

Lasting Benefits

The Long-term Legacy of the Assisted Places Scheme for
Assisted Place Holders

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Bridging the divide between state and independent schools remains one of the great challenges of education in England. It was one of the main reasons I established the Sutton Trust in 1997. Politicians of all parties proclaim it as one of their ambitions, and it isn't hard to see why. Successive OECD reports have shown that our independent schools are the best performing schools in the world, but we also have a larger performance gap between the state and independent sectors than any other developed nation.

The Sutton Trust has published several reports showing how a majority of the top roles in British society are taken by those who attended leading independent schools. It is not just the academic record at school of those independently educated that makes a difference in entering our professional elites; it is the access to our top universities and the networks and social skills that a private school education provides.

Governments have recognised the importance of attempting to bridge this divide, to an extent. In the late 90s, the Sutton Trust pioneered independent-state school partnerships which resulted in the Sutton Trust independent state school partnership programme, and fostered co-operation between the two sectors. But this is just tinkering around the edges, and until we open up independent day schools based on merit not money, education apartheid will persist. Until 1976, the central government and county councils paid for students to attend independent day schools through the Direct Grant Scheme and similar local funded programmes. These schemes were so extensive that up until 1976, 70% of independent day schools were principally state funded.

After 1980, the Assisted Places Scheme provided sponsored places for bright children from low and middle income families to attend independent schools. The scheme ran from 1980 to 1998, and provided means-tested support to 75,000 young people over its lifetime. Today, the only state funded places in private schools are in pre-school, choir schools and special schools.

This study looks at the experiences of some of those students who benefited from Assisted Places. It is not the first time we have visited them: the Sutton Trust published reports in 2006 and 2009 on their experiences. Those reports compared a group of students who all qualified for assisted places and for all intents and purposes had similar family backgrounds and ability. Some took the assisted places and some went to state schools. The reports showed that Assisted Place holders did better than state educated respondents at GCSE and A level. It also showed that they gained more places at Oxbridge with lower A level results than their state-schooled counterparts. By their thirties they also earned significantly more than their state-educated colleagues.

For this report, Professor Sally Power and her team at Cardiff have revisited more than 70 of the Assisted Place holder group originally studied. They have looked not just at their careers but the extent to which they acquired a social resilience to cope with the challenges of life.

Her findings are clear, if salutary. The benefits of an independent education have lasted well into adulthood. Even those who left their independent school before gaining A-levels are in solidly middle class occupations with a good income. All the respondents have weathered the economic downturn well, and some look forward to a comfortable early retirement. Crucially, this success was about more than getting good academic results. The Assisted Places Scheme enabled them to override any disadvantages associated with their social background. Their secondary schools were significant in the development of a range of personal attributes, such as self-discipline and self-reliance. They also provided them with enduring social networks.

I don't believe we should recreate the Assisted Places Scheme. Its reach was too limited. The earlier research showed, for example, that parachuting a few low and middle income children into a school where all other children are full fee payers does not work socially; as a result, some of the Assisted Place holders either dropped out or did not realise the full benefits. Instead, there is a much better model in the Open Access scheme that we trialled with considerable success at Belvedere School in Liverpool from 2000 to 2007.

Under Open Access, 100% of places are available on merit alone, with parents paying a sliding scale of fees according to means. Some pay nothing, others pay full fees and some pay partial fees. Under the Belvedere pilot, the social mix of the school became far more diverse, with 30% of pupils on free places, 40% on partial fees and the rest paying full fees. As brighter girls from a whole range of backgrounds were recruited compared to when the school was fully fee-paying, academic standards increased radically. The school was also a happy place to learn and teach.

The Trust has proposed that this model be extended to 100 or more leading academic day schools, with state funding, as a means of boosting mobility at the top and opening the pipeline of talent to leading universities and the professions. Because of the partnership with parents, who pay according to means and therefore share part of the cost, the cost per head to the state for Open Access would be less than the cost of the average state school place. 90 independent day schools – approximately half of the leading independent day schools in the country - would back Open Access if state funding is available. We are discussing state funding of Open Access with politicians of all parties, and we will have more to say on our ideas in the coming months.

I am very grateful to Professor Sally Power and Dr Stuart Sims at WISERD at Cardiff University and to Professor Geoff Whitty for their work on this latest report on the Assisted Places Generation. I hope it will add to the arguments for radical change in opening up independent schools on the basis of merit rather than money.

Sir Peter Lampl
Chairman
The Sutton Trust and the Education Endowment Foundation

Executive Summary

The Assisted Places Scheme was introduced in 1980 by the Conservative Government to provide a 'ladder of opportunity' for academically able students from poor homes. Over the next 17 years, more than 75,000 pupils received means-tested assistance from public funds to attend the most selective and prestigious private schools in England and Wales. The Scheme proved controversial and was eventually abolished when New Labour came to power in 1997. However, the issue of how best to cater for the academically able child has never really been resolved and there have been recent calls for initiatives similar to the Assisted Places Scheme to be reintroduced. This report seeks to contribute to the debate through examining the long term legacy of the Scheme through tracing the progress of some of its beneficiaries.

Earlier research compared a group of students who all qualified for Assisted Places and, for all intents and purposes, had similar family backgrounds and ability. Some took the Assisted Places and some went to state schools. The research showed that Assisted Place holders did better than state educated respondents at GCSE and A level. It also showed that they gained places at Oxbridge with lower A level results than their state-schooled counterparts. By their thirties they also earned significantly more than their state-educated colleagues.

This research draws on a survey of 77 former Assisted Place holders, drawn from the earlier sample, who are now in their early forties. The survey was designed to answer four broad questions:

1. How have Assisted Place holders progressed in terms of occupational status, security and satisfaction?
2. What role do they perceive their secondary education played in shaping their future?
3. To what extent has it influenced social allegiances and attitudes?
4. What is the legacy of their Assisted Place for the education of their children?

1. Occupational status, security and satisfaction

Assisted Place holders continue to benefit from their secondary school education. Even those who did not go to university are now in middle class occupations with a good income. This suggests that they may have benefitted from a private school premium over and above that associated with educational attainment. They have also demonstrated significant resilience in the face of the current economic climate.

It is of course impossible to ascertain with any certainty how our respondents might have fared had they not received an Assisted Place. Earlier statistical analysis indicates that, on the whole, Assisted Place holders who completed their schooling in independent schools up to age 18 gained higher levels of qualifications and went to more prestigious universities than might have been expected if they had attended state-maintained comprehensive schools.

This survey suggests that Assisted Place holders continue to reap the benefits of their secondary education. The overwhelming majority have continued their upward trajectory in professional and managerial occupations with high levels of earnings. Even our non- graduates are in solidly middle class occupations with a good income. This suggests that they have benefited from a private school premium over and above that associated with educational attainment. Despite a sometimes variable academic record, our respondents considered themselves 'successful'.

Our respondents reported not only satisfaction but also a fairly strong sense of job security - indicating apparently significant resilience in the face of the current economic climate. Such is their confidence in their future financial security that a significant proportion were anticipating that they would be in a position to take early retirement.

2. Accounting for success

The Assisted Place holders attributed their success to ability and hard work. It is possible that the Scheme lessened any of the potentially damaging effects on attainment commonly associated with socio-economic disadvantage. In addition, our respondents report that their secondary schools were significant in the development of a range of personal attributes, such as self-discipline and self-reliance. These schools also contributed to enduring social networks.

While education featured as a very important factor in their success, most respondents accounted for their success in terms of individual attributes of ability and hard work. Social background was considered relatively unimportant. While this strong emphasis on the meritocratic basis for their achievements may go against much social scientific evidence, it may indicate that for these individuals the Assisted Places Scheme enabled them to override any disadvantages associated with social background.

In relation to education, there was general consensus that secondary schools were the most important institutions in shaping subsequent careers. Clearly secondary schools play an important role in helping students obtain the necessary qualifications to enter those universities that are going to enable them to pursue well-paid prestigious careers. But they also aim to develop a range of 'soft skills' that are increasingly important in recruitment processes. Our respondents report that their secondary schools were significant in the development of a range of personal attributes, such as self-discipline and self-reliance. These schools also appear to have contributed to the development of enduring social networks.

3. Allegiances and attitudes

In spite of their upward social mobility, our respondents have maintained strong ties with their families. However, their social circles are cosmopolitan and similarly highly educated. They also are more likely to have settled down with partners who are well-qualified. A high proportion have partners who were also privately educated. The majority of respondents believed that standards in state-maintained schools were lower than in private schools.

Of course education is not only about 'skills' - hard or soft. Schools are important in shaping particular kinds of allegiances and attitudes. It is often argued that one of the benefits (but also one of the risks) of initiatives such as the Assisted Places Scheme is that they dislocate children from their communities. Our data do not indicate a high incidence of dislocation and family ties appear to remain strong. However, our respondents report that they move in cosmopolitan and well-qualified circles. They also are more likely to have settled down with partners who are well-qualified – with a relatively high proportion having been privately educated.

