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THE EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER TRAJECTORIES OF ASSISTED PLACE HOLDERS

A report for the Sutton Trust

Sally Power
Geoff Whitty
Emma Wisby

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FOREWORD BY SIR PETER LAMPL

One of the main reasons I set up the Sutton Trust in 1997 was to bridge the divide between the state and independent education sectors in this country. Year after year the list of the hundred highest-ranking schools in England is dominated by independent schools which, according to a comparative analysis by the OECD, are the best performing schools in the world. The corollary of this success, however, is that the UK has the largest performance gap between the independent and state sectors of any country in the world, which means that the 7% of children in fee-paying schools have a significant advantage over their less affluent peers in maintained schools, taking a disproportionate number of places at our top universities and in our highly-paid professions.

But the best educational opportunities have not always been available only to those with the money to afford fees: up until the mid-Seventies the majority of places at most of the leading independent day schools were open to all on the basis of merit alone, irrespective of the ability to pay. And, after that, the assisted places scheme gave opportunities to a limited number of youngsters from more modest homes. As a former pupil of an independent school where all places were state funded, I know first hand the tremendous boost – not just in academic terms, but in terms of confidence, aspirations and expectations – that attending a good independent school gave me and my friends, some of whom were from very poor backgrounds.

This study is an attempt to quantify the nature and extent of this 'independent school advantage', by charting the education and career trajectories of similarly able children who pursued different school paths. The results are clear: across the social spectrum, those who had been to independent schools – whether as assisted place holders or as full fee-payers – attained more highly than their peers in state schools; were more likely to be admitted to elite universities, even with the same level of qualifications; and were more likely to end up in higher-paying jobs. An illustration of the scale of the difference is that a quarter of those from independent schools went on to earn over £70,000 a year, compared to fewer than one in ten of those from state schools.

This is not to say that I believe we should return to the assisted places scheme or a modification of it. The system for means testing families was flawed and meant that those who benefited were not always in genuine need of help. And as some of the evidence in this study testifies, the limited nature of the scheme meant that many children who received support felt isolated and out-of-place. It is also clear that wider factors, aside from the type of school attended, had an impact on pupils' outcomes: across all school types, children from the lowers social classes attained less highly than their more affluent peers even though, ostensibly, they had access to similar educational opportunities.

Even so, to my mind, this research shows that there is a very strong case for once again opening up top independent day schools to talented pupils from non-privileged backgrounds, so they too can benefit from the academic, social and cultural advantages it brings.

What is more, thanks to the Open Access initiative jointly funded by the Sutton Trust and the Girls Day School Trust, we know how this can be done effectively. For the last six years all the places at the Belvedere School in Liverpool have been allocated on the basis of merit alone, with parents paying a sliding scale of fees according to their means. On average we have seen over 70% of pupils receiving help with their fees, including 30% who pay nothing.

The results speak for themselves. An extensive evaluation of the scheme by Alan Smithers' team at Buckingham University shows that not only does the Belvedere's social profile now reflect that of the Liverpool area, but the school has also achieved its best ever results at GCSE, making it the highest performing school on Merseyside. Importantly, the evaluation has shown that the school is a happy place, with pupils of diverse backgrounds getting on well together and achieving excellent outcomes. Rolling out this scheme to a hundred or so independent day schools would be a significant boost for many thousands of bright children from poorer homes.

There are also other ways to help bridge the divide between private and state schools. At the Sutton Trust, for instance, we pioneered the introduction of Independent-State School Partnerships which we continue to support and which have since been taken up by Government. These initiatives allow a fruitful exchange of experience and resources between the sectors, and in areas where one school excels or has particular expertise, the other can learn. And our Summer School programme raises the aspirations of able students from non-privileged backgrounds so that the support they receive, and the expectations they have, are comparable to those found in the independent sector. There is significant scope for these initiatives to be expanded and built upon, and for new areas – the importance of soft skills, for instance – to be explored.

If we are truly interested in a mobile society where success is based on merit not money, we cannot – and should not – ignore the contribution the independent sector can make in improving the educational experiences of all young people.

Sir Peter Lampl
Chairman, The Sutton Trust
June 2006

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the Sutton Trust for the funds which have made this analysis possible. We would also like to acknowledge the ongoing support of the Economic and Social Research Council for the funds to undertake the surveys on which this analysis is based.

As always, we are grateful to our respondents who have given up their time to complete interviews and surveys over the years. Some of their schools have also helped us to trace them.

Colleagues who have helped us in the analysis include Dr Chris Taylor (Cardiff University) who gave us statistical advice and Professor Tony Edwards (University of Newcastle) who offered comments on the research and policy implications.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Established in 1980, the Assisted Places Scheme enabled the government to help parents of academically able children with the cost of fees at private schools on a means-tested basis. On the basis of longitudinal research on the careers of a cohort of 300 'academically able' pupils, this research explores the relative progress of those who benefited from an Assisted Place (AP).

