale for that is fairly simple – ballots seem to us to be fairer than the alternatives. If oversubscription is determined simply on proximity, then those who can afford to live a few feet closer to the school gates benefit. If you use religion, then you have admissions authorities making subjective judgements about which pupils are more religious than others. Often, of course, it is the better off parents who are more able to make that case.*
- *Our surveys of parents suggest that there is some initial hostility to random allocation methods, but when you explain how it could work as a tie-break, then they are viewed as at least as fair as the other methods. The case needs to be made.*

Vouchers

- *We are not against a more transparent allocation of funding to individual pupils, particularly if that may mean that poorer pupils have a significantly larger allocation of resources. We would however have concerns over a voucher that was able to be topped-up by parents' own funds as this is likely to increase segregation. There would be a divide between those who could afford to add to their voucher and those who could not, who would be stuck in schools with the lowest funding.*
- *Top-up-able vouchers are not like the Trust's Open Access proposal, even though the latter does have a sliding scale of fees. Under Open Access, admissions decisions are totally unrelated to means – no pupil is denied a place because they can't pay.*

How successful have academies been in breaking the cycle of underachievement?

- *Some academies have certainly had a positive impact, boosting achievement and attracting new parents into the schools. In other cases that impact is less clear. One thing about the academies scheme now is that there are so many (150) and one school can look quite different from another, so talking about it as a cohesive programme is increasingly difficult.*
- *There are problems in identifying quite what the factors are at work in academies that have seen improvements, and whether those features are exclusive to the academies programme rather than other types of state school. The recent analysis from the LSE suggests that improvements in academies have been very similar to their neighbouring schools, for example.*
- *We are generally in favour of schools having freedoms, and that is a feature of academies, and there is international evidence from the PISA studies that schools with more independence tend to do better, all other things being constant.*
- *However, we believe that all schools need to take in their fair share of pupils from all backgrounds - and the review of academies we commissioned from the Institute of Education suggested that we need to keep an eye on their social makeup. Rises in achievement have coincided with a decline in the proportion of disadvantaged pupils and the School Census indicates that the average proportion of pupils eligible for Free School Meals in academies has declined from 45.3% in 2003 to 29% in 2008.*
- *That is not necessarily a bad thing - indeed one initial success of some academies has been to make schools more attractive to middle class parents, who would not in the past have considered them as an option. But those displaced FSM children must get the opportunity to go to another good school. It is also important that academies do not impact negatively on other schools in the area, by excluding more pupils for example or taking in less than their fair share of low income children.*

Educational backgrounds of leaders in different professions: current trends

- *Our series of surveys suggest that the proportion of independently educated people at the top of the professions has declined slightly over the last twenty or so years.*
- *However independent schools still produce over half of leaders in most professions, even though they make up only 7% of schools.*
- *Our concern is that state schools may make up an even smaller proportion of the next generation of leaders. When we looked at younger leading lawyers (up to age 39) in our 2004 report, 71% were independently educated in 2004 compared with 59% in 1989. Meanwhile when we surveyed news journalists, editors believed that journalism is becoming an increasingly privileged profession. There are many reasons for this – informal selection procedures, fees for postgraduate courses, low pay and insecurity during early careers, and the high living costs of London.*
- *Interestingly new figures we have seen (in a report by public affairs company, Madano) suggest that while 13% of all new MPs in 1997 went to independent school, the figure for 2010 could be as high as 38% when considering the known educational backgrounds of candidates. But this is largely due to the fact that there will be more Conservative MPs this time round.*
- *Also, if you accept that access to higher education is important as a route to most top professions, then the proportion of students from poor areas and low social classes at top research-led universities in particular, remains very low. The latest Performance Indicators for selective university intakes in 2007-08 show a slight drop in social class groups, while the proportion of state school pupils is static. So until we address that the inequalities will persist.*

'Sutton Trust 13' intake	1997/98	2001/2	2002/3	2005/6	2007/8
% from independent schools	39	35	32	33	33
% from state schools	61	65	68	67	67
% from lower social classes	13*	14*	16	17	16
% from low participation areas	6	7	8	8	4**

Source HESA; * comparable with later social class measures; ** not comparable with figures for previous years. The 'ST13' universities are: Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Durham, Edinburgh, Imperial College, London School of Economics, Nottingham, Oxford, St Andrews, University College London, Warwick and York.

