

## SSAT Annual Lecture and Debate 2014

### Embedding social mobility for all young people

Thursday, 11 September 2014

**Introducing SSAT's 2014 annual lecture in London on 11 September, chief executive Sue Williamson emphasised the importance of its theme: embedding social mobility for all young people. It is a key part of the moral imperative to provide education and opportunities for all, she said.**

The meeting included a debate as well as a lecture, with six main speakers and significant contributions from the audience of well over 100, which included some of the leading opinion formers and practitioners in English education.

Even major companies involved in social change and new technologies are not all confident that they are doing enough to address the issues of social mobility that directly affect them, said Mike Byrne, director of management consulting at Accenture, the lecture's sponsors. For his own company, he said, 'social mobility is an issue Accenture has only recently started to look at. It is an important learning experience for us.' This despite the fact that the company is responsible for the Skills to Succeed Academy, a

widely used and highly successful cloud-based learning programme for young unemployed people. It provides access to the advice and skills they need to identify a suitable career, find a job, and most importantly keep that job.



Pupil Premium Champion Sir John Dunford, who chaired the meeting, said closing the gap is the big challenge. He told the audience the meeting should 'fire up your ideas on what you can do to help bring this about. Social mobility in this country has been very poor in the past, and worse than that in many other countries. But I've always found SSAT is a "can do" organisation', so he thought it most appropriate that the organisation was holding this event – 'together, we can make a contribution.'<sup>1</sup>

He then introduced Graham Stuart, chair of the parliamentary education select committee, commending Mr Stuart's performance in that role as 'sharp and good humoured'.



*This meeting should 'fire up your ideas on what you can do' to help bring about social mobility in this country.*

*John Dunford*



<sup>1</sup> See panel on page 16, which summarises key suggestions and recommendations from all the speakers at this event.

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## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES



**Graham Stuart MP**  
*Chair, Education Select Committee*

Graham Stuart began by stating that the job of the education committee – which comprises five conservative MPs, five labour and one liberal – is to scrutinise the work of the DfE, and to ‘keep the Secretary of State honest.’ So ‘education standards and social mobility are absolutely central to my role. If we get it right, our education system can be an engine for social mobility.’

Since the start of the coalition government they had seen ‘some significant improvement’ in English education, with 154 failing schools in 2013 against 407 in 2010. This means 250,000 fewer students are now being taught in failing schools.

Particularly relevant in this context was a more negative statistic: in 2013, white British children eligible for free school meals (FSM) were the lowest performing group in GCSE at age 16, with 31% achieving A\*-C including English and maths (against the national average of 60.6%).

The government’s response has included widening access to

free childcare to the 40% most disadvantaged two-year-olds, and an extra £2.5bn pa committed to the pupil premium (PP), which now covers early years. However, it is very important that this is targeted properly, he pointed out: ‘extra resources will not provide the answer by and of themselves’. Ofsted is now focusing more closely on the way PP is used in schools, but the real key to reducing the attainment gap is the training and distribution of high-quality teachers.

Meeting chairman John Dunford welcomed this increased focus by Ofsted on the way schools spend their PP money: ‘money and Ofsted are what keep a lot of heads awake at night, for good and bad reasons,’ he said.

### **Effective teachers benefit poor children more**

Graham Stuart noted the work of Eric Hanushek of Stanford University, California, with London School of Economics: they found that in one year a very effective teacher adds an extra 25-45% performance in maths, compared with poor teachers. A particularly important finding in this research was that children from poor backgrounds recorded double the benefit of their wealthier peers. He concluded from this that school governors should keep a close eye on the resources devoted to ‘ever 6’ children; and the best teachers should be working where they are needed most, with these children.

That the poorest children can achieve well when they work with

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*Research into very effective teachers has found that children from poor backgrounds recorded double the benefit of their wealthier peers*

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outstanding teachers was shown by the example of King Solomon's Academy in Paddington, West London. This is in a deeply depressed area: 12% of the children are diagnosed with special needs, 51% are eligible for FSM, and 65% have English as an additional language. Yet this year, Mr Stuart reported, 93% achieved five or more GCSEs at A\*-C including English and maths, and 75% secured the EBacc. This shows 'these kids can aspire to the same standards as those from more affluent homes.'