Key findings

Simple comparison of GCSE and A level results reveals that our *AP holders did better than our state-educated respondents* and better than might have been predicted on the basis of background socio-economic and educational inheritance variables.

The selective status of the schools appears to be a factor in their performance as both our AP holders and state-educated grammar school pupils did better than might have been expected. Other attributes, such as whether a school is single sex or has a sixth form may also be important factors, but ones which we were not able to isolate in this study.

There is, however, wide variation in achievements. AP holders who had the highest gains had parents in professional, managerial and intermediate occupations. *Pupils from working class backgrounds, whether AP holders or at state schools, did less well than might be expected.*

One reason for differential success is the age at which they left school. Most AP holders who left school before they were 18 came from homes where their father was in an intermediate or working class occupation. It would appear that, for these students, *the more socially exclusive environment of their elite private school created difficulties*.

For those AP holders who did stay in school, *over one third went to an 'elite' university*, compared to less than one in ten from state schools. Although this is partly a consequence of their higher average A level results, it also reflects the different track records of private and state schools in securing Oxbridge entrance. *Our AP holders gained places at Oxbridge with lower A level results than their state-schooled counterparts.*

While the degree results of AP holders compare favourably with their state-educated counterparts, *they were the least likely of the three categories to have completed their studies*. Nearly one in ten dropped out or failed. In general, and as with the finding on school leaving ages, it would appear that the odds of 'dropping out' are higher for AP holders – but that if they 'stay in' they do well.

In parallel with their state-educated counterparts, most of those from intermediate and working class backgrounds are now in professional and managerial occupations. However, *our AP holders' average earnings were significantly higher than those for state-schooled colleagues*. Additionally, there appears to be a private premium for non-graduates in that *the majority of AP holders without degree-level qualifications were in professional and managerial occupations.*

THE EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER TRAJECTORIES OF ASSISTED PLACE HOLDERS

Introduction

Established in 1980, the Assisted Places Scheme (APS) enabled the government to help parents of academically able children with the cost of fees at private schools on a means-tested basis. Seventeen years later the scheme was abolished by the New Labour government.

Efforts to replace the scheme continue through appeals for private funds – by individual schools and by several charities. There have also been alternative proposals that attempt to overcome some of the shortcomings of the original scheme by, for example, the Sutton Trust and its Open Access scheme.

Such efforts reflect a commitment to access by ability to the 'best' schools and, thereby, to changing the social composition of these schools. Given the generally higher educational attainment among those who attend schools in the private sector – and the growing link between educational achievement and earnings (eg, Blanden *et al* 2005) – these efforts also reflect a commitment to increasing social mobility.

As the most direct means of enabling academically able pupils from less privileged backgrounds to access better performing schools, assisted places schemes are an important topic for research – to establish the benefits to the individual and to explore ways of enhancing the experience and outcomes of these and similar initiatives in future.

The research reported here examines the educational and career trajectories of a group of young men and women whose education was subsidised through the APS in the 1980s. The study, funded by the ESRC, began in 1982 as part of an early evaluation of the Scheme[1]. The evaluation comprised interviews with 611 academically able children, from a wide variety of schools, at the start of their secondary education and looked at their background, schooling and future aspirations.

Since then, two follow-up studies have been conducted – interview and questionnaire research with over half of the original sample as they entered their twenties and moved into employment (the *Destined for Success?* study[2]) and a questionnaire survey of a slightly smaller sample as they entered their thirties and had largely consolidated their careers (the *Success Sustained?* study[3]).

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[1] 'The state and private education; an evaluation of the Assisted Places Scheme', funded by the Social Science Research Council (Award No C00230036)

[2] 'Destined for Success? Educational biographies of academically able pupils, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (Award No R000235570)

[3] 'Success Sustained? A follow-up study of the 'Destined for Success' cohort', funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (Award No Res-000-22-0627)

The overall findings of these successive studies have already been published (Edwards *et al* 1989; Power *et al* 2003; Power *et al* forthcoming). However, in this report we look more closely at the particular experience of the assisted place (AP) holders in the sample, to see how their educational and career trajectories compare with those of the other groups of respondents, particularly those from selective and non-selective state schools, as well as full-fee payers in the private school sector.

Key questions

A full evaluation of the APS could investigate a number of dimensions – the impact on participating schools, on neighbouring state schools, and on the landscape of school choice in general. However, the focus of this particular analysis is on the relative progress of a sample of individuals who participated in the Scheme. The overall objective is to find out whether these students did better than they might otherwise have done. It is, of course, impossible to demonstrate with any certainty whether things would have been different for them had they taken other educational pathways. Nevertheless, through a variety of statistical techniques we can investigate their relative success.

The report is structured around a number of central questions:

1. How well did our AP holders do at school?
2. Did they do better or worse than might have been expected?
3. What factors might explain their performance, specifically in relation to
    a. Background
    b. School
4. Did some benefit from an AP more than others?
5. To what extent have they been able to translate their school performance into further educational qualifications and occupational success?