In general, there is some evidence of a 'private sector affinity'. The majority of respondents believed that standards in state-maintained schools were lower than in private schools. However, their support for private education does not straightforwardly reflect any particular political preferences.

4. Planning their children's education

Their own experience of private education has strongly influenced the decisions that they have made about their children's education. Around half our respondents with children have chosen private schools for their children (the national average is 7 per cent). Our respondents are overwhelmingly in favour of the reintroduction of the Assisted Places Scheme.

Three quarters of our respondents now have children. Of those with school-aged children, just under one half have chosen private schools for their children – a proportion significantly higher than the seven per cent who do so within the UK as a whole. The proportion at secondary schools was slightly higher than the proportion at primary schools.

The quality of the local state school was the most important factor in parents' decisions about where to send their children. This was the case for those who went private (for whom it was a push factor) and those who chose state-maintained schools (for whom it was a pull factor). The reputation and academic profile of the school were also important considerations. The only factor where there was a significant divergence between our private- and state-school choosers was in relation to the extent to which they based their decision on their own experience of school. This was a more important factor for those choosing a private school.

Finally, our respondents are overwhelmingly in favour of the reintroduction of the Assisted Places Scheme.

Background

The Assisted Places Scheme was introduced in 1980 by the Conservative Government in order to provide a 'ladder of opportunity' for academically able students from poor homes. Over the next 17 years, more than 75,000 pupils received means-tested assistance from public funds to attend the most selective and prestigious private schools in England and Wales. However, the Scheme proved highly controversial. There were claims, for example, that it damaged the public sector because it 'creamed off' academically able students from state schools and sent out a clear signal that private schools were better (see Walford 1987). New Labour abolished the Scheme when it came to power in 1997, arguing that public funds should be designed to 'benefit the many, not just the few' (DfEE 1997). The incoming administration put in place measures, such as the Gifted and Talented scheme (DfEE 1999), to try to ensure that academically able children would not be disadvantaged by staying within the state sector.

However, the issue of how best to cater for the materially disadvantaged but academically able student never really went away and the return of a Conservative administration in 2010 brought the issue into the public eye again. While the Conservative Party had already abandoned its longstanding support for the return of state-maintained grammar schools in those areas without them, it has been eager to promote alternative forms of provision – particularly free schools and academies. In England, the incorporation of previously independent schools into the academy sector has blurred the boundary between state and private education, but has not resolved the issue of how to achieve the academic 'press' associated with selection. In 2010, the prospect of assisted places returned when it was proposed that businesses could sponsor places for disadvantaged children at private schools (Barker 2010). The Sutton Trust (2012) has launched a campaign to introduce an Open Access Scheme whereby the 'top' independent schools would open their doors to academically able students on a fees-blind basis.¹

This research is intended to contribute to the ongoing debate surrounding these developments by exploring how the benefits and risks associated with the Assisted Places Scheme continue to play out in the lives of its intended beneficiaries.²

¹ The Scheme would run along similar lines to the trial already conducted by the Sutton Trust at Liverpool's Belvedere School (see Smithers and Robinson, 2006, for an evaluation of the trial).

² It is important to note that in this Report we are assessing the legacy of the Scheme for individuals rather than for the education system as a whole. Many critics of the Scheme have argued that any benefits experienced by Assisted Place holders (and the schools they attended) have been at the expense of neighbouring state-maintained schools and their children (see Fitz *et al* 1986 for a summary of the debates surrounding the launch). We are not seeking to evaluate these claims here.

Aims and objectives

The broad aim of the research has been to explore the long-term impact of the Assisted Places Scheme on beneficiaries' occupational and social prospects and on their aspirations for their children's education.

1. How have Assisted Place holders progressed in terms of occupational status, security and satisfaction?
2. What role do they perceive their secondary education played in shaping their future?
3. To what extent has it influenced social allegiances and attitudes?
4. What is the legacy of their Assisted Place for the education of their children?

Previous research

The research builds on our ongoing investigations of the Scheme and of the complex relationship between school type, mode of sponsorship and subsequent educational and occupational trajectories. These studies have been based on following the progress of a cohort of nearly 600 young men and women who were deemed to be 'destined for success' at the start of their secondary education. Within this larger cohort is a sub-sample of Assisted Place holders who have been interviewed and surveyed in the 1980s (Edwards et al., 1989) and followed up at three subsequent points in 1994-8, 2003-4 and 2008 (Power et al., 2003; Power et al., 2006a & 2006b and Power et al 2009).³

This research has its origins in previous work that examined the Assisted Places Scheme. In 1982, an evaluation of the scheme was funded by the then Social Science Research Council.⁴ This entailed 611 interviews with pupils, all of whom were identified as academically able but divided in their schooling between fee payers at independent schools, Assisted Place holders at the same schools, and academically able children in nearby state schools, both grammar and comprehensive. Parents of around half the sample were interviewed in their homes.

³ The four earlier studies which involved collection of primary data comprise:

1. The original SSRC funded project *The State and Private Education: An Evaluation of the Assisted Places Scheme* (1981-1985, SSRC Award No. C00230036) when the students were interviewed at school.
2. A questionnaire survey and interviews as part of a larger ESRC study *Destined for Success? Biographies of academically able students* (ESRC Award No. R000235570)
3. A questionnaire survey in 2004: *Success Sustained? A follow-up study of the 'Destined for Success?' cohort* (ESRC Award No. RES-000-22-0627).

Interviews in 2006 with the most disadvantaged Assisted Place holders, funded by the Sutton Trust. *'Embers from the ashes'? The experience of being an assisted place holder.*

⁴ 'The state and private education; an evaluation of the Assisted Places Scheme', funded by the Social Science Research Council (Award No C00230036).

There have been several follow-up studies. The first “Destined for Success?”⁵ consisted of questionnaire data from 1995 from over half the original sample, complemented by qualitative interviews with around 150 of them. The respondents were then in their mid-twenties and becoming established in employment. In a major book based on this work in 2003, the independent school sample as a whole was compared with the state school sample. Another questionnaire, with a slightly smaller sample, was conducted in 2004 as the respondents entered their thirties and consolidated their careers. This was published as *Success Sustained?*⁶ In 2006, further analysis was conducted for the Sutton Trust to disaggregate the independent school sample in order to analyse differences between Assisted Place holders and full fee payers, and to compare them separately with pupils at state schools (Power et al 2006).

In the 2006 analysis, it emerged that, on the whole, Assisted Place holders performed better in their GCSEs and A levels than the respondents at state schools, and also better than might be expected on the basis of socio-economic and educational inheritance variables. However, those Assisted Place holders in the sample from working class backgrounds did less well than might be expected. One reason for this may be that Assisted Place holders from homes where the father was in an intermediate or working class occupation were more likely to have left school before they were 18 than peers who remained in state schools. In terms of higher education, while Assisted Place holders were more likely to go to more prestigious universities, they also appear to have had a greater chance of not completing their degree, and nearly one in ten dropped out or failed their course. Yet, there also appeared to be an independent school premium for non-graduate Assisted Place holders, the majority of whom were in professional and managerial occupations.

A further report, *Embers from the Ashes*, was published by the Sutton Trust in 2009, based on interviews with 25 Assisted Place holders. Respondents felt they could not participate in out of school activities, such as field-trips, cultural visits or foreign exchange trips, because their parents could not afford to finance them. For some this was a key reason for them becoming estranged or alienated from the independent school in which they were placed.

Methodology

For this report, a short survey was developed that was designed to elicit data on the respondents’ current occupation, income and future plans. This study received responses from 77 Assisted Place holders, giving us a response rate of 55 per cent.⁷

Comparison of parental occupations, sex, school leaving age, qualification levels and subsequent occupational destinations showed no statistically significant variation. This leads

us to conclude that there is no reason why the range of experiences and perceptions presented here should not be seen as indicative of those of the broader cohort.

⁵ ‘Destined for Success? Educational biographies of academically able pupils’, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (Award No R000235570).

⁶ ‘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).

⁷ This response rate is based on a total sample of 139. Although there were 142 respondents in the original research, three subsequently died. We have removed these from the sample for the purposes of calculating response rates.

2. Occupational status, security and satisfaction

The principal aim of the Scheme was to increase social mobility through providing a ‘ladder of opportunity’ that would enable academically able children from poor backgrounds to ‘escape’ the local comprehensive school and attend some of the country’s most prestigious private schools. At its launch, Rhodes Boyson (1982), the Minister responsible, argued that the Scheme would mean that ‘the boy or girl from an inner city area ... can now once again join the ladders of social and economic mobility.’