## **Incentives needed**

So, based on this information, how to narrow the gap? Graham Stuart believed the system must provide incentives for the best teachers and school leaders to work in the toughest schools. In the current system, there are many idealistic teachers and leaders, but they are incentivised to work elsewhere, he maintained. 'Headteachers in successful schools in leafy suburbs are far less likely to be fired than those who work in inner-city schools.'

'Some sharp-edged accountability is needed, but we must be careful that people are not penalised for working in our toughest schools.'

He backed the widely expressed view that good schools should work with the weaker ones. The education committee strongly supports the demand for government to widen funding support for collaboration beyond academic partnerships. It should increase the use of targeted seed-corn funding for some

independent and state schools to work together. He also supports HMCI Michael Wilshaw's view that leadership awards should be reserved for those working in the toughest schools. The emphasis until now has been primarily on inner-city schools, but Ofsted is rightly now focusing on rural and coastal areas too. Four of the five worst-performing LAs in terms of education for FSM children are Peterborough, West Berkshire, Hereford and the Isle of Wight, Graham Stuart reported.

A funding formula based on need rather than political considerations should be a priority for the next government, the education committee insists.

## **Careers advice and guidance**

Turning to careers information, advice and guidance, Mr Stuart said it was 'understandably poor' in most schools, because they have a disincentive to advertise alternative courses that would take students away – 'there's an overwhelming imperative to keep bums on seats.' In addition, there are many other pressing issues for heads to deal with, and they are not incentivised to prioritise the long-term interests of the child as opposed to short-term exam results.

The solutions to this, he suggested, included every school having one governor responsible for children's careers. He cited the example of the Humber Local E.P. whose schools offer face-to-face careers guidance, mentoring, work experience and enterprise clubs. It specifically

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targets students identified as most at risk of becoming NEET (not in employment, education or training).

He also challenged the stereotype of 'social mobility' as 'the child from a bleak estate who makes it to Oxford or some other leading institution. That will only ever apply to a small number of people. The real challenge is for those at risk of falling out of the system to obtain skills and qualifications they need to get a worthwhile job. It may not be so spectacular, but it's those young people who need social mobility the most in order to make something of their lives.'



## **Mike Byrne**

*Head of health and public service management consulting for global management consulting, outsourcing and technology company Accenture*

Research shows young people from low-income backgrounds often have very similar aspiration levels to those from higher-income backgrounds, said Mike Byrne. The difference is that, while the aspirations of those from lower-income backgrounds are high, their expectations of the process and outcomes are low. 'Unfortunately, there is good evidence that their expectations are often accurate,' he noted.

Mike Byrne also discussed some of the social mobility challenges facing his company and others in the private sector, the steps they are taking to address them, and the implications for young people and schools.

## **Demand planning**

'Most large organisations we work with struggle to accurately predict their future skills requirements, largely because the world is changing so fast,' he said. 'Five-year plans are almost unheard of now – they have been replaced by three-year or even one-year plans.' This means the education, qualifications and skills that were needed in the past are being rapidly enhanced and even replaced.

There is a 'war for talent' in today's business, he added. This emphasises the crucial need for companies 'to recruit the right people to reflect: the changing nature of their work; the new demands of their customers; and they need to compete on the world stage.'

## **Skill shortages – identifying the skills**

Companies are becoming increasingly worried about the UK's skill gaps, especially when it comes to digital skills. The Management Consultancies Association (MCA) recently surveyed several high-profile businesses and confirmed 94% of senior executives view digital skills as important or very important to their businesses, yet 20% feel that graduates' grasp of digital skills is average to poor. Mr Byrne



*Every school should have a governor responsible for children's careers.*

*Graham Stuart,  
Education Select  
Committee*



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raised a key question: 'how can we equip young people with the skills to become digitally savvy when there were just 56,025 UK computer science graduates in 2011, which was a drop of 23.3% over the past 10 years?'

He was at pains to point out what those digital skills are. These are not simply 'super-users' – typically, young people who use digital technologies such as computer games and social media a lot and become very skilled in their manipulation. No, what companies are increasingly looking for is people who can support the creation and provision of engaging digital products, such as 'creating a usable app.'