Methods

The research uses data from across the studies outlined in the introduction. However, the latest, the *'Success Sustained?'* study, provides the most up-to-date information and (unless indicated otherwise) forms the sample examined here. The sample[4] may be broken down as follows:

Table 1: The sample

Full-fee payers at private schools	82
AP holders at private schools	62
Pupils at state-maintained schools	152
TOTAL	**296**

Data on their educational and career trajectories are derived from a questionnaire distributed in 2004 designed to elicit a brief outline of their current situation (both occupational and domestic) together with outline details of their work, educational

[4] We have included in this analysis late returns from respondents which have increased the sample from the 292 reported in previous publications to 296.

and geographic histories since the previous survey. These data were then compiled with earlier data from the previous two surveys and analysed using descriptive statistics and linear regression.

The report

The report begins by exploring the performance of AP holders at school and the extent to which they did better or worse than might have been expected. It examines a number of explanations for their achievement and explores variation between AP holders. The second section examines the extent to which they were able to translate their school qualifications into subsequent educational and occupational opportunities. Finally, the report concludes with a discussion of the implications of this research for the development of similar sponsorship schemes.

Performance at school

Overall profile

Our respondents attended a wide variety of schools, which ranged from inner-city comprehensives to some of the most prestigious private schools in the country. Although they were all deemed to be 'academically able'[5] at the start of their secondary education, there were wide variations in their educational attainments. It should be noted that there was as much variation between institutions as there was between kinds of school. Nevertheless, simple comparison of the average number of GCSEs and A level points obtained by our respondents (Tables 2 & 3) reveals that our AP holders did better than our state-educated respondents but worse than their full-fee paying counterparts.

Table 2: Number of A-C GCSEs (or equivalent)

Pupil category	*Mean*	*N*[6]	*Std. Deviation*
Full-fee payer	9.19	81	1.783
AP holder	8.85	61	1.842
State	7.71	150	2.315
Total	**8.36**	**292**	**2.185**

Table 3: A level points (without General Studies)[7]

[5] The identification of academic ability was based on a number of criteria. Passing entrance examinations was taken as an indication of ability for those at academically selective schools (private or state) while those at state schools were identified by their teachers as being academically capable of gaining an assisted place at an independent school.

[6] In this, and all other tables in this report, the number of respondents relates only to those for whom we have relevant data. This means that the total number of respondents varies from table to table.

[7] A level points are used as the best indicator of performance because there is greater variation than for number of GCSEs and because of their significance for higher education destinations. For consistency with previous analyses we are using the 'old' points system (A=10, B=8, C=6, D=4 and

Pupil category	*Mean*	*N*	*Std. Deviation*
Full-fee payer	24.22	81	8.927
AP holder	20.56	61	10.296
State	15.38	150	10.713
Total	**18.91**	**292**	**10.834**

The generally higher level of educational qualifications achieved by our full-fee payers and AP holders might lead one to conclude that private schools do better for their students than state schools. Such a simple conclusion, though, does not take into account a number of factors that are relevant to educational attainment. These include home background factors, such as parents' socio-economic status and level of qualification, and institutional factors, in particular academic selection.

Background and institutional factors

Taking home circumstances into account

In order to ascertain whether our respondents did better or worse than might be expected given their home circumstances, the sample's background variables were built into a regression model to compare patterns of variation between their actual performance and their predicted performance (Appendix).

Taking into account the background variables of parents' occupation and parents' education (as reported when the respondents were at school), the relationship between actual and predicted achievement is outlined in Table 4 below:

Table 4: Predicted and actual A level points

Pupil category		N*	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Full-fee payer	A level points	57	2	40	24.98
	Predicted points	57	15.28	27.67	22.02
	Difference	57	-20.49	19.94	**2.96**
AP holder	A level points	35	0	40	21.31
	Predicted points	35	11.35	26.21	18.63
	Difference	35	-17.87	21.98	**2.68**
State pupil	A level points	92	0	45	16.87
	Predicted points	92	10.40	26.98	19.71
	Difference	92	-20.32	21.63	**-2.84**

** Only respondents (N=184) for whom we have complete data on all four background variables and whose parent(s) were in paid employment have been included in the regression analysis.*

E=2). We have also excluded points derived from the General Studies A level from the analysis because it is more usually taken in private schools and would therefore give a skewed comparison.

These figures indicate that our AP holders did better than might have been predicted on the basis of background socio-economic and educational inheritance variables. Their predicted A level results (mean 18.6 points) were lower than those of their state school counterparts (mean 19.7 points), but their actual results were significantly higher. On average, our AP holders obtained 2.6 A level points above what might have been predicted and those who went to state-maintained schools obtained 2.8 A level points fewer than might have been predicted.

This analysis suggests that AP holders did better attending a private school than if they had gone to a state school. However, the nature of the Scheme meant that the profile of its beneficiaries had a number of distinctive characteristics.