In earlier analyses of the impact of the Scheme on the educational and occupational careers of its beneficiaries (Power *et al* 2006b), we have shown that most Assisted Place holders left school with higher levels of qualifications than their state-schooled counterparts. The overwhelming majority (81 per cent) of the 77 respondents being considered here went on to higher education and the majority gained degrees from the more prestigious universities (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Higher education profile of respondents

	Number	%
Elite ⁸ university	12	15.6
Other ‘old’ university	38	49.4
‘New’ university	12	15.6
Did not go to HE	15	19.5

The translation of these high levels of qualifications into high level occupations endures and it would appear that our respondents continue to reap the benefits of their Assisted Places. Indeed, in the nine years since the last survey (Power *et al* 2006a), their overall occupational profile has risen considerably (Table 2.2). While the majority of our ex-Assisted Place holders were in professional or managerial posts in 2004, the proportion has increased from 66 per cent to 88 per cent. Only four cohort members are in any other type of employment (Intermediate) and no one is engaged in manual work.

There have been other changes in the occupational profile of our respondents. One quarter are now self-employed and most of these are ‘freelancing’ professionals or company ‘partners’. A significant minority of our female respondents (and it was only women) are working part-time to accommodate childcare responsibilities. Only a small number are not in paid employment at all. Again, most of the five in this category are women who were interrupting their careers to undertake full-time childcare. Only one respondent is unemployed as a result of being unable to find work.

⁸ Elite status refers to Oxbridge and other highly selective universities.

Table 2.2: Occupational profile⁹ of cohort in 2004 and 2013

	2004 Survey		2013 Survey	
	Number	%	Number	%
I & II (Professional and managerial)	41	66.1	66	88
IIINM (Intermediate)	11	17.7	4	5.3
IIIM, V & V (Manual)	1	1.6	0	0
Not in paid employment	9	14.5	5	6.7
Total	61	100	75 ¹⁰	100

Using the Hope-Goldthorpe classification (Goldthorpe & Hope 1974, Goldthorpe et al 1980), which gives us greater differentiation at the ‘upper’ end of the occupational scale, we can see that the overwhelming majority of those in paid employment are in what would be considered higher grade professional and managerial roles (such as architects, surgeons or barristers). Less than a third are in lower level professional and managerial positions (such as teachers or data analysts). Only a very small minority (6 per cent) are in ‘intermediate’ occupations (such as clerical work) and none are in what might be considered working class jobs.

Table 2.3: Occupational profile of graduates in paid employment

	Number	%
I Higher grade professionals and managers	46	65.7
II Lower grade professionals and managers	20	28.6
III-V Intermediate	4	5.7
VI-VII Working class	0	0
Total	70	100

However, as we have noted in earlier analyses (Power 2006b), those Assisted Place holders from the most disadvantaged backgrounds did not always gain the high levels of qualifications of their classmates and were more likely to leave school at 16 rather than progress on to A levels and higher education.

⁹ We use here the broad socio-economic categories of the Registrar General’s scale in order to be able to make direct comparisons between our two studies.

¹⁰ Two of the 77 respondents did not provide data on occupational status.

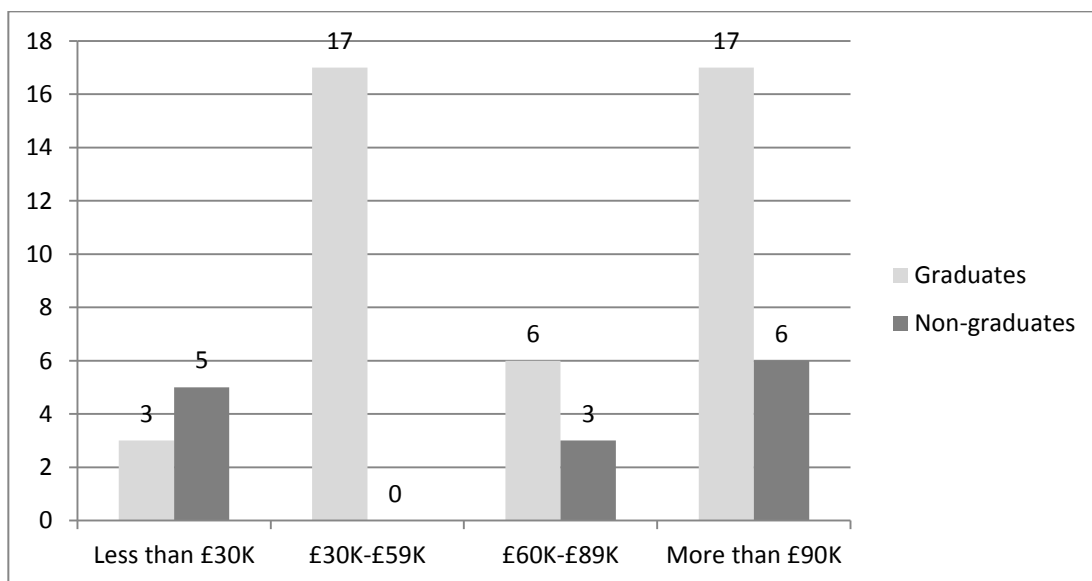
Indeed, these Assisted Place holders did less well than might be predicted than their state-schooled counterparts. But even those who left school at 16 or did not progress beyond A levels are now towards the top end of the occupational scale (Table 2.4). All of these non-graduates are currently employed are in professional and managerial positions. Over 70 per cent are in upper-level occupations (10/14) and just over a quarter are in lower level professional or managerial roles (4/14). None is in an intermediate or working class job.

Table 2.4: Occupational profile of non-graduates in paid employment

	Number	%
I Higher grade professionals and managers	10	71.4
II Lower grade professionals and managers	4	28.6
III-V Intermediate	0	0
VI-VII Working class	0	0
Total	14	100

In terms of occupational classifications, therefore, there do not appear to be any marked differences between those who graduated from university and those who did not. Although the number of non-graduates is small, these data could suggest that there is a premium in the labour market gained from attending a prestigious private school.

Graph 2.1: Earnings of graduates and non-graduates in full-time employment



Some evidence for what might be called a 'private school premium' can also be found when comparing income levels of our graduates and non-graduates (Graph 2.1). In general, and as might be expected, the overall earnings profile is high. Across the sample as a whole, 40 per cent are earning in excess of £90,000 per annum. However, while the non-graduates are disproportionately found at the lower end of the earnings spectrum, they are also well- represented at the upper end with 43 per cent - six of them earning over £90,000 per annum.

Success, security and satisfaction

Perhaps it is not surprising that over 90 per cent of our respondents regard themselves as 'successful'. Perception of success does not appear to relate to education, employment or earnings. Of the small number (four men and three women) who did not consider themselves successful, the majority were graduates (6/7). Three were in professional and managerial occupations and four were earning below £30,000 pa.

The relatively prosperous situation of our respondents was matched by generally high levels of satisfaction and security. Over four-fifths stated that they were satisfied (53 per cent) or very satisfied (33 per cent) with their current job.

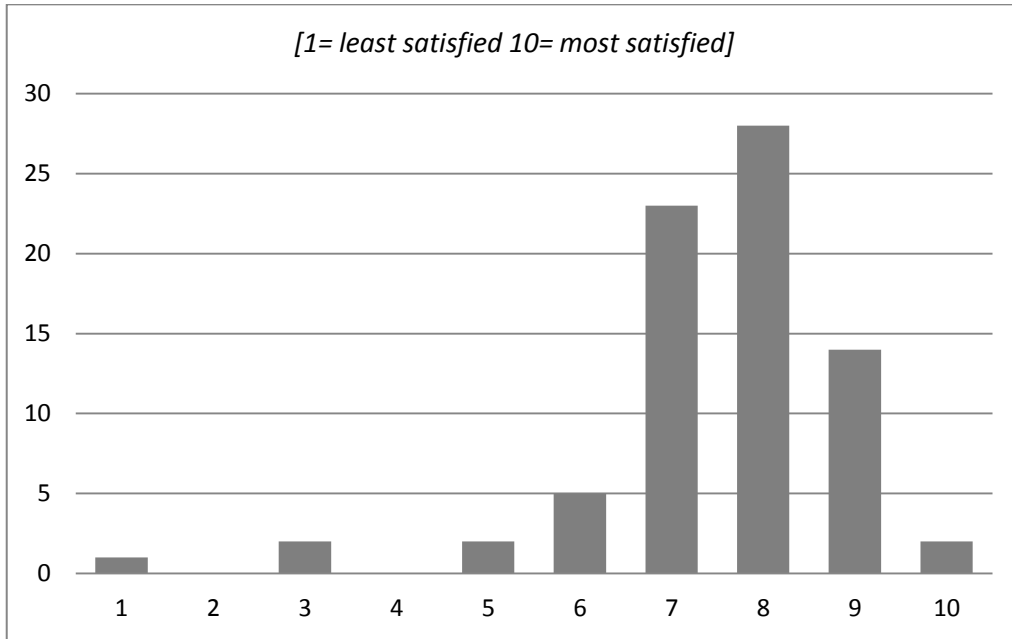
They reported that their current occupation provided them with interesting and challenging work (79 per cent), which is 'socially useful' (51 per cent), on competitive salaries (62 per cent) and with managerial opportunities (57 per cent).