Even products and services not intrinsically technological now use digital technologies extensively in their marketing as well as their production. For example with food and fashion products, consumer attractiveness is being enhanced by apps that provide recipes or alternative colour schemes, respectively. In this new world all industries have a demand for skills in digital technologies.

Collaboration is another important aspect in business, but it is more than the collaboration young people typically experience in education, he stated. It involves 'not just conversing and sharing ideas, but influencing people.' In general education needs to develop a greater receptiveness to the way demand for skills is changing, he maintained.

## **Social mobility achieved not just by direct action**

Referring back to his own company's efforts to continually improve the way they work as part of their various diversity initiatives, he said: 'we recognised that the need to improve the number of female leaders had to be supported by the right policies and processes, such as ensuring that those people working part time were not disadvantaged compared with those working five days when looking at performance management and staffing.'

In its recruitment process, the company has traditionally sought graduates but more recently, while continuing to recruit graduates, Accenture has also introduced an apprentice scheme, employing 18-year-olds as IT trainees. This is also proving successful for the changing roles the company has to offer.

'You facilitate change by looking at the overall business model, and not simply tackling every perceived challenge or problem head-on,' said Mr Byrne.

## **Developing skills to succeed**

Although the company's business is not directly involved with education, much of its pro bono work is. It has introduced the Skills to Succeed Academy ([www.s2sacademy.com](http://www.s2sacademy.com)), which focuses on providing online learning for choosing a career, help in getting young people into work and help to stay in work. Almost 20,000 jobseekers are now registered with this



*All industries now have a demand for skills in digital technologies.*

*Mike Byrne, Accenture* 

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programme. Sometimes it involves partnerships with job advisers and coaches, at other times teachers in schools. Mike Byrne observed that the latter option works well; the academy is a learning tool, so giving it to a professional in that field means they instinctively know what to do with it.

'We need to drive collaboration between employers and education a lot more, and to raise the profile of the high-demand areas,' he concluded.



**Dr Tessa Stone**  
*Chief executive, education charity Brightside Trust and steering group chair, The Bridge Group*

Dr Tessa Stone presented the third sector view. Their main concern was 'the chaos in careers advice and guidance. It's so important that Graham (Stuart) has spoken out about this, and his committee is working on it.'

She was also concerned about the lack of charities' and employers' focus on outlying areas, such as (in Greater London) Barking and Dagenham, which are largely ignored in this context, 'while lots of attention is given to the disadvantaged children in Tower Hamlets.' After all, she pointed out, 'we need social mobility for all.' Supporting Graham Stuart's point about

Russell Group universities, she approved of the University Alliance – a group of 20 'business-facing' universities, which achieve professional accreditation for 70% of their courses. 'We're not going to advance social mobility unless we start to think about what skills we are looking for in young people. Who is going to make a good employee at Accenture. And why? It's not about particular universities. And we should make sure kids in schools too know what this argument is all about.'

She had been impressed by the work of the Humber LEP, not least in bringing together schools, employers and universities. It should be seen as an example to be followed in providing a hub for all students to access information and resources, whether their ambition was to go to university, vocational/FE study or directly into engineering, for example. She was a strong believer in regional networks of this sort as the source of great social mobility.



**David Thomas**  
*Assistant senior leader, Westminster Academy. Winner of the Pupil Premium Award for secondary schools, 2013*

David Thomas described how the curriculum can be used to help disadvantaged youngsters, but he began with a chilling fact.

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## Variance in life expectancy

In Westminster, men in the most deprived areas live on average almost 17 years less than men in the least deprived areas (source: analysis of ONS mortality data and population estimates by Trust for London and New Policy Institute).

He was a passionate advocate for proper use of the pupil premium, agreeing with John Dunford that the goal for every school should be that no pupil receiving the premium should end up NEET. Such a goal must feed back into spending decisions, including providing high-quality careers advice throughout a child's time at school.

Mr Thomas supported previous comments about the undue focus on a few disadvantaged children making it to top universities: the romance of the 'poor but bright' is a damaging idea, he said. 'As educators, we need to revise our expectations of social mobility – we cannot use a headline of students getting into Oxbridge to mask a bulk who just meet, or even fall short of, the very basic expectations. The system needs to invest as much, both emotionally and financially, in alternative provision as in university access.'