While our AP holders had fewer fathers in professional and managerial occupations than either the full-fee payers or their state-schooled counterparts, there is much uncertainty about a large proportion of their fathers (Table 5). For over one fifth of our AP holders we have no information about their fathers' occupation. As other research indicates, AP holders disproportionately came from single parent households – overwhelmingly headed by mothers. Ten percent of our AP holders did not know what their fathers did, the fathers of a further five percent had died and seven percent were not in paid employment, through disability or other reasons. The economic and educational inheritance of these fathers is therefore something of an unknown – as is the influence of non-cohabiting and even cohabiting adults who were not considered to be relevant within the terms of the Scheme.

While single parent families often suffer from low income, they may have other forms of economic capital at their disposal – data on which are notoriously difficult to obtain.

Table 5: Occupational profile of fathers

		Frequency	Percent
Full-fee payer	Prof and Managerial	54	65.9
	Intermediate	18	22.0
	Working class	3	3.7
	NIPE	1	1.2
	Dead	3	3.7
	Not known	3	3.7
	Total	82	100.0
AP holder	Prof and Managerial	23	37.1
	Intermediate	19	30.6
	Working class	7	11.3
	NIPE	4	6.5
	Dead	3	4.8
	Not known	6	9.7
	Total	62	100.0
State	Prof and Managerial	71	46.7
	Intermediate	48	31.6
	Working class	19	12.5
	NIPE	3	2.0
	Dead	4	2.6
	Not known	7	4.6
	Total	152	100.0

It may also be the case that the low income of our AP holders – and the absence of a biological father in the household – was compensated for by higher levels of educational inheritance. Certainly, a relatively high proportion of AP holders' parents (31% of fathers and 23% of mothers) had at least degree-level qualifications. However, as Table 6 shows, these are still lower percentages than those of their full-fee paying colleagues and state-educated counterparts.

Table 6: Parents' highest educational qualifications

		Father		Mother	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Full-fee payer	GCSE or less	7	12.3	19	31.1
	A levels	16	28.1	19	31.1
	Degree and above	34	59.6	23	37.7
AP holder	GCSE or less	19	48.7	20	51.3
	A levels	8	20.5	10	25.6
	Degree and above	12	30.8	9	23.1
State	GCSE or less	39	36.8	62	56.9
	A levels	21	19.8	17	15.6
	Degree and above	46	43.4	30	31.1

Related to level of qualification, is kind of parental schooling. Halsey *et al* (1980) argued that a child's educational opportunities are enhanced if either the mother or father attended a selective school.

Table 7 shows the types of school attended by respondents in the *Destined for Success?* survey. The majority of both the mothers and the fathers of full-fee payers had been to private or selective secondary schools themselves. The parents of AP holders and state-educated respondents were more likely to have been educated in the state sector as a whole. However, a larger proportion of the mothers of AP holders went to a private school than mothers of state-educated pupils (14.3% compared to 5.3%).

Table 7: Parents' secondary schooling

		Father		Mother	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Full-fee payer	Private/Direct Grant	22	36.7	23	38.3
	Grammar	26	43.3	20	33.3
	Secondary modern	2	3.3	1	1.7
	Secondary/Comprehensive	8	13.3	13	21.7
	Other/overseas	2	3.3	3	5.0
	Total	60	100.0	60	100.0
AP holder	Private/Direct Grant	4	10.0	6	14.3
	Grammar	16	40.0	19	45.2
	Secondary modern	4	10.0	7	16.7
	Secondary/Comprehensive	15	37.5	10	23.8
	Other/overseas	1	2.5	0	0.0
	Total	40	100.0	42	100.0
State	Private/Direct Grant	19	17.1	6	5.3
	Grammar	43	38.7	50	44.2
	Secondary modern	10	9.0	10	8.8
	Secondary/Comprehensive	37	33.3	43	38.1
	Other/overseas	2	1.8	4	3.5
	Total	111	100.0	113	100.0

Institutional factors

Although those who went to private schools – both full-fee payers and AP holders – got on average higher A level results than those who went to state schools, this may be a function of the selective nature of the intake rather than its sectoral designation.

The performance of the small number (24) of pupils who went to state grammar schools was marginally higher than our AP holders (Table 8). However, this might be explained by their background variables. Both AP holders and state-educated

grammar school pupils did better than might have been expected, but the AP holders had a slightly greater difference between actual and predicted A level points than the ex-grammar school pupils (2.7 A level points compared to 1.2 A level points).

Table 8: Predicted and actual A level points of AP holders and state grammar pupils

Pupil category		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
AP holders	A level points	35	0	40	21.31
	Predicted points	35	11.35	26.21	18.63
	Difference	35	-17.87	21.98	**2.68**
State grammar pupils	A level points	15	0	45	20.33
	Predicted points	15	13.15	23.96	19.17
	Difference	15	-17.65	21.63	**1.16**

Given the small number of grammar school pupils in the sample and the absence of any non-selective private schools in the institutional sample, it is difficult to draw any conclusions about the significance of the sectoral designation of schools. However, in this study, the data suggest that academic selection is an important factor in explaining differences in A level performance between pupils.