When they were in their twenties, many of these young people envisaged having what are often described as 'portfolio careers' involving frequent shifts of employer and even radical career changes (see Power *et al* 2003). Now they are older, their careers appear much more stable – with a mean continuous career length of 12.5 years.

In general, our cohort appears to have been largely 'recession-proof'. Nearly two thirds (49/77) claimed that the current financial crisis had not affected their standard of living. They also reported being 'better off' than they were '10 years ago'. Fewer than one fifth (14/77) reported *not* being better off – and in over a third of these cases this can largely be attributed to moving from full-time to part-time work. Moreover, three quarters anticipated being better off in 10 years' time. In terms of occupational security, more than three quarters felt confident that even if they were made redundant, they would be 'very likely' (21 per cent) or 'likely' (53 per cent) to find similar work.

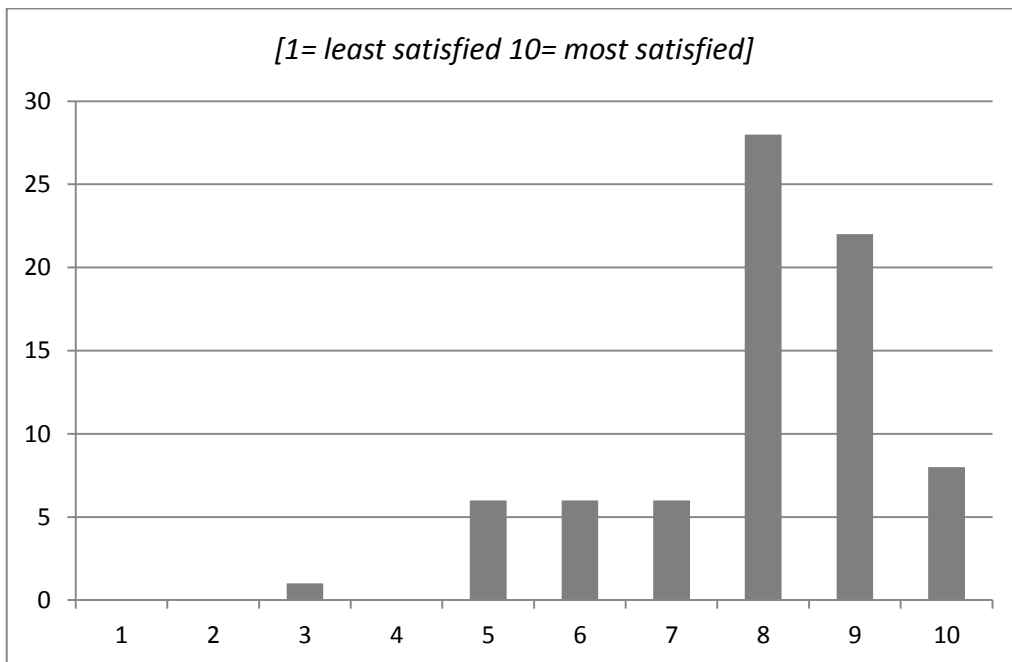
Their overall levels of satisfaction are evident in their own assessments of both their current and future circumstances. The overwhelming majority of respondents report high levels of satisfaction in response to the question 'How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way life has turned out so far?' (Graph 2.2).

Graph 2.2: 'How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way life has turned out so far?'



Their confidence in the future is reflected in their response to their predictions about how satisfied they expect to be in 10 years' time – where even higher levels of satisfaction were anticipated (Graph 3). Over 10 per cent of the respondents expected to be completely satisfied with their lives and fewer than a quarter of the sample expected to be less than what could broadly be considered 'very satisfied' with their lives in 10 years' time.

Graph 2.3: 'How satisfied or dissatisfied do you expect to be in 10 years' time?'



Further evidence of their confidence about their financial security in the future is evident in their plans for retirement. The most common preference being that people would like to retire early (39 per cent) (Graph 2.4).

Graph 2.4: Future retirement plans



In summary, we find our ex-Assisted Place holders in generally well-paid and secure employment in their early forties. Despite variable levels of educational qualifications, they generally enjoy high earnings, job satisfaction and confidence in the future. The extent to which their progress can be attributed to having received an Assisted Place is difficult to isolate. Nevertheless, the relative prosperity of our non-graduates suggests that there may be a private school premium that operates alongside and in addition to the higher levels of qualifications associated with these schools. In the next section we explore the extent to which the respondents themselves attribute their success to their secondary school experiences.

3. Accounting for Success

In the previous section we saw that our ex-Assisted Place holders report high levels of occupational success, earnings, job satisfaction and confidence in the future. Our non-graduates were generally as well-placed as our graduate respondents. In this section, we attempt to unravel the extent to which these high levels of confidence can be attributed to the sponsorship afforded by their Assisted Places.

The importance of education

We asked our respondents to identify a number of aspects that may have contributed to their success (or lack of it). Those who considered themselves successful take a clear meritocratic perspective on their achievements – which are accounted for in terms of ability and hard work (Table 3.1). Although education was not deemed the *most* important factor by the largest number of respondents, it did figure fairly highly in their accounts of their success. Correspondingly, and against overwhelming social scientific evidence to the contrary, social background was deemed to be less significant as an explanation in their success – with only one individual considering it to be ‘very important’.

Table 3.1: To what do you attribute your success? (n=70)

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not at all important
Ability	88.4%	11.6%	0.0%
Hard work	77.1%	21.4%	1.4%
Education	67.1%	25.7%	7.1%
Ambition	45.7%	52.9%	1.4%
Social networks	24.6%	44.9%	30.4%
Luck	17.4%	71.0%	11.6%
Social background	1.4%	42.9%	55.7%

Interpreting the significance of the weight our respondents give to different factors is difficult. It might be argued that our respondents are simply wrong – that their explanations for their own success erroneously privilege individual capabilities and marginalise more structural determinants. On the other hand, it might be argued that the opportunities afforded by the Assisted Places Scheme did actually enable their hard work and ability to be rewarded – that the Scheme led to more meritocratic outcomes than would have otherwise been the case. From this perspective, it may be that for *these* individuals, social background was less important in influencing their subsequent achievements.

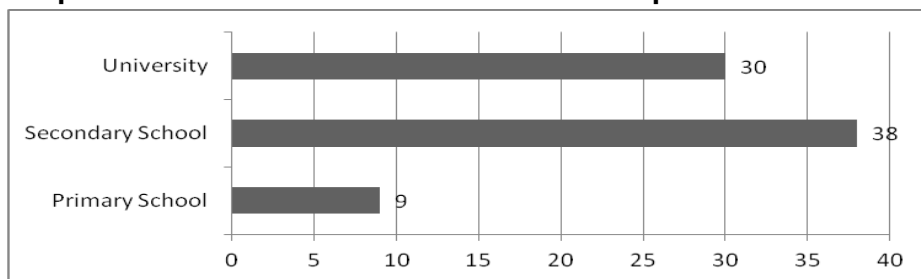
Perhaps not surprisingly, those seven respondents who do not consider themselves

successful did not identify the same factors as explanations. Thus lack of hard work and/or lack of ability were not seen as important explanations of the lack of success. The factor identified most frequently as being significant was 'lack of ambition' – which was rated 'very important' or 'somewhat important' by six individuals.

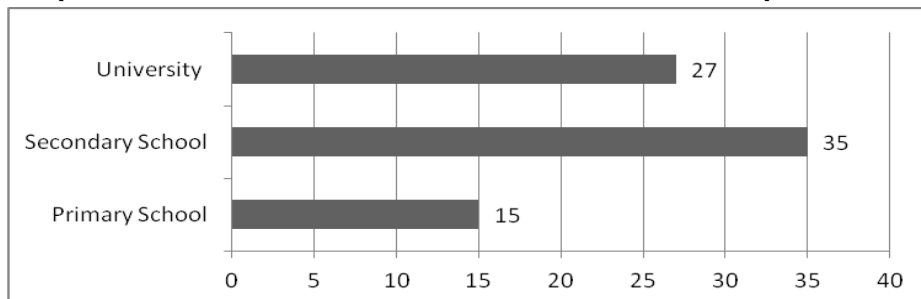
Which level of education mattered most?

Because we were interested in trying to isolate the significance of the Assisted Places Scheme, we asked our respondents which level of education was most important in shaping their future. The following graphs (Graphs 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3) show the relative importance of primary, secondary and higher education institutions.