## Right ways to spend pupil premium funding

He felt there were two main ways in which pupil premium money could be well invested:

- improving teaching – which benefits disadvantaged

children even more than other groups

- 'fighting the causes of the gaps in your school.'

One of the ways Westminster Academy does the latter is by addressing basic lack of general knowledge among many students who arrive at the school. For example, Westminster Academy staff bought wall maps of the world for students to stick on their bedroom or living room walls. The effect is 'absolutely magical' in the enthusiasm such simple and cheap measures can generate, he said. Other examples include explaining about such varied concepts as classical myths and how government works.

The curriculum is also personalised through their extended school day, with students joining extra lessons where needed. These allow them to stretch the highest performers as well as support the lowest.

Sometimes, they take a more basic approach. In one case, with a girl who was often late for school although she was keen to learn once she got there, David Thomas discovered that there was no-one at home when she needed to get up to go to school, so he bought her a 'very loud' alarm clock. It worked, perhaps as much because of the implication of the school's action as its practical use. 'You have to look for the causes for individual students,' he believes.



*Simple and cheap measures, when accurately targeted at students who will benefit from them, can have 'absolutely magical' effects on students' enthusiasm for learning.*

**David Thomas,**  
**Westminster Academy**



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## **Ian Ferguson CBE**

*Chairman of trustees at Metaswitch Networks; formerly a member of Mike Tomlinson's 14-19 advisory group, board member of QCA and TDA and deputy chairman of the Apprenticeship Ambassadors Network; now a member of the EFA Advisory Group, Skills Commission, RSC's education advisory group, Association of Employment and Learning Providers, City and Guilds, and the Baker Dearing Trust.*

Ian Ferguson is one of the most prolific and energetic supporters of education, as the list above of some of his past and current responsibilities indicates. His contribution to the SSAT forum lived up to his reputation.

## **Start education as early as possible**

He recalled a comment by his namesake Alex Ferguson of Manchester United, when they were discussing how both were still very active in their respective fields despite being well over normal retirement age: 'I blame our parents!' Sir Alex declared. 'They instilled us with work ethic.' Both of them had been brought up in the Govan shipyard area of Glasgow, and both had 'humble beginnings but very supportive parents.' Clearly, many of the disadvantaged young people

being discussed at this meeting did not have those benefits.

'How do you substitute for the absence of caring friends and families?' Ian Ferguson asked. 'We need a systemic change that will stand the test of time.' This should include young people starting education 'as young as possible,' and broadening the definition of education to include 'the skills to survive in life and work – for every young person.'

To achieve this, schools need help and funding to provide the needed support, including such basics as food and a safe place (both in and out of term time) to socialise and work. He favoured the greater use of school boarding houses, accessible sports and leisure facilities, psychological counselling, and personal and careers guidance. 'A lot of that is happening now, but it's not universal, not part of the system. And there's not enough funding.'

## **Cohesion in services**

Another issue Ian Ferguson identified was lack of cohesion in the services that do exist. In addition to educational services generally provided through DfE, 'our disadvantaged young people need social support, which currently comes from local authorities – and often not very well. We have England-wide organisational silos covering health, police, social security and work and pensions services. That system is never going to work to provide support for every one of our disadvantaged young people,



*Ian Ferguson favours greater use of school boarding houses, accessible sports and leisure facilities, psychological counselling, and personal and careers guidance*



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and so to increase social mobility. But at the moment, I believe, there is no political will to do what is needed.'

LAs need 'massive structural improvement. Their role should probably increase (a political minefield) and what they do should be redefined and its quality improved.' He felt that as well as Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland, there is a strong case for England to have nine (in this case) devolved regions, each the size of population, i.e. 5-10 million, proved as being effective in other parts of the world such as Canada, Australia and Switzerland. Such regionalisation would also be better placed to tackle the major issues of discrimination, alienation and stigma associated with our lack of social mobility.

'We have to do it, and create the political will to do it, for the sake of subsequent generations of our teachers, students and parents,' Ian Ferguson concluded.

## STUDENT'S VIEW:



### **George Allison**

*Head boy, Kingsford Community School, Beckton, East London*

Head boy at Kingsford Community School in the deprived area of Beckton, East London, George

Allison began by outlining the school's values: focus, integrity, respect, self-determination and teamwork.'