Another factor that may have some bearing is whether schools are co-educational. However, given that all our selective schools (both private and state-maintained) are single sex and all of our comprehensives but one are co-educational, it is not possible for us to isolate this factor in this study.

The presence of a sixth form has also been associated with higher A level performance. However, again it is not possible to disaggregate this factor from our sample of schools as those with only 11-16 provision were all state-maintained comprehensive schools. Nevertheless, the presence of a strong sixth form is itself strongly associated with selective status to the point that it has been identified (Kerkhoff *et al* 1996) as one of the contributory factors of higher performance in selective schools as it brings better resources and better qualified staff. It is therefore likely to be linked to academic selection.

Variations between AP holders

It does appear that, overall, our AP holders gained academic benefits from attending selective private schools. However, there is wide variation within the sample.[8]

As already mentioned, the policy was driven by a particular concern with increasing social mobility for the 'poor but able'. It is now widely acknowledged that the

[8] The small size of the sample means that within cohort differences cannot be strongly demonstrated. It would be worth exploring whether these patterns are visible with a larger sample.

beneficiaries of the Scheme, albeit poor by some definitions, were less disadvantaged than had been envisaged. In our own sample, we have relatively few respondents from unambiguously working class backgrounds. As Table 5 illustrated, the largest occupational category for all our pupils (full-fee payers, AP holders and state pupils) was 'professional and managerial'. Table 9 illustrates the relative performance of the three types of pupil according to their fathers' occupational category.

The table suggests that AP holders who had the highest gains compared to predicted levels of performance were those from the professional, managerial and intermediate groups. Even taking background variables into account, our working class AP holders and state-educated pupils did less well than might be expected.

Table 9: Predicted and actual A level points by father's socio-economic group

	Pupil category		Mean A level points	Mean Predicted points	Mean Difference
Professional and managerial	Full-fee payer	N=40	25.25	22.78	2.47
	AP holder	N=15	24.53	22.20	2.33
	State	N=45	19.78	22.66	-2.88
Intermediate	Full-fee payer	N=12	25.00	20.20	4.80
	AP holder	N=12	18.17	15.36	2.81
	State	N=28	15.00	17.67	-2.67
Working class	AP holder	N=3	14.00	14.17	-.17
	State	N=11	10.91	14.48	-3.57

If we break down occupations into manual and non-manual (Table 10) this becomes even clearer. Although one needs to be cautious in view of the small numbers of students with fathers in manual occupations, it should be noted that on this analysis these AP holders did even less well compared to their state-educated counterparts – obtaining 7.5 fewer A level points less than might be predicted.

Table 10: Predicted and actual A level points by father's occupational type

	Pupil category		A level	Predicted	Difference
Non-manual	Full-fee payer	N=50	25.52	22.17	3.35
	AP holder	N=24	24.42	19.69	4.73
	State	N=69	18.31	21.09	-2.78
Manual	Full-fee payer	N=3	19.33	22.68	-3.35
	AP holder	N=6	7.00	14.52	-7.52
	State	N=15	11.07	14.56	-3.49

One reason for differential success is the age at which they left school. If we look at the socio-economic background of those who left full-time education before they were 18, we can see that most of them came from homes where the father was in an intermediate or working class occupation:

Table 11: Father's occupation of respondents leaving full-time education before 18 years old

Father's SES	Pupil category			Total
	Full-fee payer	AP holder	State	
Professional & managerial	1	0	4	5
Intermediate	2	3	6	11
Working class	0	1	6	8
Total	5	6	17	28

More qualitative data would be needed to examine the reasons why our AP holders from intermediate and working class backgrounds left school earlier than their full-fee paying colleagues. However, survey data from the '*Destined for Success?*' study show that, for some students, the more socially exclusive environment of an elite private school may have created difficulties.

Tables 12, 13 and 14 (which all have statistical significance) suggest that AP holders were more worried about some of the social aspects of their school experience than not only their full-fee paying colleagues, but also their state-educated counterparts.

Although our AP holders had a similar socio-economic profile to our state-educated pupils, the more socially exclusive environment of their private schools may well have made them feel they did not fit in. One fifth of AP holders remembered worrying 'a lot' about being ashamed of their home – a significantly larger proportion than the 2% of state-educated pupils and full-fee paying pupils (Table 12).

Table 12: When you were at secondary school, did you worry about feeling ashamed of your home?

		Fee Paying	AP holder	State pupil
Never worried you	Count	69	37	137
	% in Pupil Category	75.8	44.0	79.7
Worried you a little	Count	20	29	32
	% in Pupil Category	22.0	34.5	18.6
Worried you a lot	Count	2	18	3
	% in Pupil Category	2.2	21.4	1.7

Table 13 indicates that AP holders were more likely to be worried 'a lot' about some pupils looking 'down' on them. Fewer than half never worried about this.

Table 13: ... did you worry about feeling that some pupils looked down on you?