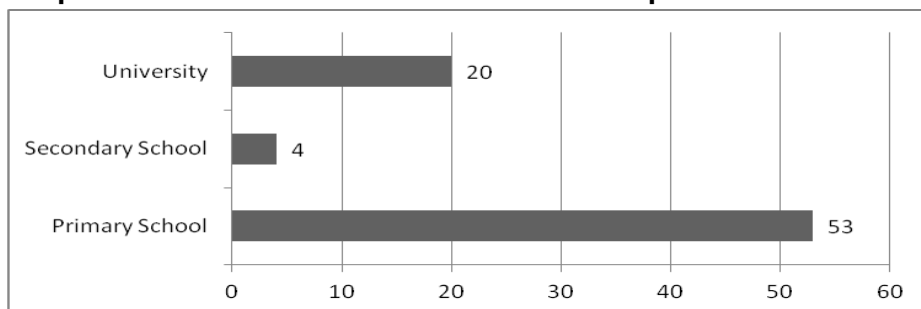
Graph 3.1: Level of education deemed most important



Graph 3.2: Level of education deemed second most important



Graph 3.3: Level of education deemed least important



These graphs indicate that there is general consensus that primary schools are the *least* important in shaping future destinations and that secondary schools are the *most* important. There is more ambivalence about higher education, where opinion appears to be divided. In general, though, the perceptions of our Assisted Place holders indicate that it was their sponsorship into particular kinds of secondary schools that proved important for their future careers.

What was it about their secondary education that mattered?

Clearly secondary schools play an important role in helping students obtain the necessary qualifications to enter those universities that are going to enable them to pursue well-paid prestigious careers. But they also aim to develop a range of ‘soft skills’ that are increasingly important in recruitment processes. Indeed, private schools are often as keen to emphasise their contribution to fostering these kinds of skills as they are to helping students get good grades (eg HMC 2013). Research by the Independent Schools Council (ISC 2013) into public perceptions of independent schooling has shown that 66 per cent of the population believes that their schools instil a sense of confidence in pupils and 49 per cent agree with the view that they excel in developing ‘soft’ skills such as communications and teamwork, which are important to employers. Therefore, another key area where one would expect to see a continued legacy from the private education that this cohort received would be in ‘softer’ attributes such as self-confidence or social awareness.

Table 3.2: To what extent did your school help you develop.....?

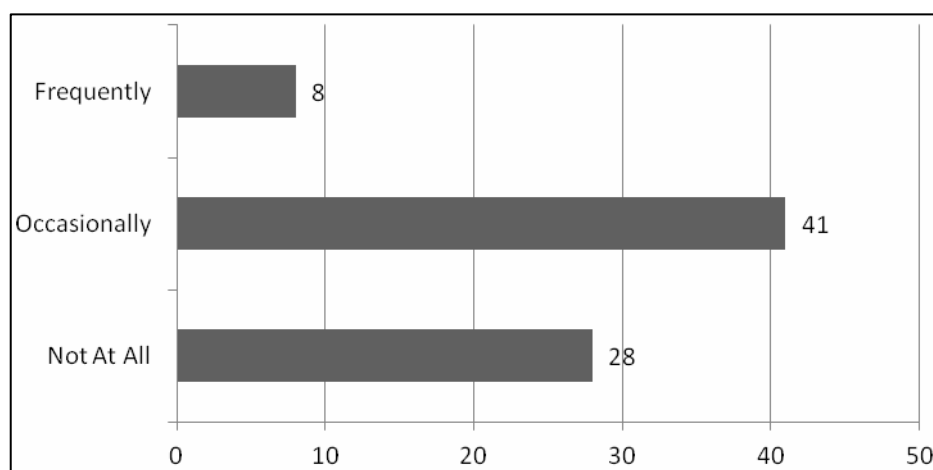
	A lot	Somewhat	Not at all
Self-reliance	58.4%	31.2%	10.4%
Self-discipline	54.5%	36.4%	9.1%
Ambition	45.5%	37.7%	16.9%
Curiosity	41.6%	44.2%	14.3%
Communication skills	36.4%	55.8%	7.8%
Cultural sophistication	36.4%	48.1%	15.6%
Self-confidence	26.0%	55.8%	18.2%
Social awareness	22.4%	53.9%	23.7%
Leadership skills	19.5%	46.8%	33.8%
Teamwork	15.6%	66.2%	18.2%

The responses of our Assisted Place holders (Table 3.2) are at some variance with popular perceptions identified by the ISC research. The soft skills that were most commonly identified as being developed by these independent schools were self-reliance, self-discipline and ambition, while less than a fifth of our respondents felt that their schools made a significant contribution to the development of teamwork and leadership skills. There was also significant ambivalence about the schools' contribution to the development of self-confidence and social awareness.

The 'old boy' network?

It is often claimed that those who attend prestigious private schools benefit from the advantages of being part of an 'old boy' network that provides privileged and enduring access to particular career and social opportunities. We were therefore interested to know how many of our respondents (male and female) are still in contact with ex-pupils and in what capacity (Graph 3.4).

Graph 3.4: How often do you communicate with your old school friends? (n = 77)



Only a minority (10 per cent) remain in frequent contact with their old school friends. However, the majority (53 per cent) still have occasional contact. Those who are in contact with old school friends were asked to briefly describe the nature these contacts. While the majority of these contacts are of a non-professional nature, one fifth (20 per cent) of our respondents maintain contact with old schools friends in a professional capacity. The nature of these contacts includes chance encounters ('Coincidentally, I have sometimes had conference speakers that were acquaintances from school') as well as more strategic networking ('I recommended a contact to speak to about a potential job opportunity'). A few explicitly stated that these contacts either helped them or their contact in their career.

These data, together with the relative importance attached to social networks developed at school (Table 3.1), suggest that there is some evidence that private schools are important in forging long-lasting and professionally significant connections.

In summary, our respondents perceive that their private secondary education was an important factor, perhaps *the* most important factor, in shaping their subsequent careers. In addition to fostering (and rewarding) hard work and academic ability, they report that the schools they attended were significant in the development of personal attributes, such as self-discipline and self-reliance. These schools also appear to have contributed to the development of enduring social networks. These might contribute to a possible 'private school premium'.

4. Allegiances and attitudes

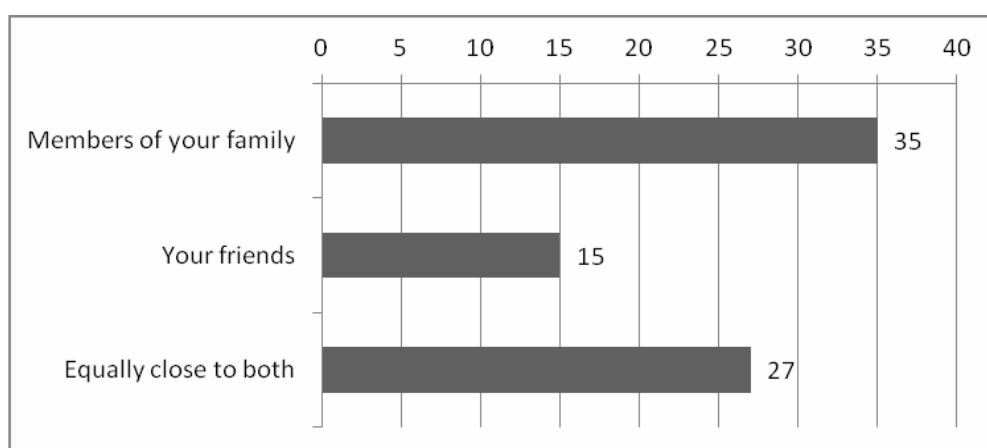
Of course education is not only about 'skills' - hard or soft. Schools are important in developing allegiances and influencing attitudes. It is often argued that one of the benefits (but also one of the risks) of initiatives such as the Assisted Places Scheme is that they dislocate children from economically and culturally disadvantaged milieux and place them in more culturally advantaged environments where the press for academic achievement is much stronger. This 'distancing' from their social background is likely to have consequences beyond qualifications. Jackson and Marsden (1966: 177) in their celebrated study of the impact of a grammar school education found that working class children reported significant ambivalence about their social circumstances in adulthood. They claim that social mobility was not 'easy and triumphant'. They found that, despite successful careers, their informants frequently seemed to display 'a drifting, rudderless existence' as they became distanced from the 'affective securities of family life and the social strengths of neighbouring community'.

In this section we will be concerned to examine the extent to which the privileged education experienced by our Assisted Place holders has dislocated them from their social background and contributed to particular kinds of outlook.

Family, friends and partners

As we saw in the last section, nearly two thirds of our respondents are still in touch with their school friends. However, it does not appear that these friendships have supplanted family ties (Graph 4.1).

Graph 4.1: Who are you closest to?



Of course, the lack of dissonance between their new social circles and family background may reflect the relatively advantaged background of some of our Assisted Place holders.

However, the pattern is the same even when we look at those few respondents from working class backgrounds.

The lack of apparent distancing from families may also reflect the more differentiated society where the division between middle class and working class is less clear cut and where one’s class location is less defined by one’s occupation and relates also to patterns of cultural consumption. These kinds of changes are reflected in new social classification systems – and particularly that developed by Savage *et al* (2013). We asked our respondents to self-classify using this scale (Graph 4.2).¹¹

Graph 4.2: Respondents’ self-classification using the new classification system¹²



¹¹ 17 responded ‘none of these apply to me’.