Extracurricular activities are important ways of helping students to develop these qualities, he said. In a visit to China organised through the school, he had seen high levels of dedication in students, which 'should be taught in schools here.'

Giving a student's view of free school meals (which he used to receive) he said 'students shy away from talking about it, but I think it's a really good thing.'

He was less enthusiastic about the national preoccupation with GCSEs, A-levels and access to university: 'there needs to be a bigger emphasis on alternative pathways', especially for those with disadvantaged backgrounds, he believed. 'I want to go to a Russell Group university, but not everyone wants to; teachers and headteachers should learn that, so their schools can look for the alternatives.' He approved the opportunities available at his school for employability courses and work experience, proving that 'it's not just about further and higher education.'

Commenting on George's courageous contribution to the 100+ leading educators, meeting chair John Dunford said 'he reminded us that what's at the core of all this is our values.'

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## FORUM

### What do we need to do in order to embed social mobility for all young people?

#### HOW TO ENABLE YOUNG PEOPLE TO DEVELOP THE SKILLS THAT WILL LEAD TO FULFILLING CAREERS?

First speaker in the forum was Louise Barnfield, associate director of education at RSA. While commending the recent focus on narrowing the gap as ‘a tremendous step forward’, she cautioned that closing the gap in school attainment would not guarantee improved outcomes in the labour market and the adult life. This is particularly so in the case of young people from ethnic minority backgrounds, where great progress has been made over the last decade in narrowing the gap in school attainment, but with continued gaps in degree completion rates and an ‘ethnic penalty in labour market outcomes’, even for the highest-attaining ethnic minority groups. RSA is conducting research on the longer-term effects of efforts to increase social mobility, by studying what happens later in the careers of the young people involved.

She too pointed to the limitations of existing careers advice, evidenced by the severe disconnect between the jobs

available and the jobs young people think they want to do. For example, a recent survey of 12,000 young people by the Education and Employers Taskforce found almost two-fifths were interested in just 10 occupations, and over half wanted to work in just three out of 27 occupational sectors. Not one young person responding wanted to work in manufacturing – yet this comprises 10% of the market for new employees. And in many cases the qualifications the young people were studying would not qualify them for the jobs they wanted to do.

Mike Byrne felt employers often found it difficult to communicate effectively in this context. ‘There’s so much information about careers but you can’t find what you need. We need to coordinate so employers are not duplicating what others are doing. How can you talk about manufacturing in a way that engages children and their parents?’

#### How to achieve the scale required?

In the context of vocational education and developing more seamless links between education and employment, former SSAT chairman Sir Cyril Taylor cited the example of University Technical Colleges (UTCs): ‘they’re good but they cost £10 million each. We’re not going to get 1000 of them (which is what is needed).’ Stating that there is a national shortage of 100,000 skilled IT workers,



*A recent survey of 12,000 young people showed not one wanted to work in manufacturing – yet this comprises 10% of the market for new employees.*



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he suggested that 14-year-olds should be allowed to take technological education routes in academies. 'It works in Germany, where more than half of 10-year-olds go to technical schools.'

Ian Ferguson agreed, but added that FE colleges could incorporate UTCs without the capital costs. 'It's a ready-made solution.' However, John Dunford maintained that a qualifications structure would have to be set up before this could be done.

Lisa Capper, vice-president of the North Warwickshire and Hinckley FE college, immediately responded, pointing out that only a small number of FE colleges in the country had so far taken on students at age 14. But she added, 'schools and FE could work extremely well together to get the sort of provision we're talking about, sharing teachers and resources, and it would be helpful if the 14-16 college programme was incentivised to enable this.' The Midlands Academies Trust, of which she is schools director, includes two studio schools.

## THE RURAL CONTEXT AND ITS CHALLENGES

Tony Bloxham, principal of Preston School, Yeovil, and leader of the highly regarded Somerset Challenge, said the challenge had signed up 38 of the 39 secondary and middle schools in the county. They gained £1 million of funding for the work, which included

contracting the Behavioural Insights Team (Cabinet Office's 'nudge unit') to help develop an understanding of social mobility in rural contexts. In Somerset's case, this means no higher education facilities, few businesses, and 'a heap of different challenges to face, compared with London.'