Qualifications, skills and careers guidance

- *The Trust's recent study on attainment of pupils in schools of different levels of deprivation found that the top 10% of pupils in poorer schools were ten times more likely to take certain vocational qualifications – and we believe that that should be a concern for the Government.*
- *There is nothing wrong with pupils taking vocational options, but a young person shouldn't be more likely to pursue that route if he or she is from a poor background or certain type of school. And the same goes in reverse for academic subjects. We believe there should be informed choice.*
- *Part of the solution is about education and careers guidance – which is generally regarded as being inadequate in many state schools – particularly because the landscape of qualifications is so crowded. Students need impartial and informed guidance to guide them through the various options.*
- *Another issue, though, is whether there are genuinely opportunities open to all students to pursue the 14-19 path that is most appropriate to them. Does every student who wants to study separate science GCSEs and traditional A levels have that option if it is not offered in their school? Do all students have the full range of diploma choices available to them? Ensuring they do is a huge logistical issue, but the danger is that we get an even greater divide opening up between different qualification pathways, which is based on background not ability or interest.*

Soft skills, and what state schools learn to deliver these

- *Graduate employers and the CBI argue that skills like communication, team working, initiative, leadership are lacking even in relatively highly qualified candidates. As more people get degrees, these attributes are becoming more important in differentiating between who does and does not get appointed.*
- *But there are clearly some schools that are better at developing these qualities in their pupils than others. The Trust's report on the outcomes of Assisted Places Scheme holders showed that poorly qualified independent school students were more likely to go into professional and managerial jobs than poorly qualified state school peers. The question is what 'added value' is being offered by these independent schools (and top state schools) to their students. That should be available to all young people as it is increasingly important in determining who succeeds in the workplace.*
- *We believe that part of this is due to the extra-curricular activities provided at particular schools – developing the person in the round. Debating clubs, cadet forces, sports clubs, theatre and drama opportunities – often there is much more of these activities in those schools serving better off communities. But programmes like Debate mate and the Children's University have had great success in getting into inner city schools too, improving a host of soft and hard outcomes as a result.*
- *This question also relates to how you measure school performance – this should not just be about grades, but other outcomes too. We believe that state schools should be assessed in some way on the actual destinations of pupils after they have left school. We also argue that leading schools should be measured partly on their efforts to improve the social mix of pupils.*

How the professions should engage with education to improve access

- *We believe that there are lots of ways in which professions could engage with education to improve access, but we advocate two approaches in particular. There is now lots of pressure (rightly so) on universities engaging more with younger age groups - for example arranging visits and resources for primary school children to get them familiar with the concepts and vocabulary of Higher Education. And one could imagine a complimentary approach for the professions. So someone comes to talk about university, but they also happen to be a medic, or an architect or a vet, and can talk about routes in to those professions too. And, as with all of this, it should be the poorest schools which are targeted first. We know that some professional bodies are*

very good in this area - but there is little coordination with other professions and, as far as we are aware, no spreading of best practise.

- *Secondly, bearing in mind access to university is tied in with access to the professions in many cases, the professions need to engage with HE much more significantly on this issue. A good example of this is the Pathways to Law scheme sponsored by the College of Law. It is a partnership between higher education faculties, law training providers and top law firms. It picks up non-privileged students in the lower sixth and gives them a full programme of HE advice and support over two years so that they make the right HE choices that will lead them to a career in law. But it combines this with professional experience – internships, work experiences, mentoring from law undergraduates, so that the students build up confidence and a network of contacts too. There's scope for this to be rolled out to many other areas too.*

Are teachers best placed to provide careers guidance?

- *A literature review for the Trust indicated that half of all state schools have careers and education guidance that is in some way inadequate. We believe that a significant part of the problem is due to structural problems around distribution of expertise and lack of an effective independent service.*
- *We do need teachers to co-ordinate the IAG within schools, and it needs to be seen as a priority - something that is core to their mission.*
- *But there are strong arguments that IAG should be delivered by people who are independent of the school, who are impartial and have the expertise relevant to the avenue that students want to follow. One teacher can't possibly know everything, about access to medicine at selective universities and engineering apprenticeships, plus BTECS, diplomas and arts courses.*
- *Our proposal to the National Council for Educational Excellence was that there should be a network of specialists, possibly at local authority level, which schools and students can draw on as necessary.*
- *School alumni links can also be useful in this respect – private schools are very good at making the most of old boy and girl networks, acting both as role models and also offering concrete support and access to opportunities like work experience and internships.*
- *The state sector could do more of this through a simple brokerage network that joins up comprehensive educated professionals, for instance, with their old schools or schools in their area. FutureFirst is doing this in Camden and the feedback so far has been very positive. The power of seeing and learning from someone from a similar background who has 'made it' is very strong.*