¹² Savage *et al*’s (2013) classification system is as follows :

<i>Elite</i>	This is the wealthiest and most privileged group in the UK, They score highest for social, cultural and economic factors.
<i>Established middle class</i>	This is the most gregarious and the second wealthiest of all the class groups, people in this group enjoy a diverse range of cultural activities
<i>Technical middle class</i>	This is a small, distinctive and prosperous new class group, they prefer emerging culture to highbrow culture
<i>New affluent workers</i>	A young class group which is socially and culturally active, with middling levels of economic capital
<i>Traditional working class</i>	This class group scores low for economic, social and cultural factors, but they do have some financial security
<i>Emergent service Workers</i>	This class group is financially insecure with low scores for savings and house value, but high for social and cultural factors
<i>Precariat</i>	This is the poorest and most deprived class group, people in this group score low for economic, social and cultural factors

The diversity of their responses (and the low frequency of working class identification) indicates a move away from simple dichotomous working-middle class identification.

The extent to which their social circles are socially heterogeneous may reflect upward mobility – distancing from more lowly social origins. Local networks may be supplemented by more cosmopolitan social circles – nearly two thirds (64 per cent) having social circles which were geographically widespread rather than localised.

Just over half of our respondents are still in the regions where they were born. The others have moved regions – particularly to the South East which was the destination for over half of the ‘movers’ and 35 per cent of the sample as a whole. Six respondents are currently living overseas.

Our respondents also tend to mix with similarly well-qualified people – 79 per cent report that their social circle comprises members who are most likely to be graduates. However, there is also some evidence that their upward career trajectories have not entailed losing touch with less privileged friends. For example, the majority of respondents (60 per cent) report that most members of their social circle are state-educated rather than privately-educated. Additionally, over half the sample (56 per cent) claim that they are better off than most of the members of their social network.

While most respondents still experience close relations with family members irrespective of their class of origin, they are most likely to have settled down with partners like themselves. The vast majority of participants are either married or co-habiting (84 per cent) and living in a home that they are in the process of buying (57 per cent). Of those who are either married or co-habiting, most have partners who are in paid employment (88 per cent). Three-quarters of their partners are educated to degree level or higher (75 per cent) with over a fifth having higher level qualifications such as a Masters or Doctorate (20 per cent). In terms of the continued social legacy of attending private schools, just over a quarter of the respondents who are married or co-habiting have a partner who also attended private school. This form of ‘assortative mating’ is likely to have important implications for the extent to which their educational advantages can protect their children from subsequent downward social mobility (see Ermisch and Francesconi 2002; Bukodi and Goldthorpe 2012)

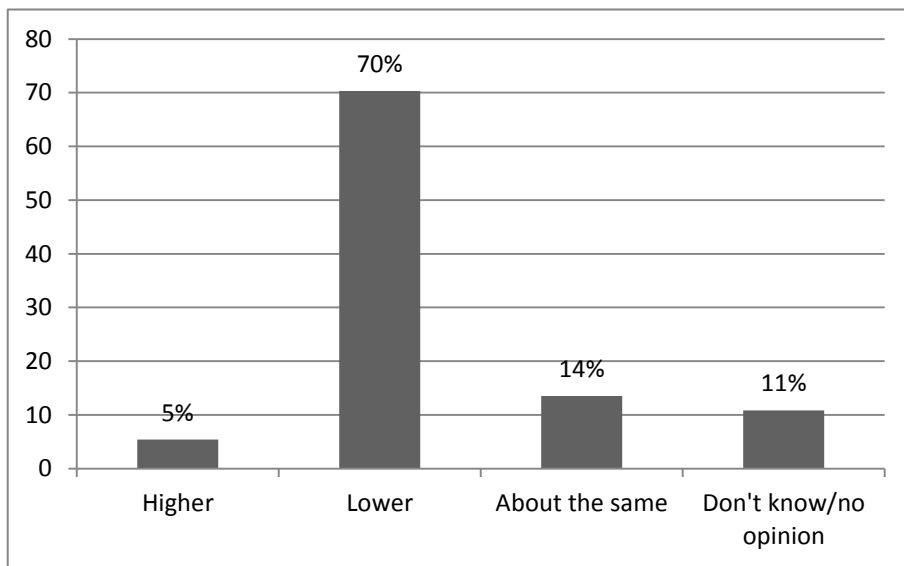
Attitudes towards education

In addition to finding out how their private education might have affected their social relationships, we were interested to know whether they shared any particular political perspectives. We have noted before (Power *et al* 2003) that there is some evidence for a ‘private sector’ affinity amongst those who were privately educated and came from private sector backgrounds. This manifested itself in terms of preferences for particular sectors of employment and political preferences.

Of the 57 respondents¹³ in full-time employment, over two thirds (69 per cent) worked in the private sector and just over a quarter (28 per cent) worked in the public sector (mostly in education and health services). Two respondents worked in the voluntary sector.

As we have seen in the last section, our respondents accounted for their own success in terms of individual attributes which is usually seen as indicative of a more conservative political orientation. Certainly, they were very positive about private education in general (Graph 4.3).

Graph 4.3: Do you believe that educational standards in state schools are higher, lower or about the same as independent schools?



Over 70 per cent of our parents claimed that that standards in private schools were higher than in state schools – with only four (5 per cent) claiming the opposite to be the case. This question is replicated in our survey from an annual survey by the Independent Schools Council (ISC) to a sample of 2075 people that is designed to be representative of the UK population. In 2012 this survey showed that 59 per cent of the sample believed educational standards were higher at independent schools with only 6 per cent saying that state schools had the better education. Another difference between the ISC data and our respondents is that 23 per cent of the ISC sample believes that standards are roughly the same in state and independent schools whereas only 13.5 per cent of our sample agreed. Therefore our cohort is more likely to think highly of private school standards than the general population.

However, while our sample is well-disposed towards private education, this does not translate straightforwardly into voting preferences. The majority of participants voted in the last election (78 per cent excluding those who refused the question) and those who did generally voted for the mainstream parties with the Conservatives being narrowly the most popular (32 per cent), the Liberal Democrats (27 per cent) were narrowly more popular than Labour (25 per cent).

¹³ It was impossible to ascertain the sector of employment for five respondents.

When asked who they would vote for if a general election were called tomorrow there were some fairly big changes. The biggest shift in their voting intentions was away from the Liberal Democrats (7 per cent) who have fallen from the second most popular party to behind the Green Party (14 per cent) and only narrowly above the UK Independence Party (3 per cent). Labour and the Conservatives would be equally successful among our cohort in an immediate general election, each accounting for 31 per cent.

In summary, the social allegiances of our respondents do not appear to be characterised by significant dislocation from their families – although they do appear to have moved into more cosmopolitan and educated social circles. They are overwhelmingly positive about private education, but this is not straightforwardly translated into voting preferences - although of course this may tell us more about changes in of traditional party political positions rather than the political persuasions of our informants.

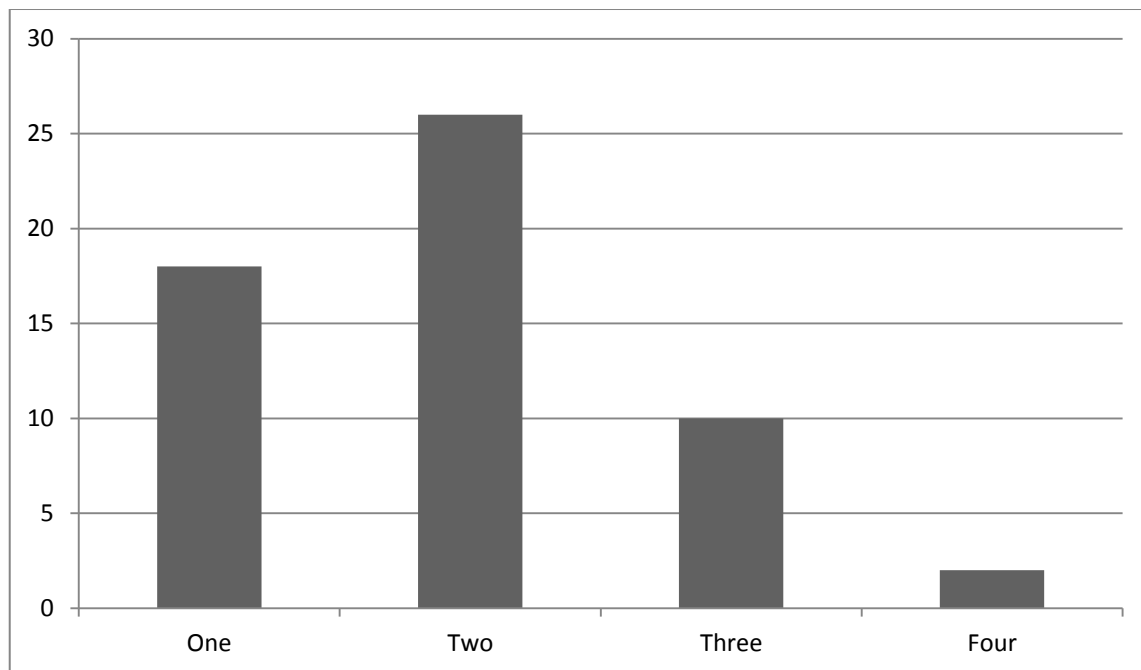
5. Their children's education

In trying to understand the significance of schemes such as the Assisted Places Scheme, it is important to take a long view. If the Scheme has been influential in shaping the destinations of its beneficiaries, its reach may extend beyond their own lives. It may have an impact on the decisions they make about their children's education which will ultimately shape their children's futures. It is these decisions which we explore in this section.