The challenge for these schools is not made easier by recent budget reductions, typically £100,000-£300,000 per school. Teacher recruitment is a lot harder than in the metropolis, and the local authority has only two people with responsibilities within education. 'So we in schools are focusing on building our collective capacity to produce more teachers who will help us raise achievement.'

Following the earlier success of the London Challenge, examples such as Somerset and one in the North East are discovering how to improve social mobility, and specifically the performance of children on free school meals, in their different contexts. Multi-academy trusts are another vehicle for spreading good practice and developing local solutions that work, Ian Ferguson pointed out. National Schools Commissioner Frank Green added that over 1000 academies are now involved in MATs, of which there are 450 in operation and 600 approved.

Another factor that makes it particularly difficult to provide extracurricular resources in some rural areas is transport. Social

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mobility commissioner David Johnston noted that in rural Norfolk heavy dependence on the school bus services severely restricts after-school clubs, school visits, and work experience opportunities.

## ROLE MODELS AND CIAG

Lesley King, a former SSAT director and now chair of governors in a rural Norfolk academy, described some research Tom Welch and she had undertaken. This found that those students on free school meals who had done well at GCSE and in some cases gone on to university had a much higher drop-out rate than their peers. When interviewed, these young people often said they felt distant from supposed role models, such as people from industry. A typical comment was, 'they have nothing to say to me', because their backgrounds were so different.

One solution to this perceived alienation would be to do 'what public schools have always done – develop excellent alumni systems,' Lesley King suggested. Schools could get former students to come back on weekends or during the holidays, or online, to enable current students to discuss with and relate to them, to provide trusted role models. 'We feel this could provide part of much more systematic and personalised careers education in schools. In

return, the school could provide the necessary contact and support for former students as they embarked on the next stage on an unfamiliar journey to further or higher education.'

Tim Oates of Cambridge Assessment agreed with previous speakers that much work is needed to 'reinvigorate' IAC in schools, but 'I want to shift the perspective: we do not want a massive bureaucracy. We need good linkages between the labour market and schooling, and signalling from the labour market can be done effectively in many different ways. Complex and expensive bureaucracy can in fact weaken the signals from the labour market, and lessen rational and effective choice by young people.'

Two main things are needed, he said:

- Decent vocational education routes, as in Switzerland, Austria and Singapore
- Early decision-making in secondary schools about subject choices – for example entry to maths tiers, entry to GCSE triple science; data tell us this is highly determining of students' life chances.

John Dunford was pleased to announce that the Pupil Premium team were working with SSAT in developing careers advice services.



*State schools should do 'what public schools have always done – develop excellent alumni systems... to enable current students to discuss with and relate to legitimate role models*

**Lesley King**



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## Apprenticeships

Dominic Herrington, regional school commissioner for the South East and former director of the DfE Academies Group, felt the potential contribution of apprenticeships had been neglected. 'It's a route that has brand recognition and is understood. We need to modernise it, but it's something we can grasp. There are fantastic opportunities in apprenticeships.'

Ian Ferguson agreed: 'research shows that 13% of 16-19 year olds want to be in work, so they should be in apprenticeships. I'm immensely frustrated by this. The last education secretary saw apprenticeships as not for young people. I see it as a crucial part of meeting the needs of our young people.'

## Disconnect between education and business

'Schools have a nine-pin plug and employers have a 12-pin plug,' was the way Graham Stuart characterised the current disconnect between education and business. He recalled a complaint from one employer: 'I rang my local school four times, and couldn't even speak to the person responsible for careers, so I gave up.'

'We need an adapter,' Mr Stuart declared, 'so schools and employers can see what they would like from each other, to enable seamless interaction.'

Employers are often willing to help, but schools are often not interested. We've got the systems, with no bureaucrats in sight. But it's not working.'

## PARENTING

Contributors to the forum agreed that, as parenting is a key factor in facilitating young people's social mobility, school teachers and leaders should be working closely with young people and their parents on this.

Unfortunately, that rarely happens. 'Schools do it quite badly,' said David Thomas. 'We have a tendency to shy away from it because culturally we're scared of telling people what to do. We provide access to information and services – but no lever to make sure that they're used. It really worries me. We know what works but we're afraid of being seen to criticise or compel people. We do nothing except put stuff on the shelf so you can take it if you want.'