		Fee Paying	AP holder	State pupil
Never worried you	Count	63	41	116
	% in Pupil Category	69.2	48.8	67.4
Worried you a little	Count	20	29	46
	% in Pupil Category	22.0	34.5	26.7
Worried you a lot	Count	8	14	10
	% in Pupil Category	8.8	16.7	5.8

They were also more likely than either of these groups to be worried 'a lot' about feeling left out of things (Table 14).

Table 14: ... did you worry about feeling left out of things?

		Fee Paying	AP holder	State pupil
Never worried you	Count	24	23	36
	% in Pupil Category	26.4	27.4	20.9
Worried you a little	Count	46	33	103
	% in Pupil Category	50.5	39.3	59.9
Worried you a lot	Count	21	28	33
	% in Pupil Category	23.1	33.3	19.2

On a more positive note, one of the justifications for the AP scheme was to provide disadvantaged students with an environment in which academic progress was emphasised. Table 15 suggests that this claim might be supported. Our AP holders – along with their full-fee paying colleagues – were least likely to worry 'a lot' about other peers thinking they were too clever.

Table 15: ... did you worry about other pupils thinking you were too clever?

		Fee Paying	AP holder	State pupil
Never worried you	Count	72	62	96
	% in Pupil Category	79.1	73.8	55.8
Worried you a little	Count	16	20	63
	% in Pupil Category	17.6	23.8	36.6
Worried you a lot	Count	3	2	13
	% in Pupil Category	3.2	2.4	7.6

Subsequent educational trajectories

In this section we explore the extent to which our AP holders have been able to translate their school performance into further educational qualifications and occupational success.

Higher education destinations

As might be expected from an academically able sample, the majority of respondents went on to higher education (Table 16). Although different proportions of our three

pupil categories did not go to university (one in ten of the full-fee payers, one fifth of AP holders and nearly one quarter of state pupils), the most significant differences are connected with the 'rank'[9] of university attended. Here we see a large difference between our AP holders and their state-educated counterparts. Over one third of AP holders went to an 'elite' university, compared to less than one in ten from state schools.

Table 16: Higher education destinations

		Full-fee payer	AP holder	State
Elite	Count	37	21	14
	% within pupil category	45.1%	33.9%	9.2%
Other 'old' universities	Count	33	21	65
	% within pupil category	40.2%	33.9%	42.8%
'New' universities and colleges of HE	Count	5	8	38
	% within pupil category	6.1%	12.9%	25.0%
Did not go to university	Count	7	12	35
	% within pupil category	8.5%	19.4%	23.0%

More of our AP holders went to Oxbridge than their state-schooled counterparts. Although this is obviously a reflection of their higher average A level points scores, it also reflects the different track records of private and state schools in securing Oxbridge entrance. Our AP holders (and to a lesser extent our full-fee payers) gained places at Oxbridge with fewer A level points than their state-schooled colleagues (Table 17). Although in recent years elite universities have made efforts to widen their intakes, the under-representation of state-schooled pupils continues. Research undertaken by the Sutton Trust (2005) last year indicates that each year some 3,000 state educated pupils achieve the A level grades necessary to enter these institutions, but do not do so.

Table 17: Average A-level points obtained by Oxbridge entrants

Pupil category	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Full-fee payer	32.95	19	5.265
AP holder	29.33	12	6.787
State	34.20	5	7.823
Total	31.92	36	6.272

[9] Our ranking of universities is based on reputational indices available in the early 1990s, well before the recent spate of university 'performance' tables published in the media. 'Elite' universities include Oxbridge and other prestigious universities, such as Durham, Imperial, LSE and UCL. The second category contains the other pre-1992 universities. The third category contains the 'new' universities incorporated as a result of the abolition of the 'binary line' in 1992 (some of which were still polytechnics when our respondents entered them) and colleges of higher education.

Once at university, the progress of our sample appears to have been mixed (Table 18). Data taken from the *Destined for Success?* sample[10] indicate that full-fee payers were most likely to get first class degrees, state-educated pupils least likely.[11]

Table 18: Outcome of first degree

		Frequency	Percent
Full-fee payer	1st	7	7.7
	2i	39	42.9
	2ii	22	24.2
	3rd	2	2.2
	Pass	3	3.3
	Not yet finished	5	5.5
	Dropped out/failed	7	7.7
	N/A - no degree	5	5.5
	Not graded/specified	1	1.1
	Total	91	100.0
AP holder	1st	5	6.0
	2i	31	36.9
	2ii	21	25.0
	3rd	2	2.4
	Not yet finished	3	3.6
	Dropped out/failed	8	9.5
	N/A - no degree	10	11.9
	Not graded/specified	4	4.8
	Total	84	100.0
State pupil	1st	7	4.1
	2i	64	37.2
	2ii	32	18.6
	3rd	1	0.6
	Pass	5	2.9
	Not yet finished	9	5.2
	Dropped out/failed	10	5.8
	N/A - no degree	35	20.3
	Not graded/specified	9	5.2
	Total	172	100.0

However, while their degree results compare favourably with those of their state-educated counterparts, AP holders were the least likely of the three categories to have completed their studies. Nearly one in ten dropped out or failed. The overall higher rate of drop-out for our privately-educated pupils is interesting. Our

[10] The *Success Sustained?* Survey did not include questions on degree classification.