Our respondents as parents

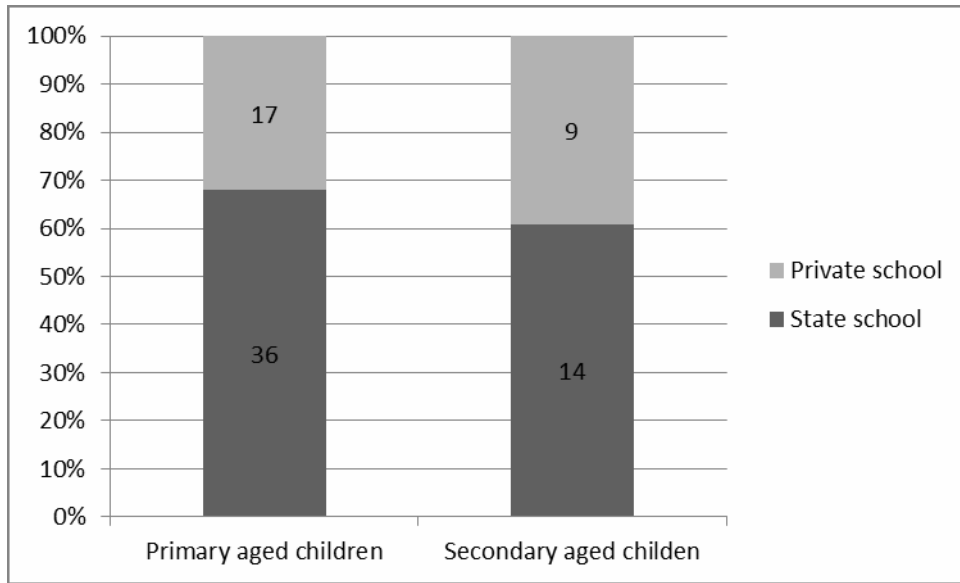
Three quarters (74 per cent) of our respondents have now started families. The size of family (Graph 5.1) is broadly in line with the UK average of 1.8 children for married couples and 1.7 for the population as a whole (ONS 2012). Forty-five respondents have children of school age. Most of these children are now between five and ten – although five respondents have children who are over 18 years old and have already left school.

Graph 5.1: Respondents' number of children



Of the forty-five parents with school-aged children, just under one half (47 per cent) have chosen private schools at some point in their child's education. Although this is less than might be expected given the overwhelming endorsement of standards in private schools reported in the last section (Graph 4.3), it is significantly above the UK-wide figure of 7 per cent parents who choose to send their children to a private school. As one might expect, the proportion at private secondary schools is higher than at private primary schools (Graph 5.2).

Graph 5.2: Proportion of respondents' children attending state or private schools



As might be anticipated, and in line with the UK picture, parents currently living in the South East of England are the most likely to use private schools. Although numbers are small, eight of the 16 parent respondents here send their children to private schools.

Influences in choosing a school for their children

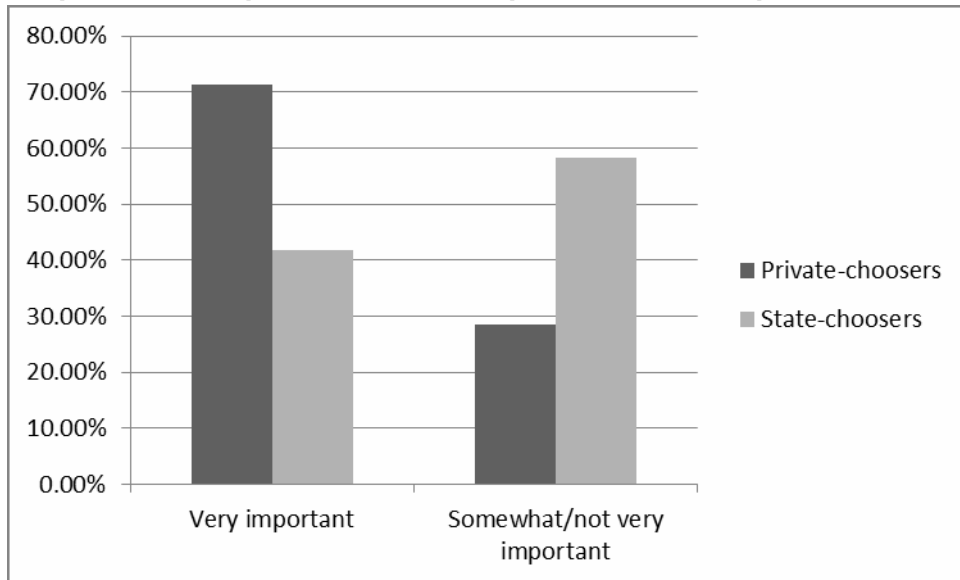
We asked parents to rate the importance of a range of factors that might be considered important when making decisions about schools (Table 5.3). Interestingly, it is the quality of the local state-maintained schools that is the top-rated factor. This is the case for those who chose private schools and those who chose state-maintained schools. This suggests that despite a strong private sector affinity, it is the quality of state-maintained provision which acts either as a push factor (for private school choosers) or a pull factor (for the state school choosers). Not surprisingly, reputation and academic profile were also very important factors for both sets of parents.

Table 5.3: Factors influencing choice of school (n=57)

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not at all important
Quality of the local state school	84.2%	14.0%	1.8%
Reputation of the school	77.2%	22.8%	0.0%
Academic profile of the school	75.4%	22.8%	1.8%
Respondent’s school experience	54.4%	38.6%	7.0%
Distance from home	39.3%	55.4%	5.4%
Cost	33.3%	49.1%	17.5%
Maintaining child’s friendships	24.6%	63.2%	12.3%
Child’s preference	21.1%	70.2%	8.8%

The only factor for which there is a statistically significant difference between those parents who chose a private school and those who chose a state-maintained school for their children is that relating to the respondent’s own experience of school (Graph 5.4). The majority of those who chose private did so based on their own experience of private education, whereas the majority of those choosing the state school did not.

Graph 5.4 The importance of the respondent’s own experience of school



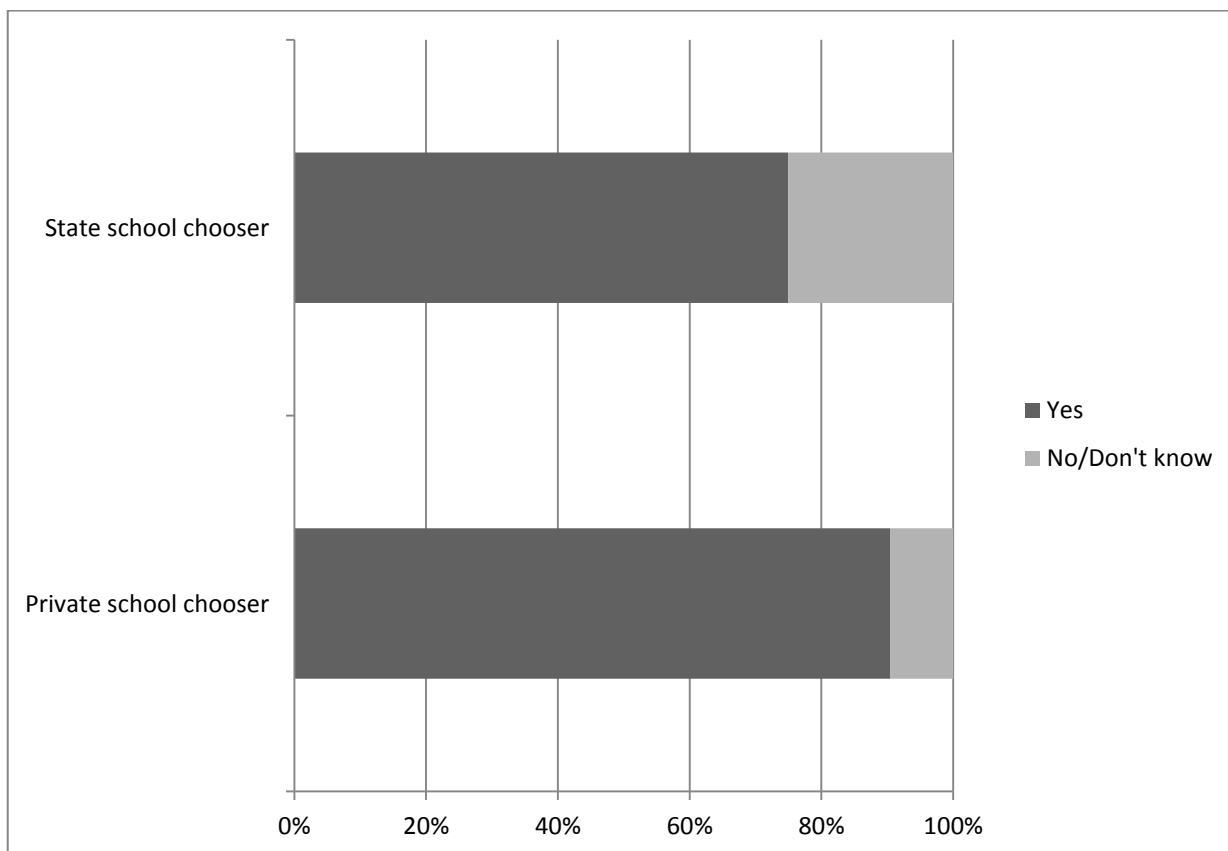
As with the other factors, distance, cost, children’s friendships and preferences were somewhat important. There was no significant difference between state and private school choosers in the relative importance attached to these factors.