John Dunford commented that such insights would be 'very useful in my pupil premium work. I agree with David that we have to fight the causes of the gaps. We need to get parents to raise their aspirations. Schools need to be incentivised to personalise the curriculum, to give youngsters the right materials for them, not those chosen by some government minister.'



*Parenting support is sorely lacking in most schools – 'Schools have a tendency to shy away from it because culturally we're scared of telling people what to do.'*

**David Thomas**



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Primary head John Goodey of St John Baptist School, Lewisham, South East London, expressed concern about the growing number of children age 4-6 seen at primary level 'who can't cope. They have regular breakdowns in class and the other kids can't learn. School leadership teams often spend 50% of their time dealing with these issues. Some children shouldn't be there: they should be in specialist provision - but there are not enough places, locally, especially for girls. Or they should be in nurture groups within schools - which is very hard for a small school to provide.' When these pupils hit secondary school, it will cause 'turmoil', he predicted.

Behind this growing problem, Mr Goodey felt, was attachment issues before age three, due mainly to poor parenting. Graham Ferguson recognised this problem too. He felt schools could help to some extent through PSHE lessons - before the young people become parents. 'The aim of increasing investment in the early years is precisely to try to make up for the problems of weak parenting. That is why some pupil premium funding is being dedicated to this. Early exposure to education can help.'

Frank Green agreed with John Goodey's observations: the number of young people with an ever-widening range of difficulties, especially autism spectrum disorders and 'children from

dysfunctional families who can't relate', seems to be increasing. A special school with which he is involved has 250 young people age 3-10 with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) '- and we could have taken on another 30-40, if we had room for them.'

To counter this trend, in Bexley a small primary academy trust of which he is a director encourages pregnant young women to come to antenatal clinics which provide food and other support as well as advice and guidance. The continuing contact with the young mothers and their children in due course helps the school to prepare for the range of difficulties they may face later when the children come to nursery.

## DEFINING SUCCESS

Machel Hewitt, director of learning at Kingsford School (and one of George Allison's teachers) thought it was important to be clear about the language of success, which currently 'can be damaging: you're on dangerous ground when you say the EBacc for instance is what measures success for students. It marginalises other subjects and it marginalises the pupils who don't achieve it. Schools tend to be driven towards that by the accountability system. I had a year 11 kid who was at level 2 in English at KS2. When it came to GCSE, he got a D in English and a B in drama - so he was seen as a failure. But now, he's



*Measures of success based solely on passing a particular set of exams 'marginalises the pupils who don't achieve it.... We must get away from that damaging narrative and be able to change the system for some students.'*

*Machel Hewitt,  
Kingsford School*



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studying drama at college, and he's happy (I met him the other day). We must get away from that damaging narrative and be able to change the system for some students.'

The skewing of the accountability system through the focus on particular exam results has a severe effect on many employers' recruitment, said Mike Thompson, who runs Barclays' apprenticeship programme.

'Recruitment policies cause problems when they translate five A\*-Cs into a surrogate for talent spotting,' he pointed out. 'At Barclays we scrubbed all academic criteria. We now look for broader, more diversely talented young people – many of whom in the past have been failed by the education system. And this approach has been very successful. Talent is not measured by five A\*-Cs.'

## **The dustbin of history**

The official departure from 5 A\*-Cs as a key indicator of success is something the education committee persuaded the government to do, and Graham Stuart said he was proud of the committee's part in 'consigning 5 A\*-Cs into the dustbin of history.'

Rosalind Goates, from the Association of Certified Chartered Accountants, suggested government should include a cabinet minister with cross-departmental responsibility for

social mobility. Part of their remit should be to tackle elements of the 'market that is against the consumer' such as payday lending, which particularly disadvantages people in deprived circumstances.

There are different ways to look at social mobility, John Dunford added, such as the urban and rural contexts that had been discussed. 'Schools can get together to create something, as they have in the Somerset Challenge. I've seen LAs coming together with groups of schools to sort things out – though it depends on them (the LAs) still having staff left who can talk about education. We need to incentivise local action, as Graham was describing is happening in Yorkshire. At the end of the day it's about values; that's what we hang together on, to do something about social mobility in this country.'