[11] This is somewhat at variance with other research. Smith and Naylor's (2001; and Naylor *et al* 2002) analysis of degree outcomes based on a much larger sample found that students from state comprehensives got higher degree grades than those from private schools . The variance might be explained by the distinctive and highly selective nature of the private schools in our sample.

interview data suggest that some students from private schools (and from one school in particular) felt they had been ill-prepared for the kind of independent study required at university.

In general, and as with the finding on school leaving ages, it would appear that the odds of 'dropping out' are higher for AP holders – but that if they 'stay in' they do well. In the next section, we consider how they have been variously able to translate their educational qualifications into occupational success.

Occupational destinations

Occupational level

In socio-economic terms, the overall profile of our AP holders now that they are in their early thirties is not significantly different from that of the other two categories of respondent (Table 19).

Table 19: Socio-economic profile of respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Full-fee payer	Professional & managerial	63	76.8
	Intermediate	11	13.4
	Working class	1	1.2
	NIPE	7	8.5
	Total	82	100.0
AP holder	Professional & managerial	41	66.1
	Intermediate	11	17.7
	Working class	1	1.6
	NIPE	9	14.5
	Total	62	100.0
State	Professional & managerial	104	68.4
	Intermediate	31	20.4
	Working class	1	.7
	NIPE	16	10.5
	Total	152	100.0

Of course, the lack of difference could in itself be taken as evidence of the success of the Scheme given that our AP holders came from less privileged backgrounds than the full-fee payers in particular. If we compare their current occupational groups with those of their fathers' we can see that over half of those now in professional and managerial occupations came from intermediate and working class backgrounds (Table 20).

Table 20: AP holders' occupational group relative to their fathers'

AP holder's occupational group		Father's occupational group		
		Prof and Managerial	Intermediate	Working class
Prof and Managerial	Count	15	13	4
	%	46.90%	40.60%	12.50%
Intermediate	Count	2	4	3
	%	22.20%	44.40%	33.30%

Excludes those not in paid employment

However, our incomplete data on fathers' occupations make any definitive conclusions on this problematic. It should be also noted that the general shift 'upwards' is no more marked than for our other groups of students and, indeed, reflects broader shifts in the labour market as the middle class continues to expand.

Earnings

Using data on earnings provides a more sensitive indicator of occupational success than broad socio-economic categories. On this indicator we can identify wide variation across the sample. Our full-fee payers generally earned more than both AP holders and state-educated pupils (Table 21). Over one quarter were earning in excess of £70,000. Our AP holders' average earnings were also significantly more than their state-schooled counterparts. Nearly one fifth were earning in excess of £70,000 – more than twice the proportion of those from state schools.

Table 21: Earnings of those in full-time paid employment

		Frequency	Percent
Full-fee payer	Less than £30K	18	28.6
	£30K-69K	27	42.9
	Over £70K	18	28.6
	Total	63	100.0
Assisted place holder	Less than £30K	18	40.9
	£30K-69K	18	40.9
	Over £70K	8	18.2
	Total	44	100.0
State	Less than £30K	48	45.7
	£30K-69K	49	46.7
	Over £70K	8	7.6
	Total	105	100.0

In part this difference can be accounted for by gender differences. Overall, our female respondents in full-time work earned less than the men and we have more women in our state-educated sample. There is though a school sector aspect to this. The earnings gap between men and women was much smaller for our privately educated respondents than for our state-educated respondents.

The higher earning of the AP holders (and full-fee payers) can also be explained by the status of university attended. We have commented elsewhere (Power *et al* 2003) on the apparent earnings premium of an Oxbridge degree. As more of our AP holders went to Oxbridge, this pushes their average earnings up. However, if we compare across Oxbridge graduates, we can see that the 'premium' is apparently highest for the full-fee payers rather than the AP holders (Table 22).

Table 22: Earnings of Oxbridge graduates in full-time employment

		Frequency	Percent
Full-fee payer	less than £30K	3	23.1
	£30K-69K	4	30.8
	Over £70K	6	46.2
	Total		
Assisted place holder	less than £30K	2	28.6
	£30K-69K	3	42.9
	Over £70K	2	28.6
	Total	7	100.0
State	less than £30K	1	20.0
	£30K-69K	3	60.0
	Over £70K	1	20.0
	Total	5	100.0

These findings suggest that for some individuals the AP scheme provided a pathway to high occupational achievements. However, what of those who did not do so well?

Comparison of the destinations and earnings of our small number of non-graduates suggests that there is still a private school advantage, in that the majority of AP holders without degree-level qualifications were in professional and managerial occupations. This was the case for only one quarter of our state-schooled respondents (Table 23).