Finally, we asked parents about whether they would like to see a new Assisted Places Scheme introduced. There is huge support from these beneficiaries for reinstating the Scheme. Eighty-two per cent would like to see the Scheme reintroduced, only one in ten said they would not, and a further seven per cent did not know.

We could find no significant background factor to account for those who did not want to see the Scheme reintroduced in terms of variables such as attainment, occupation, income, life satisfaction or perceptions of success. Those members of our cohort who could be broadly considered as being from a 'working class' background almost unanimously support the reintroduction of the scheme.

There is a difference between those parents who have chosen private schools for their own children and those who have not (Graph 5.5). It should be noted that their enthusiasm for a reintroduction of assisted places is unlikely to be based on a personal benefit as their overall income levels would indicate that their own children would not be eligible for financial support if the Scheme were reintroduced.

Graph 5.5: Would you like to see the Assisted Places Scheme reintroduced?



In short, it would appear that the experience of having an Assisted Place has influenced the choices about schooling that our respondents are making for their children. Although the quality of the local state school appears to be the most significant factor in either attracting parents to the state-maintained school or propelling them towards private provision, our ex-Assisted Place

holders are generally very positive about private schooling in general and the reintroduction of the Scheme in particular.

Conclusion and Discussion

This research has sought to understand the legacy of the Assisted Place Scheme on a small sample of individuals who received an Assisted Place over 30 years ago. It is of course impossible to ascertain with any certainty how our respondents might have fared had they not received an Assisted Place. This, and earlier research, shows that most Assisted Place holders gained good school-level qualifications that gave them access to leading universities. This study shows that they have continued their upward trajectory in professional and managerial occupations and are now in relatively secure and satisfying occupations with high levels of earnings. From this perspective, the Scheme is an unqualified success and arguably reveals meritocracy at work. Certainly, our respondents accounted for their own achievements in terms of the meritocratic formula of ability and effort. The relative unimportance they attach to factors such as luck and social background suggest that for these individuals the Scheme alleviated the impact of socio-economic disadvantage.

Of particular interest, though, are those Assisted Place holders who left school early and *did not* progress to university – the majority of whom came from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. Even these individuals are now in solidly middle class occupations with good incomes. This suggests that they have benefitted from a private school premium over and above that associated with educational attainment.

While a private school premium might be explained in terms of the range of soft skills that these schools claim to foster, it raises important issues about the meritocratic principles underpinning the Scheme. We know that, in the UK, one of the main barriers to greater intergenerational social mobility is the ability of middle class parents to utilise their resources to protect their children from downward mobility (Goldthorpe and Jackson 2008). The existence of a private school premium may be one of the elements in providing this kind of protection. If this is the case, questions might be asked about whether making such protection more widely available constitutes a good use of public funds.

However, even if we use the success of the Scheme to indicate that political (and financial) interventions can be effective at overcoming the negative impact of social disadvantage on educational attainment, it is difficult to know how the benefits of the Assisted Places Scheme can be ‘scaled up’ to the point where they increase opportunities for more than a few.¹⁴ The schools our respondents attended had a number of attributes – academically selective, single sex and private – for which it is difficult to isolate the relative effect. It may well be that it is the academic press associated with academic selection which is key – but the widespread reintroduction of the grammar schools is not even being pursued as a policy objective by the leadership of the Conservative Party. In England, there has been a blurring of the boundary between private and state provision associated with the introduction of free schools and

¹⁴ Additionally, we need to be cautious about presuming that even the success stories reported in this survey will have long-lasting consequences. Historical analysis (eg Long 2007; Long and Ferrie 2007) suggests that upward social mobility may be short-lived. Looking at only one cycle of intergenerational mobility significantly overestimates the degree of upward social mobility as the children of upwardly socially mobile parents are quite likely to be downwardly socially mobile themselves.

academies. This may make some form of private (and single sex) provision more widely available. But for such initiatives to bring about a system-wide weakening of the strong association between socio-economic disadvantage and low educational attainment remains a major challenge, notwithstanding the individual experiences reported here.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Sutton Trust for the grant that has made this project possible. We would also like to acknowledge the support of the Economic and Social Research Council, which enabled us to undertake the previous surveys that are cited in this report.

We also appreciate the support of Tina Woods, WISERD Administrator, for her assistance with the research.

As always, we are grateful to our respondents and would like to thank them warmly for giving up their time in increasingly busy lives to complete the survey.

Annex - methodology

The survey

A short survey was developed that was designed to elicit data on the respondents' current occupation, income and future plans. It also gathered data on 'softer' attributes, such as self-confidence, relationships and involvement in civil society. In addition to assessing the impact of the Scheme on their current lives, we were also concerned to find out how it has influenced the decisions they have made about their children's education.

The survey was developed in three formats – online, postal and telephone - in order to enhance response rates. We encouraged participants to use an online version wherever possible.

Tracing the sample

As with all longitudinal research, keeping track of cohort members' whereabouts is a major challenge. Perhaps because of their significant occupational successes, this is slightly easier for our cohort than for other more disadvantaged groups. Many of our respondents have high levels of online visibility for professional purposes. This includes being featured on company websites (often with direct contact information) and professional networking sites. In particular, LinkedIn proved a useful tool because it allows users to search for individuals based upon the educational institutions they have attended and previous employers. This meant even having relatively out-dated information about these Assisted Place holders (for example the university that they attended) narrowed down possible participants significantly.

We were able to recruit 16 participants using LinkedIn, including two who had not participated in the research since the initial interviews in 1980s. We were able to locate a further cohort members using Facebook – although in only two cases did this lead to returned surveys. We were able to contact twelve participants directly with either email addresses or phone numbers taken from company websites and a further four through a combination of different websites, including the directory enquiries website 192.com. A total of 34 participants were recruited using these various online tracking methods including all 23 of the 'lost' participants. The remainder of the participants were contacted using existing information from previous waves of this research (43). Attempts were made to contact a further 29 participants either through details that we already had or those found through various tracking methods. The lack of response from these participants was likely due to a combination of mistaken identity (particularly tracking online), changed addresses and refusal to participate.

Response rates

This will be the fifth time that we have approached this cohort of Assisted Place holders -with variable success on each occasion. Of the original 142 students interviewed while they were at school in the early 1980s, 84 participated in the 'Destined for Success?' project (1994-8) when they were in their mid-twenties, 62 responded to a questionnaire survey as part of the 2003-4 project 'Success sustained' and 25 were interviewed in 2008. For this research, we attempted not only to include the previous respondents, but also to reincorporate as many of our 'lost' Assisted Place holders as possible. We were successful in recruiting 23 our 'lost' participants (16.6% of the total sample) including three who had been lost to us since the 1980s¹⁵. This study received responses from 77 Assisted Place holders, giving us a response rate of 55.4%.¹⁶

Representativeness

In order to assess whether our participating Assisted Place holders are representative of the cohort as a whole, we compared the attributes of respondents with non-respondents. We anticipated that there would be some systematic bias, with those cohort members responding to this survey being more likely to have more advantaged socio-economic backgrounds, higher levels of educational and occupational success than our non-respondents. However, we could not find evidence of this. Comparison of parental occupations, sex, school leaving age, qualification levels and subsequent occupational destinations showed no statistically significant variation. This leads us to conclude that there is no reason why the range of experiences and perceptions presented here should not be seen as indicative of those of the broader cohort.

¹⁵ The proportion of respondents within successive surveys is as follows:

	No of AP holders	% of original sample	% in 2013 survey
2013	77	55.4%	100.0%
2008	25	18.0%	81.5%
2004	46	33.1%	40.3%
1994-98	52	37.4%	26.0%
1981-85	139	100.0%	55.4%

¹⁶ This response rate is based on a total sample of 139. Although there were 142 respondents in the original research, three subsequently died. We have removed these from the sample for the purposes of calculating response rates.

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