Sue Williamson concluded the lecture and forum by saying it was vital for good schools to help the not so good – 'but the not so good can have pockets of excellence too.' She showed a short film in which children from deprived backgrounds gained great satisfaction and motivation from building an aeroplane. 'That gave them confidence, far more than exam results would,' she concluded.



*There should be a cabinet minister with cross-departmental responsibility for social mobility.*

*Rosalind Goates, ACCA*

# SSAT Annual Lecture and Debate 2014

## SOME WAYS OF IMPROVING SOCIAL MOBILITY FOR ALL YOUNG PEOPLE

Suggested by presenters and forum contributors at the 2014 SSAT Annual Lecture and Debate.

### *Schools can:*

- Establish a firm target that no child from a disadvantaged background will become NEET on leaving school.
- Ensure the most effective teachers work with the most disadvantaged young people.
- Look for the causes of the gaps – the factors blocking social mobility among your students – and make every effort to remove them, through personalising learning and other means.
- Provide support for parenting skills (e.g. encouraging raising aspirations among young people) – especially for young parents and students, who are likely to become parents.
- Where necessary, provide wider services such as accommodation, sustenance, leisure facilities, psychological counselling, and personal as well as careers guidance.
- Provide high-quality careers advice throughout each child's career in school.
- Take action to improve advice, guidance and access to careers through local employers; invest in employer collaboration.
- Give a governor responsibility for children's careers.
- Develop the school's understanding of employers' changing needs, and work towards equipping your students to meet those needs.
- Ensure at every level and in every subject your school avoids perpetuating the notion that success is measured only by exam results.
- Provide opportunities for all your students to develop and express their talents (non-academic as well as academic), and gain credit for them.
- Enhance collaboration among students to include influencing skills.

*Local groupings (inc schools, academy chains, multi-academy trusts, local authorities, and groups such as the current Somerset Challenge) can:*

- Enable cooperation between schools, inc different types (e.g. state, independent) and levels of success – 'good' schools working with 'weaker' ones, though the benefits will be two-way.
- Recruit local and national FE and HE providers and employers into partnership.
- Look to develop cohesion between the various services disadvantaged young people may need in your area.
- Gain an understanding of what works in improving social mobility of all young people in your area – including their destinations after education and first employment.
- Whether you are in an urban or rural area, consider the particular challenges you face and how best to tackle them (e.g. in rural areas, providing additional transport to facilitate extracurricular activities, work experience, etc).
- Ensure 'signalling' enables all local providers to communicate and cooperate effectively.

### *FE and HE can:*

- Work with schools and employers to ensure your students have the best chance of following the paths that will lead each to a fulfilling and successful career.
- Seek a vocational element throughout your courses.
- Build on the careers advice the young people have received at school and through work experience.
- For FE colleges: consider whether you could complement the work of UTCs, e.g. by recruiting students at 14 for vocational courses and/or working with local schools.

*Industry and business employers can:*

- Ensure your recruitment, promotion and employee development strategies and practices give the full range of opportunities for all potential employees.
- Take every opportunity to collaborate with schools in advancing social mobility for young people through the recruitment, training and career development you provide.
- Work with other employers and national groupings to ensure your career development, recruitment and employment practices are complementary to others' and do not simply duplicate them.
- Consider whether you can offer more apprenticeships covering a wide range of your activities and the skills you will need in your workforce.

### *Government agencies can:*

- Provide incentives for the best teachers and school leaders to work in schools in the most disadvantaged areas (e.g. Ofsted focusing leadership awards on schools in 'tougher' areas).
- Widen funding support for collaboration beyond academic partnerships; e.g. increasing the use of targeted seed-corn funding for independent and state schools to work together.
- Increase funding for expert careers advice and guidance in and outside schools.
- Enable greater cohesion between the education, social, health, police, pensions and other services that may have an impact on social mobility for young people.
- Work towards more effective regionalisation.
- Incentivise local action.
- Get away from the view of particular examination results as the main determinants of young people's (and schools') success or failure.
- Funding formulae should (ideally) be based on need rather than political considerations.
- Increase efforts to ensure young people start their education as early as possible.
- Government should appoint a cabinet minister with specific and cross-departmental responsibility for social mobility.