Table 23: Occupational destinations of non-graduates

		Frequency	Percent
Full-fee payer	Professional & managerial	6	75.0
	Intermediate	2	25.0
	Working class	0	0.0
	NIPE	0	0.0
	Total	8	100.0
AP holder	Professional & managerial	7	58.3
	Intermediate	4	33.3
	Working class	1	8.3
	NIPE	0	0.0
	Total	12	100.0
State	Professional & managerial	9	25.0
	Intermediate	20	55.6
	Working class	0	0.0
	NIPE	7	19.4
	Total	7	19.4

As other research (Naylor *et al* 2002) indicates, there also appears to be an earnings premium to having attended an elite private school (Table 24). This is the case for both full-fee payers and AP holders. The majority of both groups (72% and 80% respectively) were earning over £30,000 per annum. Only one third (35%) of our state-educated pupils were earning this amount. To some extent this can be explained by the gender composition of the sample.

Table 24: Earnings of non-graduates in full-time paid employment

		Frequency	Percent
Full-fee payer	Less than £30,000	2	28.6
	£30,000-£59,000	3	42.9
	£60,000-£89,000	2	28.6
	Total	7	100.0
AP holder	Less than £30,000	5	50.0
	£30,000-£59,000	3	30.0
	£60,000-£89,000	2	20.0
	Total	10	100.0
State	Less than £30,000	13	65.0
	£30,000-£59,000	7	35.0
	Total	20	100.0

Career attributes

We found no significant differences between our different categories of respondent in terms of the sector of employment (public or private) or the nature of their occupation (professional or managerial). We also found no differences in terms of how they perceived their career, either in terms of whether it was successful, disrupted or smooth. When asked about how they accounted for their success, a few mentioned 'education'. However, none of the AP holders made specific reference to their school or their sponsorship.

Mobility

Social mobility is, to some extent, linked with geographic mobility and we did find some slight differences in terms of geographic mobility. As in many other aspects, the progress of our AP holders lies somewhere between that of their full-fee paying colleagues and their state-educated counterparts. Thus, they were marginally more geographically mobile than state-educated pupils and less geographically mobile than full-fee payers. They were more likely than state-educated pupils to have felt the pull towards the South East – itself an aspect of upward career trajectory. Somewhat inexplicably, the AP holders were the least likely to have lived overseas.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

It is clear that for many individuals, the APS provided a pathway to high level qualifications, elite university places and occupational success. However, our research indicates that the Scheme was not an unqualified success. Aside from consideration of the implications of this kind of scheme for the system as a whole, which have been written about elsewhere (see Walford 1987; Edwards *et al* 1989), our research suggests that those who see it as a way of increasing opportunities for disadvantaged individuals need to address issues of eligibility and reduce the risks without compromising the benefits.

Eligibility

Although the Scheme undoubtedly reached many families who might not otherwise have been able to send their children to private schools, there is overwhelming evidence from our research and others (eg, Douse 1985), that many of its beneficiaries were not culturally and economically disadvantaged.

The ways in which eligibility for assistance was calculated did not take into account various forms of economic and cultural capital. If schemes such as these are to be implemented more widely, more sensitive measurements of these forms of capital need to be taken into consideration.

Risks

However, even if access schemes do draw in unambiguously disadvantaged pupils, our research suggests that it is these students who have the most difficulties benefiting from the opportunities. Our respondents from working class backgrounds were more likely to drop out of school at 16 and get lower A level results than expected – even taking background variables into account.

Responses to questions about their experiences at school suggest that AP holders did not feel they fitted in. They were more likely to worry about feeling ashamed of their home, of being 'looked down' on and of feeling 'left out'. There are no straightforward recommendations to be made here. One possible strategy might be to make elite private schools less socially exclusive. However, it is unclear how much social mix can be accommodated without compromising either academic exclusiveness or the cultural climate which is supposed to give these schools their distinctive ethos. It is also difficult to see what might persuade a significant number of these prestigious schools to take this route.

Cross-sector links

Even if students stay on at school, they appear to carry risks into higher education. Thus, while the degree results of AP holders compared favourably with their state-educated counterparts, they were the least likely of the three categories to have completed their studies. There is some evidence to suggest that some private schools are very effective in obtaining good A level grades but at the expense of developing

the kind of independent study skills required at higher education level. More research needs to be done on this, but, if it is the case, there are clear implications for the kind of sixth form experience that needs to be fostered. Our findings suggest that, in this respect, independent schools may have something to learn from the state sector.

Appendix

Regression output for A level points

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	12.482	3.230		3.864	.000
Father's SES	-.328	.383	-.062	-.857	.392
Mother's SES	-.183	.377	-.036	-.487	.627
Fathers' highest ed qualification	1.347	.343	.317	3.924	.000
Mothers' highest ed qualification	.438	.389	.094	1.124	.262

This table excludes all parents not in paid employment
Then unstandardized coefficient B multiplied by value for each variable to determine predicted result. Difference arrived at through subtracting predicted A levels from actual A levels.

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